



OFS AUSTRALIA NATIONAL COUNCIL'S SUBMISSION TO THE PLENARY COUNCIL

What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

We believe God desires a holier church where everyday lay Catholics can be more deeply united in the life of the church, and where the laity can play an important role in rebuilding the church. We believe that God desires the faithful to live their faith openly in the secular world and to be witnesses of Jesus Christ in all of secular society by their living example of the gospel life. The laity are called to continually grow in their faith through their lifelong ongoing spiritual formation, where they develop in their understanding of the gospels, and of church teachings, as well as giving flesh to the gospels through the way they live it.

The Catholic Church already has a great treasure which can help everyday Catholics live this lifestyle, namely the Third Order vocations. Included among these Third Orders is the Secular Franciscan Order, which is currently the largest lay Order in both Australia and in the world.

Lay Orders seem to have been forgotten/ignored by many bishops of Australia for a long time now. The bishops need to work closely with these lay orders and point the faithful in the direction of the Third/Secular orders as a way in which the faithful can develop in holiness, live the gospel life of Jesus more perfectly, and rebuild the church in Australia. The laity make up the largest part of the Church, and so the bishops, together with the Catholic Church of Australia need to realise the potential 'gold mine' they have in the Third Orders, and the significant role they can play in strengthening and rebuilding the life of the Church.

Our current pope took on the name "Francis" (of Assisi). St Francis himself was called by God to "Rebuild my Church." In 'Evangelii Gaudium' the pope speaks of a missionary church spreading the joy of Jesus to all. He speaks against an elite church, the dangers of consumerism, and an intolerance for social injustice. In "Laudato Si" he speaks for a greater care for our earthly home. In the true spirit of both St Francis and Pope Francis, the Secular Franciscans are at the forefront of making the Church a missionary Church by bringing the joy of Jesus to secular society. The Secular Franciscans through their everyday example are promoting a poorer church where all are equal, as well as working for social justice and the care for our planet.

Through the teachings of Pope Francis, God is clearly asking the church to be revived through the spirit of St Francis of Assisi. God is calling the church in Australia to live the message of Pope Francis. If the pope sees that the message of St Francis is exactly what the Church is desperately crying out for today, then we are all called to embrace this same spirit as he has. This message is at the heart of the Secular Franciscans. The Secular Franciscan Order would love to work with the bishops to help Australian Catholics to live the life that God is calling us to embrace.

What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

- How do the bishops plan to promote the Third Order vocations to the Catholics of Australia as a way in which the faithful can grow in holiness?
- How do the bishops plan to engage with the Third Orders and work together with them in rebuilding the church?

Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you?

Since the Secular Franciscans were first established in Australia in 1879, there have been countless thousands of members around the entire country living the gospel of Jesus Christ in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi. Living the Franciscan charism has shaped our members into real images of our Lord Jesus. Our members have been the missionary Church in the secular world, bringing the joy and love of Jesus to all whom they meet in the work place, at home, and throughout society. Our members have significantly contributed towards the life of the Catholic Church by working together with the priests and bishops in all areas where the laity can assist.

Secular Franciscans have worked tirelessly with many charities in both Australia and overseas, giving themselves to the service of the poor and needy. They work as catechists in schools, pastoral carers in hospitals, caring for the elderly, feeding the homeless on the streets, assisting new refugees to settle in Australia. Among our thousands of members over the last 140 years it is impossible to list all the stories that have shaped our members, however there have been even more stories of people's lives that have been enriched by the work God has done through the hands and hearts of the Secular Franciscans. Our members have contributed significantly to building up the church of Christ in Australia.