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## TEN YEARS TO GO

Now that the speculation about me going to Melbourne is over it's time to get back to serious business again. I have only ten years to go.

When I was a young assistant priest, most of the Catholics in the parish went to Mass and brought their children with them. I had four post-school youth groups, two for males, two for females. All attended Mass every Sunday, and many found their future spouses there.

Fifteen years later the young started to disappear from Mass as the seventies-style secularism began to bite. Parents complained they had very little authority over them any more. But the parents still came.

Fifteen years later those young people were married with children of their own. Few parents were coming to Mass, and of course, their children could not make it on their own. The drift from the Church had begun in earnest and with it the knowledge of the rituals and practices of the Church, few religious pictures on the wall, no grace at meals, Church attendance reduced to first reception of the Sacraments, Easter and possibly Christmas.

Ten years later here I am trying to sort out priorities for the next ten years, when the priority is staring me in the face - stop the drift, call people back to Mass and the life-giving community of the Church, call them to be true followers of Christ.

All the areas listed below are part of that revival and renewal. There is no easy answer, because we are caught in a post-modern culture that we cannot overturn by ourselves. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor of Westminster said recently that we are living in "a world without a father - no-one to tell us what is right and wrong, no-one to tell us that we matter, that we are forgiven and cherished, no-one to tell us that we are loved".

"A culture that denies God for long will find that the desire for God will break through powerfully because we cannot live for long 'within the lie'. Our unstable post-modern culture can deconstruct as quickly as it came into being", he said.

These are hopeful words. There are forces at work that can only be reversed by the power of God's Spirit working within and among us.

From a human point of view we have to admit that if we simply continue to do what we are doing we will get the same outcome. The drift away from the Church will continue.

We must therefore look closely at what we are doing and see what still needs to be done. New initiatives that we have not even thought of yet, need to come from our common consideration of the problems the Church is facing. This is the time to listen to God speaking to us, respond in new and pioneering ways, and

call on the Holy Spirit to fill us with wisdom and zeal, to produce a hundredfold from the seeds we plant.

So, what needs to be done? I have listed below a number of priority areas where new initiatives need to be taken. We can't afford to drift. The Holy Spirit is asking us to look at today's world and move ahead with confidence.

Perhaps Jesus is reminding us that he has the answer to all the spiritual problems and challenges out there. In fact he could be saying, "Look, the fields are white for the harvest!"

- **Personal Holiness**
- **Lay Formation**
- **Family Life**
- **Sacramental Life of the Church**
- **Catholic Education**
- **An Evangelizing Church**
- **Vocations**
- **Fidelity to the Truth**
- **Witness to Love**
- **Solidarity with the Poor**

### Personal Holiness

The Holy Father has called for this. All of us are to understand that our Baptism commits us to follow Christ faithfully and that our Confirmation gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to be active in spreading his Good News of salvation.

Personal holiness is deepened through prayer which helps us live in God's presence and draws us ever closer to a personal knowledge and love of Christ. The Sacraments of Penance, whereby we are forgiven our sins, and the Blessed Eucharist, whereby we are nourished by the Bread of Life, move us along the path to holiness. The people and events in our life are also means by which we respond to God's will and find opportunities for love, forgiveness and generosity.

Any renewal of the Church requires a renewal of the pursuit of holiness in all its members.

### Lay Formation

Opportunities for Christian formation should be extended, not just for clergy and Religious but for every baptised member of the Church.

Christians are called to be active in the world, in all areas that affect the welfare of human beings. The values they bring of justice, moral integrity, respect for life, solidarity with the poor and compassion for the suffering are urgently needed. Lay action is better directed if accompanied by serious programmes of lay formation.

There is an enormous gap in our programmes of Christian formation for young people who have left school. This is a critical area where new initiatives are needed.

### Family Life

With pressures so heavy on families today, leading to unprecedented levels of breakdown and distress, the restoration of family life must be a

priority for the Church. Helping couples prepare for marriage, offering them the support of Church parish communities, making available marriage education and enrichment programmes, offering help for marriages in trouble, and celebrating the joy of marriage and family life should be an integral feature of Catholic life.

### Sacramental Life of the Church

Parishes need to be welcoming communities where the life-giving Sacraments are offered, and where Mass is the central act of worship of God. Our parishes are to be inclusive of people from all walks of life, with a special care for those with disabilities, for the poor, for people of different ethnic origins, for strangers, for single people and for lonely souls.

The Eucharistic Liturgy is to be well and faithfully carried out, drawing people into a deep and active participation in the sacred mysteries, growing always as a community centred in Christ. Any tendency to trivialise the sacredness of the Mass is to be resisted.

### Catholic Education

Our goals of Catholic education need to be clear and consistent with the growth of children in the faith, relying on teachers whose own faith is evident to the students and whose teaching is even more effective because of the witness they give.

Together with strong Catholicity, our schools are also to aim for the highest standards of education.

We must also reach out to those not in Catholic schools more effectively, as we are all one in Christ.

### The Evangelising Church

The family, the Parish and the school share the call to spread the Good News both to those who are in the Church and to those beyond the active life of the Church. We must have a special care for the "faraway" Catholics and reach out to them like Christ did to the lost sheep. We must also proclaim the Good News to those who have not clearly heard the voice of Christ.

We do not know yet how to do this. To be missionary in our own country is still a novelty for us. Yet there are some among us who are pioneering the way. Every parish should have an evangelising outreach, believing that all within its boundaries make up the special part of the Lord's vineyard entrusted to them.

### Vocations

Every baptised person has a vocation. We need to call forth young and idealistic men to be priests or deacons, men and women to be committed Religious, and every member of the Church to be aware of his or her vocation to spread the knowledge and love of God in the circle in which they live, work or mix.

### Fidelity to the Truth

Our educators, the priests and the teachers, need to present Catholic truth convincingly and joyfully, believing it is Good News. Such is the pressure

of secularism today that many of the Church's teachings are dismissed as irrelevant. Yet people suffer from confusion and hopelessness, yearning for the liberating truth that only Christ can bring.

We must be wary of current fashions of spirituality, being careful to discern what is genuine and what is mere novelty in contemporary movements.

### Witness to Love

If the Church is the Sacrament of Christ in the world, all its members are to be examples of the love, forgiveness and compassion that Christ showed in his public life. The Church is a Church of sinners, yet the forgiveness and conversion that takes place within the Church should be an example to the world of how we are to live as brothers and sisters.

### Solidarity with the Poor

Quoting Isaiah, Jesus said in the Synagogue of Nazareth that he had come to bring Good News to the poor. This is therefore an essential part of the mission of the Church and of every true follower of Christ. The prophetic voice of the Church is to be raised on behalf of the poor, insisting on their rights as human beings to share in the world's good and be treated with dignity and respect. Whether the poor are victims of racism, economic oppression, political persecution, despotism or unjust trade imbalances, and whether they are poor because of tragedy or misfortune or mismanagement or addiction or lack of opportunity, the Church must hear their cry.

In our own community as much as in other countries, the Church must speak up on their behalf no matter what the risk.

Within our Church communities there should be no poor. Brothers and sisters must care for each other and share their time, companionship and goods.

In examining the above priorities, we need to get down to detail. I have not given many answers. I hope we can bring all this to the floor of a Diocesan Synod, after discussing them at various levels throughout the communities. The ways we can achieve these aims are open to debate and prayerful consideration, yet we must set a plan and a direction for the future, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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