

BEST PRACTICES
IN THE ONGOING
PROMOTION AND FORMATION
OF THE LAY FAITHFUL

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

This report into the best practices in the ongoing promotion and formation of the lay faithful comes from the Australian Catholic Church. The report begins by describing the characteristics of Australia and the Australian Catholic Church before summarizing the initiatives of the local Church and its institutes. This is followed by an outline of the efforts of the Episcopal Conference through its advisory councils and agencies. The report incorporates the ideals and new frontiers of formation that were described in the *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*. Finally some features of lay formation are identified and a challenge for the future reinforced.

1. Context

a. Australia

Australia's population is 25 million. In 2017, 67% were living in the capital cities and 33% in other urban and rural areas. The median age in 2017 was 37, compared with 22.5 years in 1901. Australians are living longer, with almost 4,000 centenarians in 2017. Currently women make up the majority of the population, with 98 males per 100 females. In contrast, in 1901, there were 110 males to 100 females. The proportion of Australians born overseas continues to increase, with over 28 % of Australia's population born overseas. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018)

Hugh Mackay, an experienced social researcher, writes that Australia is experiencing a troubling epidemic of anxiety. This is despite an unprecedented economic growth and the advantages of peace, affluence, and stable parliamentary democracy, freedom of assembly, press and religion.

Cultural change has been swift and unpredictable. Income inequality is growing. The stability of a harmonious society has been weakened by attacks on cultural diversity. The impetus towards gender equality is slowing. Individualism is widespread. Major corporate institutions, political leaders and churches have lost the people's trust. Australians are deeper in debt and increasingly addicted to digital devices, drugs or to buying.

Mackay suggests that the epidemic of anxiety is connected to the breakdown of community. As society becomes more fragmented because of such matters as our fear of accepting change and failure to appreciate the qualities of those from different backgrounds, the pressure on our emotional life and our sanity increases. In some form of tragic spiral, this social dislocation breeds anxiety, depression and obesity, which in turn lead to greater community disintegration.

However, Mackay identifies a positive movement towards 'convergence'. Evidence of this movement of convergence is becoming encouragingly apparent in politics, gender and religion.

In the political arena there is a blurring of ideological differences between parties. All want to occupy ‘the centre’ of political opinion. In the gender revolution, Australians are realising that male/female is not a simple distinction. Even in conversations about religion, the traditional concept of ‘God’ is under constant review. Among attempts to bridge the gap between the traditional language of the past and the searching beliefs of contemporaries, there is evidence of convergence. Inter-faith conversations are frequently more interested in similarities than differences. (Mackay, 2018)

b. Australian Catholics

The 2016 Census was the first time in Australia’s 105-year census history that the number of people identifying as Catholic decreased. The Catholic population is slightly older with the median age now being 40 years as compared to 38 in 2011. There is an increasing number of well-educated Catholics with one in five Australian Catholics holding a university degree. There is also a greater number of Catholics born in non-English speaking countries. In 2016, this had increased to 20% as compared to 18% per cent five years ago. (National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2018)

Figures collected by the Pastoral Research Office show that regular attendance at Catholic Mass has declined. Only 12% per cent of Australian Catholics regularly attend Mass.

The Second Vatican Council, through its vision of the Church as the People of God, stimulated a renewal of ministries for lay people. In the Catholic Church in Australia lay participation continues to develop. Church historian David Shinnick names five main areas in which lay ministry is fostered in Australia. (Shinnick, 1982)

Firstly, most formal lay participation occurs within **Catholic Education**. In 2017 there were 99,370 staff working in in the sector. (Pastoral Research Office, 2017) Many lay Catholic staff see their employment in Catholic Education as a means to live out their call to ministry.

Secondly, there are many **lay organisations** ranging from prayer and study groups, social justice, special works and task groups which provide avenues for the expression of the apostolate of the laity. Many of these lay organisations also provide formation aligned with the purpose and charism of the group. Some are short term; for example, a scripture reflection group may meet during the six weeks of Lent. Others are long term and members participate on a regular basis over several years, for example, the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Thirdly, there are ministry options which enable lay people to be directly involved in the **building up of the ecclesial community**, mostly at the parish level, and in the direct transmission of the Gospel. These include in liturgy, catechetics and lay chaplaincies. Some

dioceses cultivate lay pastoral ministry and formalize pathways for accreditation and formation. Diocesan and national lay roles are a strong feature of the post-Vatican II Church in Australia, along with a robust social welfare arm, in Centacare (or CatholicCare), as well as through Caritas and Catholic Mission offices.

The fourth area, the commitment to **adult faith education**, began in the 1950s and flourished from the 1960s. Vatican II reaffirmed the Church's role as teacher, and it urged its members to develop and extend its educational mission, especially among adults. The trend in adult faith education has been largely scriptural in focus. In liturgy, the use of the vernacular and the involvement of the laity in the Mass stimulates a desire for a better understanding of the experience. From this need a significant adult education initiatives in parishes and dioceses has developed. Traditional lectures have given way to a variety of informal types of discussions, short courses, and small group activities. Lay retreats are popular providing opportunities for reflection and discussion of personal faith.

Finally, there are numerous Associations of the Faithful or **lay pastoral movements of Catholics**. There “clerics, lay persons, or clerics and lay persons together, strive in a common endeavour to foster a more perfect life, to promote public worship or Christian doctrine, or to exercise other works of the apostolate such as initiatives of evangelization, works of piety or charity, and those which animate the temporal order with a Christian spirit.”(Pontifical Council for the Laity, 2006; Vatican II Council, 1975, p. 11)

Lay movements have a devotional, community or charity focus and may draw on the inspiration of a founder or patron saint. Some operate as independent groups at parish or diocesan level while others have constitutions and governance structures to maintain links to the charism and wider community of followers. All nourish the faith lives of their members; provide formation and a context for ministry and service. Many Catholic men and women belong to lay movements.

Groupings of lay people, sometimes including ordained members, have waxed and waned and new ones emerge constantly. Some familiar titles besides those mentioned earlier include Antioch, Apostleship of the Sea, Charismatic Catholic Renewal, Couples for Christ, Cursillo, Disciples of Jesus, Emmanuel Community, Focolare, L’Arche, NET Ministries, The NeoCatechumenal Way, Opus Dei, Passionist Family Groups, Serra, The Catholic Guy Ministry, Third Orders, Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Young Christian Students, Young Christian Workers, and Youth Mission Teams.

c. Current Crisis

The Australian Catholic Church has been severely affected by revelations about the extent of sexual abuse of children by priests and religious. The Australian government established a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in 2013 to inquire into and report upon responses by institutions to instances and allegations of child sexual abuse in Australia. The establishment of the commission followed revelations of child abusers moved from place to place instead of their abuse and crimes reported. There were also revelations that adults failed to try to stop further acts of child abuse. The commission examined the history of abuse in educational institutions, religious groups, sporting organisations, state institutions and youth organisations. The final report of the commission was made public on 15 December 2017.

It was revealed that more than 36 % of all abuse victims involved with the Commission were abused in the Catholic Church. The Commission's data survey reveals that 4,445 individuals alleged abuse within the Church in the period 1950 to 2010. One thousand eight hundred and eighty priests and religious were accused of abuse over that time.

Francis Sullivan, who was Chief Executive Officer of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council, the group which coordinating the Catholic Church's response to the Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse said, "This data, along with all we have heard over the past four years, can only be interpreted for what it is: a massive failure on the part the Catholic Church in Australia to protect children from abusers and predators, a misguided determination by leaders at the time to put the interests of the Church ahead of the most vulnerable and, a corruption of the Gospel the Church seeks to profess." (Sullivan, 2018)

The opinions of Catholics who attend Mass regularly were gathered in the 2016 National Church Life Survey. Nearly three out of five Churchgoers agree that their confidence in Church authorities has been damaged by the cases of sex abuse by priests and religious. More than one-third of Churchgoers agree that their respect for priests and religious has declined as a result of these offences. Nearly two thirds of Churchgoers agreed that the response of Church authorities to incidents of child sexual abuse had been inadequate and showed a complete failure of responsibility.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse stated "We have concluded that there were catastrophic failures of leadership of Catholic Church authorities over many decades, particularly before the 1990s. Those failures led to the suffering of a great number of children, their families and wider communities. For many, the harm was irreparable.

In numerous cases, that harm could have been avoided had Catholic Church authorities acted in the interests of children rather than in their own interests.” (Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse, 2017)

There is work to be done in the Australian Catholic Church to reverse the harmful effect of sexual abuse on so many individuals and families.

2. Formation

The word formation generally refers to a set of experiences designed to prepare a person or group for a particular purpose. 'Formation', in preference to a word like 'training', is used for spiritual and religious development and implies deep learning involving attitudes, values, commitment to particular life directions as well as knowledge and skills. (Gowdie, 2009) In the Christian tradition, it implies “a ‘formation of the heart’ (that leads) to an encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others”. (Congregation for Catholic Education, November 20, 2007, p. 25)

Various statements of the Catholic Church give extensive detail about priestly, religious and teacher formation but is it in the *Joy of the Gospel* that we find a challenge to the transformation of the whole Church. In brief the challenge is to “recapture our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment (and) missionary vigour!” (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 109) If the Church is transformed, all will be formed “whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, ...(to be) agents of evangelization ...The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization”. (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 120)

The Joy of Gospel affirms the role and vocation of the laity and commends those called to pastoral ministry. The document recognises that at times formation for laity is lacking. At other times opportunities within the Church for laity to take on decision making roles may be limited or clericalism may be a barrier. Applying the Gospel to the transformation of society is part of the vocation of the laity. (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 102) In particular, the challenge to “create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church” is recognized. “The presence of women must also be guaranteed ...in the Church and in social structures.”(Pope Francis, 2013, p. 130) Regarding youth, the entire community is called to ‘educate the young’ and ‘the young’ are called ‘to exercise greater leadership’. (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 106)

3. The local Church and its institutions

Three Catholic universities and institutes, Australian Catholic University, Notre Dame Australia and BBI Institute of Theological Education, offer a comprehensive range of programs to educate in theology, ministry, leadership, spiritual direction, Church management and governance, professional supervision and education, serve the Australian Catholic Church. (University) (Notre Dame University Australia, 2018) (BBI Australian Institute for Theological Education, 2018) Quality undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees are delivered in a variety of modes. Technology provides flexible learning options for students and increases access for those in working part time as well as students who live in regional areas.

The university campuses are generally based in major centres but Notre Dame Australia has one campus located in a regional centre in northern Australia as a special commitment to providing face-to-face training in education and health to indigenous and rural students. A number of dioceses through their education apostolates as well as national agencies have entered into arrangements with Catholic universities to deliver programs to personnel in theology, professional standards, Catholic identity, and religious education.

The Catholic universities have taken heed of the challenge to provide not only “doctrinal formation” but to observe also “all that the Lord has shown us as the way of responding to his love.” (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 161) Despite the challenge of a wider society that is secular and often anti-religious, the universities make their Catholic identity explicit through their courses and by animating their Catholic identity through a campus-wide commitment to serving others, developing an active learning community and fostering a just society.

The Australian Catholic University has established a Directorate of Identity and Mission that has as its primary purpose the articulation, promotion and transmission of the Catholic Intellectual and spiritual tradition. Flowing from the Mission and Core Values of the University, the Directorate forms staff and student through Campus Ministry, liturgy, formal programs, retreats, lectures, and workshops to contribute to the community. (Australian Catholic University, 2018a)

Catholic education, healthcare and social welfare organisations and networks all offer professional development programs for personnel. These programs are examples of “formation which takes place in the midst of apostolic activity”. (Pope Francis, 2013) Catholic education has accreditation pathways allied with formation opportunities and requirements. With regard to

formation for mission, the National Catholic Education Office has developed a framework for evaluation of current practice and strategic enhancement of staff faith formation. *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education*^(National Catholic Education Commission, 2018) recognizes the efforts of diocesan education authorities who develop programs tailored to the capacity and needs of local contexts. See for example, the range of substantial programs available on the website of Catholic Education Brisbane.^(Brisbane Catholic Education, 2018) Significant provision for lay and student formation is provided through school systems that are administered through religious orders, for example, Marist Schools Australia^(Marist Schools Australia, 2018), Good Samaritan Education.^(Good Samaritan Education, 2018)

Catholic healthcare providers, many of them once religious institutes but now ministerial public juridic persons, provide training in Catholic ethos and values for those in governance and leadership roles. Catholic Health Australia^(Catholic Health Australia, 2018)(CHA) has established a taskforce to facilitate a collaborative approach to formation among CHA members. Their publications and resources are valuable, in particular the Mission in Focus webcasts.^(Catholic Health Australia, 2018) The Ministry Leadership Program based on program from Catholic Health Association of United States^(Catholic Health Association of the United States, 2018) is a nine-session program over two years for senior leaders in Catholic health, aged care and community services. CHA are responding proactively to the transition from religious to lay leadership so that Catholic health and aged care services thrive into the future.

Hospitals and some other institutions offer programs in clinical pastoral education to equip lay and ordained ministers for pastoral care and chaplaincy roles, see St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney for an example.^{(“Clinical Pastoral Education Courses 2018 (400 Hours),” 2018)} Spirituality institutes and centres, many ecumenical, offer programs to train spiritual directors and ministry supervisors.^(WellSpring) There is a growing interest in these formation opportunities and ministries. “The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.”
(Pope Francis, 2013, p. 169)

The topics and themes addressed when forming the laity are necessarily diverse. For many, the starting point is catechesis in the Catholic faith, to establish the foundations on which other formation, education and training can build. Ideally, these “progressive experience(s) of formation” involve “the entire community and a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of

Christian initiation.”^(Francis, 2016, p. 166) Many parishes and dioceses implement the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults annually as means of formation and evangelisation. See the Archdiocese of Melbourne. ^(Archdiocese of Melbourne, 2018) Also, the National Centre for Evangelisation ^(National Centre for Evangelisation, 2018) which independently offers a series of sixteen seminars covers topics such as The Case for Christ, The Trinity, Mary and the Saints, The Bible, Church History, The Mass and so forth.

Within the community of the Church, there is a growing consciousness of “the identity and mission of the laity in the Church”^(Pope Francis, 2013, p. 2) and a deep appreciation of the contribution of each member for the good of the whole body of the Church. ^(John Paul II, 1988, pp. 20, 28) In “Faithful Stewards of God’s Grace: Lay Pastoral Ministers in the Church in Australia” ^(2018b) the Australian Catholic Bishops affirmed the vocation of those lay people who are called to the pastoral ministry of service and acknowledged the theology of communion which underpins ministerial relationships of equality, mutuality and reciprocity.

The Xavier Centre for Theological Formation, ^(Australian Catholic University, 2018b) within Australian Catholic University, offers theological formation opportunities for lay persons, religious and clergy across Australia. Ranging from short courses, certificate and bachelor opportunities, (awards) postgraduate coursework programs, professional doctorates and research degrees, international study tours, and a wide range of tailored professional learning and in-service opportunities. Providing for multiple points of engagement, and across any variety of delivery modes, these opportunities directly support pastoral leaders, associates and planners, healthcare, educational and welfare professionals, leaders of Diocesan agencies and all who contribute to religious and parish life. Framed by an engagement with scripture, theology, spirituality, supervision and leadership, the Xavier Centre provides a context for individuals and communities to reflect on faith and service.

In a culture of growing professionalism, it is important for laity who are exercising spiritual, pastoral, educational, governance, leadership and management roles for and on behalf of the Church to have academic and professional qualifications as well as the appropriate accreditation or registration for the field in which they are serving. “formation (is) needed to take on important responsibilities” ^(Pope Francis, 2013, p. 2) within and beyond the Church and “to apply(ing) the Gospel to the transformation of society”. ^(Pope Francis, 2013, p. 2)

Australian Catholic University offers courses that target certain professions, for example, a Masters of Educational Leadership that develops leaders in Catholic Education. ACU also develops leadership and management across a range of enterprise and industry contexts.

Through its partnership with Saint Paul University of Canada, BBI The Australian Institute of Theological Education, now offers online and intensive on-campus courses in Australia for the Licentiate in Canon Law/Master of Canon Law degree, as well as Graduate Diplomas in Canon Law, Canonical Practices or Ecclesiastical Administration. Other qualifications in Governance and Canon Law are available.

Catholic Mission ^(Catholic Mission Australia, 2018) is the Australian agency of the international Pontifical Mission Societies. The Agency forms Australians for mission and raise funds for mission. A range of their resources are available, see the series ‘The Francis Effect’, and their education team facilitates holistic programs which aim to form or shape the whole person, not just the cognitive but the spiritual, to take up and carry on the mission of Jesus Christ in the world. They have pre-developed program available for parishes, teams, organisations and design unique learning program in response to need. Long-term partnerships with dioceses and other organisations has been effective.

Professional standards and the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people are critical areas in which all of the laity, as well as clergy and religious, need to be trained in accordance with their respective responsibilities. Catholic Professional Standards Ltd (CPSL)^(Catholic Professional Standards Ltd, 2018) has been formed in response to the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. CPSL is committed to fostering a culture of safety and care for children and vulnerable adults by developing National Catholic Safeguarding Standards. CPSL is developing a National Training Strategy to support the implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

4. Episcopal Conference

The Commissions, advisory councils and agencies, which support the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, contribute to lay formation in the Australian Catholic Church.

Some Commissions, councils and agencies use websites, e-letters and statements to inform and to transform. An example of this is *Walking with Love: alternatives to abortion* which was an initiative of the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting ^(Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting, 2018) publishes regular film reviews on the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The Australian Catholic Council for Lay Pastoral Ministry ^(Australian Catholic Council for Lay Pastoral Ministry, 2018a) has a bimonthly e-letter which is used to develop topics on the website.

The Office for Youth has been able to develop a broad approach to formation over time. “Even if it is not always easy to approach young people, progress has been made in two areas: the awareness that the entire community is called to evangelize and educate the young, and the urgent need for the young to exercise greater leadership.” (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 106)

In 2009 the Australian Bishops launched *Anointed and Sent* (Office for Youth, 2018), a national vision and common language for ministry with young people. This document is the foundation or formation for leaders and young people offered by the ACBC Office for Youth. In 2010, a biennial national training conference was established to gather, form and network youth ministers in all contexts of the church in Australia, for example, parish, school, religious order, university and diocese. This training conference supports formation of youth ministers and a critical review of practice. In 2014, the Bishops Commission for Family Youth and Life approved the establishment of a youth and youth ministry research task group to collate and commission research into catholic young people and youth ministry in Australia. This task group holds a seminar biennially to introduce and explore current research with youth ministers. Another initiative is the hosting of regular online webinars to reach rural and local youth ministers and young people.

The Office for the Participation of Women has coordinated a formation program for young women for more than ten years. “Because the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.” (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 103)

Initially entitled *The Young Catholic Women’s Interfaith Fellowship*, graduates received a Graduate Certificate in Theology and were prepared for leadership within Church and society in a multifaith society. The revised program is called *Leadership for Mission* (Office for the Participation for Women, 2018) and contributes to the formation of educated and faith-filled young women for mission within and beyond the Church. The two-year program combines regular residential opportunities with online learning. Each residential includes involvement in mission, experience of community and prayer, leadership development as well as an academic component. Leadership for Mission is the result of a collaboration between Catholic Mission, Catholic Church Insurance, Australian Catholic University and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

A graduate of the Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship, Christine Pace, started Catholic Women's Mentoring (Catholic Women's Mentoring, 2018). The inspiration for the program is the quote from Catherine of Siena "Be who God made you to be and you will set the world on fire". The program is being introduced across Australia and invites Catholic Women to nurture each other through personal, professional and spiritual challenges.

One of the strategies used is used by several councils and agencies is to nominate a Sunday to highlight a particular issue, for example, Social Justice Sunday and supporting these event with resource material for use in parishes and other faith groups. Social Justice Sunday highlights a particular social justice issue each year and a substantial statement is released. For example in 2017 the statement was *A Place at the Table: Social justice in an ageing society*. (Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 2018) The cumulative effect of these statements and the annual focus on a contemporary issue has substantial formative impact on Australian Catholics.

Other councils develop guidelines to support good practice at the parish or local level, for example, the Council for Disability produced *Celebrating the Sacramental Life from Birth to Death: Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with People with Disability*. (Australian Catholic Disability Council, 2018)

Some councils, hold biannual or triannual conferences to provide ongoing formation, resources and support for a particular group of people or around a particular focus. For example, the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, held a 2017 National Conference on *Pastoral Care in a Multicultural Church and Society* and a 2018 Colloquium *The Global Compacts and the Contribution of the Catholic Church*. (Australian Catholic Refugee and Migrant Office, 2018)

Two particular conferences have a broad focus and draw diverse audiences. One is an initiative of Catholic Mission and has the title 'Mission: one heart: many voices'. It is a multi-sector dialogue on the joy of the gospel and leading mission. They offer participants opportunities to use their heads, hearts, hands and voices, that is, to learn through various modes over the course of the conference. By working collaboratively with other organisations, Catholic Mission is providing a substantial formation opportunity to many who would otherwise miss out.

The second conference, which has a broad appeal, is *Proclaim*. This conference is coordinated through the National Centre for Evangelisation, an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, in collaboration with a particular diocese for the biannual event. The focus for Proclaim 2018 was inspiring, equipping and encouraging parishes and faith communities to engage in Evangelisation and Renewal. Proclaim's success is a combination of inspiration and

practical support for members of parishes. People who attended this year's event came from twenty six dioceses across Australia and New Zealand.

Evaluation of conferences reveal that these experiences reinvigorate participants "joy, .. boldness and ... hope-filled commitment... (and) missionary vigour!" (Pope Francis, 2013, p. 109)

5. Features of Lay Formation

Various organisations, agencies and associations provide lay formation. Where formation opportunities connect with a particular profession or ministry, they receive financial and practical support. For example, Catholic Education employees attend retreats and other programs as part of their workload. Catholic Education authorities cover costs of providing high quality and well-resourced programs.

Some specialised formators with expertise in adult education facilitate formation programs for organisations and parishes. Catholic Mission, the mission teams associated with religious institute schools and the Xavier Institute are some examples of specialist teams who bring substantial programs to groups across Australia. One benefit of this specialised approach is that programs are developed and enhanced over time.

Academic study, even in areas of theology and scripture while educational are not always formative. However, the range of degree courses from the Catholic Universities and institutes contributes enormously to the development of the laity in the Catholic Church in Australia. For students who are able to study on campus, the access to campus ministry and the experience of being part of community support their formation in faith.

The willingness of the Catholic Universities to articulate with experiential programs and collaborate with other groups has enabled specialized initiatives such as Leadership for Mission to flourish. Not all groups have the same needs or come to formation with the same point of engagement. Tailoring programs to local needs has been very successful.

Agencies that have clarified a vision for formation amongst a group, for example, youth, before developing a long-term plan for implementation and support have been successful. In these cases, ongoing evaluation supports improved practice and allows strategies to be refined over the course of the project.

Regular programs that link to the liturgical season, such as RCIA and Lenten groups, or to an annual event, such as Social Justice Sunday, provide reliable nourishment for almost all of the laity. The regularity and consistent quality of the programs is appreciated. They become a substantial feature of Church life.

To support the transformation of society, agencies of the Catholic Church may launch particular formation initiatives. For example, to influence attitudes and policies regarding refugees, abortion, a series of statements might be developed or conferences might be held to reach many people and to attract media attention.

Similarly, to support the ongoing transformation of the Church, advisory councils will promote approaches to improve, for example, the inclusiveness of parish and the access to sacraments of those with a disability.

Large scale formation initiatives such as conferences, harness tremendous resources across various sectors and provide remarkable opportunities that impact on many dioceses simultaneously. These offerings now employ technology to make presentations and workshops available more widely and in a format that can be used repeatedly.

More Australian Catholics are accessing spiritual accompaniment as a means for promoting their own formation. Also as more lay people access the training for spiritual accompaniment they too are receiving substantial formation.

At a national and local level the efforts to form young people have become more systematic and sustained.

Lay formation opportunities vary from substantial to insignificant, from the broad to the targeted, from the long term to the occasional, the rigorous to the flexible. Regardless of the availability of resources or the size of the challenge, Australian Catholics through agencies, associations, organisations and dioceses are endeavouring to provide lay formation.

The challenge is to open to the formative capacity of the Gospel and to transform the whole Church. Thus, to heal the hurt and distrust of Australian Catholics.

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