

Shaping our Post-Pandemic World

An Enquiry for Secondary Students

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by the Australian Young Christian Students Movement
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Updated November 2021
with a chance to review the year that's been, to look at moving forward, to
look at what Covid-normal and a brighter future might look like.

Five sessions to explore:

*How the COVID-19 Pandemic
has affected me, my country and our world;
why it should concern me;
and
what I might be able to do about its
consequences*



Introduction

This updated Five Session Enquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the lives of students and the wider community is produced by the Australian Young Christian Students (YCS) for general distribution in schools and parishes. Its format is designed for use in classrooms, in conjunction with RE programs, and by parish youth groups. It can also be adapted for use by school and parish YCS groups, using each session as part of a meeting plan.

These sessions have been written because the Pandemic has had, and continues to have, such a momentous impact on the lives of many, especially students, whose goals and aspirations have been threatened and challenged. It is through a better understanding of how the Pandemic has affected our own lives that we may be able to understand how we, our nation, and the world, might respond to this new reality.

In the following session plans we set out to, first, SEE the reality of the Pandemic. In the first three sessions of this Enquiry, we look at, in turn, how the Pandemic has affected me personally and those around me; how it has impacted on Australia; and, in the third session, how it has impacted the world, especially those in developing countries. This is a search over three sessions for the realities of life: from ourselves and those closest to us, through to those we will never meet.

In the fourth session we turn to some commentaries and reflections on the Pandemic which help us reflect on and JUDGE the current and future impacts are having and will have on our lives and the lives of our “neighbours”, whether those neighbours are close to us or far away. We focus on the promotion of the Common Good.

In the fifth session we start to look at the ways in which we might ACT in response to the situations that we have discovered. This session asks us to reflect on the potential for personal action in our own lives and social action in the wider community. We have made a few suggestions for action, but we emphasise that it is up to the students, drawing on what they have discovered over the previous sessions to identify what they may be able to do.

This “See, Judge, Act” methodology, or Enquiry methodology, is the way in which the principles and values of Catholic Social Teaching are applied in the resolution of contemporary issues, a process in which the starting point is the realities of life. There is more on this methodology at pages 14 - 16.

We are hoping to build on your experiences and views about shaping our Post-Pandemic world. Please forward any thoughts you have on the matters raised by this Enquiry and the outcomes that you believe will promote an informed and considered response to the Pandemic. The YCS will collate this information for its own advocacy and for distribution to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and other Catholic institutions to assist them in developing appropriate policies and public advocacy.

Session 1 - The Pandemic and Me

For nearly 2 years now, there has been something about the Pandemic in our media every day, and it seems to have become part of all we do, say and think about. It is “in our face” 24/7 and it continues to constantly disrupt and change our lives and our plans, from simple things like a meal with friends, a family gathering or bigger things like trips away and remote learning; and decisions like Do I wear a mask in this situation? Do I have the vaccine? Which vaccine should I have? Can we vaccinate the population before variants reduce the effectiveness of the vaccine?

There is a new vocabulary we’ve become accustomed to – words like lockdown, unprecedented, work-from-home, masks, Iso, social distancing, COVID-normal, bubbles, quarantine, Zoom, jabs, roadmaps, vaxxed, double-dosed.....and the list goes on.

And more recently, there has been increasing awareness of “long Covid”, that is the ongoing health impacts that the virus has had on people who survived it and may not have even been hospitalised because of it. Young people as well as old have suffered from long Covid.

With the 80% double-dosed vaccine goal having been reached, what might Covid-normal look like? Is the future looking brighter?

In preparation for this session, you might watch Dr Murray Wright, NSW’s Chief Psychiatrist with his helpful advice on Lockdown Stress, in a Press Conference on 12 August 2021
<https://www.pedestrian.tv/news/nsw-press-conference-psychiatrist-lockdown-stress/>

“When Covid hit...every single one of the planned talks and planned conferences that I was going to be going to was stopped. Going into Year 12 and going into next year my future has always been aviation. It became very apparent very quickly that the opportunities for a career in aviation in the next 5 years were dwindling very quickly, so for me my mental health got particularly bad.”
Bob Bramley in “Surviving Turbulence” Australian Story, ABC Television, 3 February 2021.

“With the COVID-19 global pandemic, children and young people in Australia are living through unparalleled times. Kids Helpline and the Australian Human Rights Commission have co-authored a report on the impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people who contact Kids Helpline.

The report examines the types of COVID-19 related concerns that children and young people aged 5 to 25 years raised with Kids Helpline counsellors between January and the end of April 2020. There were 2,567 contacts from children and young people who raised COVID-19 during this time period.

The overall top five concerns related to COVID-19 raised by these children and young people were:

- 1. Mental health concerns resulting from COVID-19*
- 2. Social isolation*
- 3. Education impacts*
- 4. Impacts on family life*
- 5. Changes to plans and usual activities*

While these were the overall top concerns, differences existed across the top five concerns within age groups, gender, location, and cultural background.”

Extract from the Executive Summary of “Impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people who contact Kids Helpline 2020”, Report by the Australian Human Rights Commission, September 2020

“Melbourne has officially suffered through the longest Covid-19 Lockdown in the world, overtaking Buenos Aires...the 246-day title also comes with a whopping price tag – wiping \$700m a week from the economy during statewide restrictions – on top of a dire cost to mental health, children’s educations and people’s livelihoods...” Herald Sun, 4 October 2021

A letter to students:

"I'm writing to thank you for all your extraordinary efforts and patience as we grapple with coronavirus (COVID-19) and the challenges it brings.

You have done an amazing job in adapting to these strange and difficult times. I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank your parents, carers and families – for being your support squad, all while dealing with the effects the pandemic has had on their own lives.

I recognise that this year and 2020 have been school years like no others, and the disruptions have been profound...

I completely understand any stress and anxiety you might be feeling and want you to know that the Victorian Government is taking significant measures to ensure all students are treated fairly.

This means no VCE student will be disadvantaged by the effects of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Importantly, you will have the opportunity to provide your teachers information about how the pandemic has impacted you through the submission of a Students Statement.

This may include significant impacts such as: school closures, long absences, dealing with substantial extra responsibilities at home, impacts on your personal health and wellbeing and/or your immediate family, ongoing issues with remote learning, mental health challenges.

Thank you for persevering in these challenging times."

James Merlino, Deputy Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health, Victoria State Government, extracts from Letter to Year 12 Students, 2 September 2021

- What impact has the Pandemic had on you?
- What plans and dreams did you have that have had to be changed?
- What have you missed out on?
- Have there been positive things that have come out of this Pandemic time for you?
- What have you learnt about family relationships while living in a lockdown?
- Do you think your education has suffered? In learning, assignments and exams?
- Do you think the education that you would have expected has been lost? How could it be recovered?
- How effective was home schooling/remote learning? Do you think it's now disappeared forever?
- See the top five concerns identified in the earlier extract from the report of the Australian Human Rights Commission. From your experience, how would you rate them in terms of importance?

At the end of your discussion: Identify the five most notable insights that came out of the session. Appoint a student to write them up as a record of the session and send the list to pandemicenquiry@aycs.org.au

Preparation for the next session:

Before the next session think about the questions raised for discussion and prepare your thoughts. Go online to see if you can find articles that cover the questions raised. Also, you might want to share some of this research. How could you do this? Perhaps look at how the pandemic has affected each State or different regions?

After you start to form a few views about these matters, speak to your friends and parents about your thoughts.

Session 2 - The Pandemic and Australia

Even with the increased numbers and extended Lockdowns in Australia (particularly in Victoria and NSW) in the latter part of 2021, Australia is still regarded as one of the most successful countries in containing the COVID-19 virus, through, it could be said, a combination of our location, good luck, and good management.

"... this is getting very, very real for Australians as they continue to adapt and change their daily lives to what it is going to be like for us for many months ahead. ...We...have been talking about the coronavirus pandemic as being one that we're going to have to live with for at least the next six months. I've been very clear about that for a very simple reason. I really want Australians to understand that we need to be in this for that whole, it will be months. We need to make changes that we can live with and that we can implement day after day, week after week, month after month...We will demonstrate to the world here in Australia how such societies can deal with these sorts of challenges our way, the Australian way...So stay positive, Australia, stay connected, stay strong. We will get through this together..."

Scott Morrison, Prime Minister of Australia, 2 April 2021.

"Yet out of all this pressure, doom and gloom, [of the Pandemic] there are fresh insights about the value of caring work, the need for empathy and the importance of community. At the time of writing, we are both still asking ourselves the question, can we emerge from this stronger? Will we see a new global understanding about the true value of so much of what has been historically defined as 'women's work', a determination to address growing inequalities, an embrace of telework to provide family-friendly flexibility, and a new spirit of kindness based on the dramatic reminder of our shared humanity?"

Julia Gillard, former Prime Minister of Australia and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former Finance Minister & Foreign Minister of Nigeria, in their book, "Women & Leadership", 2020, pages 2-3.

"Once we reach 80 per cent, the Commonwealth is likely to reduce financial assistance to those being impacted by the effects of lockdowns including border closures. This will create a fiscal incentive for the opening of borders. Also there is growing pressure on all governments to factor in the full human costs of lockdowns and border closures, including the collapse of small business, the educational and social deprivation of children unable to attend school, the long term separation of families, the loss of employment, the impact on mental health, and the unavailability of routine health care for conditions other than COVID.

Those who find the language or rhetoric of 'rights' useful need to consider not just the rights of the vulnerable to be protected from the virus because of their advanced age or co-morbidities, but also the rights of others to live a productive life, achieving their full human flourishing in community. There are always limits on rights. There is always a need to balance conflicting rights. There is also a need to set limits on rights so as to serve the common good or the public interest..."

Fr Frank Brennan SJ, 'Clive Palmer, Covid and the WA Border', *Eureka Street*, 9 September 2021

By 1st November 2021, 1,756 Australians had died from the virus since the first case was diagnosed in Australia. The number of infections and hospitalisations have also been exceptionally low by world standards. But this has come at a great cost to many Australians and with deleterious social and economic consequences for the nation.

- What are the current figures for infections, hospitalisations, and deaths? How do they vary among the States and Territories?
- What's been the social impact of the Pandemic on Australia?
- Which age groups have been the most affected by the Pandemic?
- "We're all in this together" was our catch cry. Were we? Are we?
- Are there any benefits for our Australian society coming out of the Pandemic?
- Which sectors of the Australian economy have been most affected by (a) the Pandemic and (b) Government policies?
- Youth unemployment is usually higher than the national average. What kinds of part-time and full-time jobs being sought by students and young workers have been affected? What have been the consequences?
- JobKeeper and higher rates of JobSeeker payments were available in 2020. Were they good policies? Should they have been continued for longer?

At the end of your discussion: Identify the five most notable insights that came out of the session. Appoint a student to write them up as a record of the session and send the list to pandemicenquiry@aycs.org.au

Preparation for the next session:

Before the next session think about the questions raised for discussion and prepare your thoughts. Go online to see if you can find articles that cover the questions raised. Perhaps each student could take a country to research. Students who have relations living overseas could contact them to find out how they have been affected.

In the next session we refer to the speech by Pope Francis to diplomats in Rome on 8 February 2021. Pope Francis identifies four crises that confront the world: a health crisis, an environmental crisis, an economic and social crisis; and a crisis of politics. You might allocate each of these areas to one or more members of the group so they can prepare their thoughts for the next session.

Talk about some of these issues with your friends and parents.

Session 3 - The Pandemic and the World

“The world is currently facing a global emergency of an unimaginable scale that knows no borders and is spreading human suffering, crippling the global economy and upending people’s lives. The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis, an information crisis and increasingly a wider socio-economic crisis. Global Action, Solidarity and Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation are crucial in defeating this vicious enemy – COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact across the world. More than 1.5 billion children and young people including Young Catholic Students are unable to go to school due to school closures by Governments in order to control the spread of COVID-19 in 191 countries. Online communities have become central to maintaining children and young people’s learning, support and play thus increasing their exposure to cyber bullying, risky online behaviour and sexual exploitation.”

International Young Catholic Students Movement, website; <https://iycs-jeci.org/iycs-global-response/>

“At this critical moment, vaccine equity is the biggest moral test before the global community. We must ensure that everybody, everywhere, can be vaccinated as soon as possible. Yet progress on vaccinations has been wildly uneven and unfair.”

Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Remarks to the Security Council Open Meeting on Ensuring Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines in Contexts Affected by Conflict and Insecurity’, 17 February 2021, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20583.doc.htm>

“These unprecedented employment losses translated in an increase in global unemployment by 33 million in 2020, with the unemployment rate rising by 1.1 percentage points to 6.5 per cent. The reduction in labour income has been distributed unevenly between workers, with youth, women and low-skilled workers seeing the sharpest drops in disposable income...This crisis, therefore, interacts with and exacerbates inequalities, both between and within countries....Without comprehensive and concerted policy efforts, there is a very real risk that the COVID-19 crisis will leave a legacy of widened inequality and social injustice....Equal opportunity to access skills and lifelong learning is more than ever a key determinant of inclusive and sustainable development.”

Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organisation, 8 April 2021.

https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/statements-and-speeches/WCMS_779101/lang--en/index.htm

“I would like to mention briefly some of the crises that were provoked or brought to light by the pandemic, but also to consider the opportunities that they offer for the building of a more humane, just, supportive and peaceful world.... A health crisis.... An environmental crisis.... An economic and social crisis.... A crisis of politics”

Pope Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 8 February 2021. The full text is at: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/february/documents/papa-francesco_20210208_corpo-diplomatico.html

“The crisis of the pandemic has highlighted the depth of the interdependence both among ourselves and between the human family and our common home . societies, especially in the West, have had the tendency to forget this interconnection. And the bitter consequences are before our eyes. In this epochal change it is thus urgent to invert this noxious tendency and it is possible to do so through the synergy among different disciplines. Knowledge of biology and hygiene is needed, as well as of medicine and epidemiology, but also of economy and sociology, anthropology and ecology.

Pope Francis, ‘Public Health in Global Perspective’, address to a group of participants in the general assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, 29 September 2021

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210927-pav.html>

- Have you been following the impact of the Pandemic in the United States, Papua New Guinea, Britain, Japan and India? Or any other country?
- Do you think Australia might have been better at dealing with the impact of the Pandemic than any of these countries? If so, what would you put it down to? If not, do you have any views on why other countries have been more successful?
- Which countries have struggled the most during this time? How? Why?
- Do you think that community values might account for the different ways in which countries have responded?
- Do you think that the relative success of Australia in dealing with the Pandemic response is because of our sense of solidarity and egalitarianism, because we are compliant when directed by Governments, or because of luck? Can you think of any other reasons?
- Have Australians taken enough notice of what has been happening around the world? Do they care enough?
- What differences have vaccines made? Is it becoming a Pandemic of the unvaccinated?
- During 2021 we have seen the emergence of the Delta strain of the COVID-19 virus, presenting the possibility that the current vaccines may be less effective and new vaccines will be required. Unless poorer countries are supplied with sufficient vaccines, they may be the starting points for some of these new strains. It is sometimes said that we can only be free from the virus if everyone is free of it. What does this mean for our support of poorer nations in our region? Is enough being done for them to get the vaccines they need?

At the end of your discussion: Identify the five most notable insights that came out of the session. Appoint a student to write them up as a record of the session and send the list to pandemicenquiry@aycs.org.au

Preparation for the next session:

In the next session we will look in more detail at the nation's obligation to support those who have been impacted by the virus. It is often said that the Pandemic "laid bare", or exposed, social deprivation. Think about what the Common Good means and think about the many ways in which the Common Good might be supported. You might watch these clips:

- "COVID: through a common evil we rediscover the common good", Vatican News, 31 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yP8rNbcfY4>
- A message from Pope Francis (to young people) at VAX LIVE: The Concert to Reunite the World, 9 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQggPOTF5tA>

Again, run some of your ideas past your friends and parents.

Session 4 - The Pandemic and the Common Good

One of the fundamental principles of Catholic Social Teaching is the obligation to promote the Common Good through the laws and the social structures of society. The Catholic understanding of the common good comes from a theologically based view of human dignity and social justice. The common good requires that social institutions be ordered in a way that guarantees all persons the ability to participate actively in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. You might think of it as the social safety net, or a series of social safety nets.

“The COVID-19 crisis has shown more clearly than ever the need for a new kind of solidarity both to deal with the pandemic and find a way beyond it. We all have a role in building that solidarity – which means speaking to our fellow Australians with love not hate, with respect not contempt, with understanding not indifference. In the COVID-19 response and recovery we all need to be more open, interested and engaged in order to combat the crude tribalism that is infecting Australia and other nations at this time. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, the common good is critically important because it obliges us to look beyond our own needs and our own desires to consider the interests of the broader community. It’s at the heart of what we mean by solidarity.”

From “The Common Good in a Covid World”, A Statement by Catholic Bishops of Queensland for the 2020 State Election

“The common good is what we must all strive for. If there is a positive to have come out of this pandemic, it’s that when push came to shove, the fundamental truth of this spilled across political and ideological lines as surely as a river breaking its banks.

We have seen even some of those political parties that are more instinctively tilted towards individualism setting aside their ideology as an indulgence ill-suited to the current reality. It has been superseded by the spirit of inclusiveness. Of togetherness. Of compassion. The understanding that the bond of our common humanity is what is going to get us through.”

Anthony Albanese, Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the ALP, ‘Keeping the Common Good after COVID’ in “Eureka Street”, 2 February 2021.

“The pandemic revealed the interconnectedness of our human family — and of the full spectrum of human rights — civil, cultural, economic, political and social. COVID-19 has deepened pre-existing divides, vulnerabilities and inequalities, as well as opened up new fractures, including fault-lines in human rights. We are seeing a vicious circle of violations. The lives of hundreds of millions of families have been turned upside down...The latest moral outrage is the failure to ensure equity in vaccination efforts...”

Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations Human Rights Council, 22 February 2021
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26769&LangID=E>

“When the Church talks of the preferential option for the poor, it means that we need always to keep in mind how any decision we make might impact on the poor. But it also means we need to put the poor at the center of our thinking. By means of that preferential option, the Lord gives us a new perspective on value with which to judge events. Similarly, when the Church speaks of the common good it asks us to have regard to the good of society as a whole. It is not enough to adjudicate between different parties and interests, or to think in terms of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, as if the interests of the majority trump all other interests. The common good is the good we all share in...”

Pope Francis, “Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future”, pages 52-3

“There will be no return to a pre-COVID world: it has changed forever. Rather than lament this loss, might we be facing a great opportunity? What is the world we want to build? Is our objective a society that is fair, truthful, and merciful; prosperous and generous; democratic and transparent? Or one that is anxious and argumentative; uncivil and individualistic; competitive and selfish? Will

every life matter? What are our priorities as we take the next steps? People of faith have deep resources to share here...people of faith draw on something that does not depend entirely on other people. Reaching for a 'COVID-normal' must mean reaching for the common good, where no-one is left behind and a place is found for everyone".

Peter A Comensoli, Archbishop of Melbourne, "There will be no return to a pre-COVID world; it has changed forever", *The Age*, 23 September 2020.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/there-will-be-no-return-to-a-pre-covid-world-it-has-changed-forever-20200923-p55ygp.html>

In a video message Pope Francis said "vaccines bring hope to end the pandemic, but only if they are available to all and we collaborate with one another. He went on to say that getting a Covid jab that is authorized by respective authorities is an act of love. Helping others to do the same, he said, is also an act of love... Getting vaccinated is a simple yet profound way to care for one another especially the most vulnerable..."

Vatican News Report, 18 August 2021 at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-08/pope-francis-appeal-covid-19-vaccines-act-of-love.html>

"Decisions worth talking about are always difficult. The easy decisions don't warrant much discussion. We sometimes get told what to do, and for good reason. But more often, we need to make good decisions for ourselves, and for the right reasons. Our decision about vaccination is a real-life experience of making a discerned choice as a member of our community. I commend to you the following approach: I will be prudent. I will take good advice. I will listen to all points of view.

So even self-interested prudence might dictate that I do something less than optimal for my own physical health protection. And what seemed optimal for my health as a young person prior to the advent of the Delta strain and prior to the recent breakouts and lockdowns might not be optimal now.

If I consider only my immediate health interests, I may be overlooking what I can contribute to the common good – the sum of those things necessary so that people can socialise again avoiding the mental health risks of isolation, so that our economy can function well, so that we can get back to being part of a community of nations able to travel and relate to each other...

Weighing all these considerations, let's make decisions of which we can be proud, pleasing decisions with which we are pleased, decisions which we will happily explain to others for whom we care.

The vaccine decision which each of us will make in the coming weeks can be a vocational choice, weighing the risks and benefits for all, and playing our part for the common good..."

Fr Frank Brennan SJ, Rector of Newman College, Melbourne, extracts from Homily, 1 August 2021. <https://catholicoutlook.org/fr-franks-homily-1-august-2021/>

*Melbourne Catholic Archbishop Peter Comensoli is lobbying the state government to allow unvaccinated people to worship in person when the state reopens, warning that a double-dose COVID-19 vaccine requirement in exchange for certain freedoms could lead to a two-class society... Archbishop Comensoli told *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* that while Catholics were being strongly encouraged to get vaccinated, the notion of a vaccine passport system – in which church services or events are offered only to those who can prove they are fully inoculated against COVID-19 – could risk creating social division.*

"It would be a tragedy if two classes of citizens, the vaccinated and the unvaccinated, were to emerge and be entrenched as we look towards a COVID-normal goal," he said.

Farrah Tomazin, 'Churches fear vaccine mandates could lead to two-tiered society', *The Age*, 25 September 2021

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/churches-fear-vaccine-mandates-could-lead-to-two-tiered-society-20210924-p58uke.html>

There is a lot of reading in the resources for the discussion in this section, some of which highlights continuing debates about vaccination and the consequences of living with or without vaccination. It is important that any discussion about different points of view on vaccination be respectful. Also keep in mind that the underlying concern of this session is to promote a greater understanding of the Common Good and the ways in which it can be promoted in our society.

- Think again about the speech by Pope Francis to the diplomats in Rome on 8 February 2021. What values is the Pope spelling out?
- What kind of community values do you need for the promotion of the Common Good? Solidarity? Egalitarianism? The recognition of basic human rights?
- Some of the debate around the extent and length of the lockdowns involved differences of opinion about the trade-off between saving and protecting lives and, on the other hand, maintaining economic activity and employment. How would you balance these competing priorities?
- Moving to a “Post-Pandemic normal” requires that we achieve “herd immunity”, which requires a sufficient majority, currently unknown, of the population to be vaccinated. Yet as Australia rolled out the vaccines there were signs of vaccine hesitancy, even protests, which might make it impossible to achieve herd immunity. What happens if we do not achieve a sufficient level of vaccinations? What do you think about the need for vaccinations?
- Is the opening up of our communities at 80% double-dosed, as well as only being able to attend/participate in certain events if you’re double-dosed, fair and practical?
- What can we do to support policies that promote the Common Good?
- What does our faith have to say to, or about, the Pandemic? What does it add to all we have explored and discussed?

At the end of your discussion: Identify the five most notable insights that came out of the session. Appoint a student to write them up as a record of the session and send the list to pandemicenquiry@aycs.org.au

Preparation for the next session:

In the next session we will be looking at some of the areas where some social change is needed. Considering the four sessions that have been explored, what issues and topics would you like to explore further as you become more aware of the effects of the Pandemic on yourself, those around you, and in our country and our world?

Session 5 – The Challenge to Action

“We’re in a situation now where the world has changed, perhaps forever...The governments of Australia have done well in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially since they, like the rest of us, had entered new territory and have had to make big decisions in a strange, fast-moving environment...

We now have a chance to shape society in ways that weren’t possible before this crisis. But that can’t be left just to our political leaders. The whole community has to be creative in new ways, building on the kind of creativity we’ve shown through the crisis. The Church wants to be part of this process, and it has a unique contribution to make – not as politicians or economists but as people of faith...

We have our own distinctive voice and we have our own communities on the ground across the nation. If you put all of the Churches together, we have an extraordinary reach into the community. We’re in the rural towns. We’re in the regions. We’re in the cities. We have tens of thousands of workers in schools, hospitals and at the frontline of social services. We’re everywhere...

The strange thing is that COVID-19 which has been such a curse is also opening new doors which may lead to unexpected blessings. There are new opportunities. But the catch-cry of the crisis will still apply: We’re all in this together. The same sense of solidarity that is carrying us through the pandemic will carry us into the future. We are in this together – all Australians; and the Church wants to be a good companion on the road ahead, helping to identify new opportunities and what is needed to respond to them.”

Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane, “A Chance to Shape Society in Ways that weren’t Possible before the Crisis; but as a Community, not just the Political Leaders”, 10 June 2020 .

<https://brisbanecatholic.org.au/articles/a-chance-to-shape-society-in-ways-that-werent-possible-before-the-crisis-but-as-a-community-not-just-the-political-leaders/>

Over the first four sessions, we have explored many questions about the Pandemic and its effects on ourselves and people throughout the world. The purpose of this session is to focus on what we, as students, can do to make the world a better place. A group of students with limited time and resources cannot get involved in all the important issues.

Realistically, you will need to concentrate on one or two aspects, which are chosen because you can take some action about them. You might find that there are some actions that you could decide and take action on in this session, but, more likely, you will need to have a follow-up meeting to carry through the plan of action.

This session is about finding ways to respond to some of the consequences and challenges of the Pandemic. The discussion could fall into two parts:

- The impact that the Pandemic has had, and will continue to have, on students and their careers and wellbeing.
- The impact on the wider community in Australia and overseas, especially on the vulnerable and marginal.

Here are some questions that might arise in relation to students:

- What are the current and future needs of students who have studied through the disruptions caused by the Pandemic? What, if anything, can be done in the future to alleviate the effects of those disruptions?
- Has the education of students been disrupted to the extent that some policies should be introduced by Federal and State Governments to help alleviate the continuing

educational impacts of the Pandemic? Do students need some future educational and career support to alleviate those impacts?

Regarding the broader community impacts of the Pandemic, you might have found that the Pandemic has exacerbated a wide range of social injustices and deprivations. Some of these are: Homelessness; Asylum seekers/refugees; Environment; Mental health; Family relationships; Social media; Bullying and harassment; and Modern slavery/Human trafficking.

If you are to do something that will alleviate those impacts you will need to develop a realistic plan of action, which includes communicating your views to others, particularly decision-makers and those who might share your views.

Where possible, get others involved in your plans. Social media postings can be effective. What access do you have to social media? Can you prepare a message that could be posted on the school or some other platform?

You might consider writing a letter to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition or to any other politician (State or Federal) about an issue or issues that you have considered. If you do, consider the ways in which you might be able to generate support from others.

As we have seen, Archbishop Coleridge, who is also the President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, has said that the Church wants to be part of the process to shape society. The Church includes the bishops and a very wide range of Catholic institutions. You might also consider writing a submission to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference about the way in which you think it should advocate and lobby for social change.

Are these five Pandemic Enquiry sessions the end of your time of enquiry together? These sessions may have raised further questions for you and further areas you may wish to explore and act upon. One possibility is that a group of you draw up your own Enquiry using the See, Judge, Act structure. There is further information on using this methodology on pages 14-16.

Some of the organisations which may help you with information and suggestions for action are: St Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies); Catholics for Refugees; Australian Catholic Religious Against Human Trafficking (ACRATH); Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project; Catholic Earthcare Australia; Peace, Ecology & Justice – St Columbans Mission Society; MacKillop Family Services; CatholicCare/Centacare services; Catholic Social Services Australia; Catholic Social Services, Victoria; and Community-based groups, such as: Beyond Blue, Kids Helpline and Headspace.

At the end of your discussion, appoint a student to write a short written record of the issues and actions that you want to take up and send it to pandemicenquiry@aycs.org.au We would also welcome any feedback you have about this Pandemic Enquiry. We will collate the responses and provide a report to participating schools and parishes and to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. With your participation we can help make the Post-Pandemic world a better place for all.

Our Methodology

We have adopted the “See, Judge, Act” structure for this Pandemic Enquiry. This “Enquiry Method” can be used in understanding, considering and responding to the small and personal events in our lives, and it can be used in dealing with the great social problems of our day. It is now a common way of decision-making in our community, even though the terms are not usually used. We will find this underlying structure in, for example, the setting of public policies by governmental bodies, in the making of commercial decisions by companies trying to balance the interest of their various stakeholders and by community organisations trying to better serve their local communities.

Within the Catholic Church the Enquiry Method was developed by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn as a method for promoting social awareness, social participation, and personal formation by ordinary members of the community, starting with the realities of their own lives. Cardijn was the founder of the Young Christian Workers and, indirectly, the Young Christian Students and other similar movements within the Catholic Church. The process is now generally called the Review of Life in Cardijn-inspired movements, but that term is used to cover more than social issues and it has a more personal and a spiritual dimension; see the description of the YCS at page 17. In this Enquiry we use the term Enquiry Method to describe the See, Judge, Act structure regarding social issues and social action.

The Judge part of the method involves a consideration of the teachings and principles in the Gospels and Catholic teaching, particularly Catholic Social Teaching, along with other values and principles.

Catholic Social Teaching underpins many social ministries of the Catholic Church. Catholic Social Services Australia writes:

“Catholic Social Teaching (CST) offers a way of thinking, being and seeing the world. It provides a vision for a just society in which the dignity of all people is recognised, and those who are vulnerable are cared for. It consists of an interrelated body of Catholic social thought and principles which can be used to reflect on and guide how we relate to one another in our local and global communities.

The perspective and principles of Catholic Social Teaching are a rich heritage, developed as the Church has engaged with key social issues throughout history. Catholic Social Teaching includes insight from the Scriptures, as well as understanding from the thinking, reflections and lived experience of people throughout the life of the Church.”

<https://cssa.org.au/catholic-social-teaching/>

The Enquiry Method, was acknowledged by Pope John XXIII (now Saint John XXIII) in his 1961 encyclical *Christianity and Social Progress*, which is usually called *Mater et Magistra*:

“236. There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.

237. It is important for our young people to grasp this method and to practice it. Knowledge acquired in this way does not remain merely abstract, but is seen as something that must be translated into action”.

True to the command from Jesus Christ to love our neighbour, the Church seeks to build a better world by asking the Faithful to engage with the world and transform it according to that command. The Church's Social Teaching is a body of teaching that spells out the application of that simple command to an increasingly complex world. While the principles are clear, the application of those principles may not be simple, as the Pope pointed out in the next paragraph of his encyclical:

"238. Differences of opinion in the application of principles can sometimes arise even among sincere Catholics. When this happens, they should be careful not to lose their respect and esteem for each other. Instead, they should strive to find points of agreement for effective and suitable action, and not wear themselves out in interminable arguments, and, under pretext of the better or the best, omit to do the good that is possible and therefore obligatory."

We need to keep in mind the point made by the Pope: differences can arise in the application of principles, but those differences cannot be an excuse for a failure to act.

The expanding body of Catholic social teaching prompted by the Second Vatican Council has been in response to concerns about various social topics in the light of the Gospels, which, in turn, enlighten the see, judge, act process. St John Paul II has said:

"The Church, in fact, has something to say about specific human situations, both individual and communal, national and international. She formulates a genuine doctrine for these situations, a corpus which enables her to analyse social realities, to make judgments about them and to indicate directions to be taken for the just resolution of the problems involved....."

Today, at a distance of a hundred years [from the encyclical Rerum Novarum of 1891], the validity of this approach affords me the opportunity to contribute to the development of Christian social doctrine. The "new evangelization", which the modern world urgently needs and which I have emphasized many times, must include among its essential elements a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine. As in the days of Pope Leo XIII, this doctrine is still suitable for indicating the right way to respond to the great challenges of today, when ideologies are being increasingly discredited. Now, as then, we need to repeat that there can be no genuine solution of the "social question" apart from the Gospel, and that the "new things" can find in the Gospel the context for their correct understanding and the proper moral perspective for judgment on them." (Centesimus Annus, 1991, paragraph 5)

The Enquiry Method, based on the See, Judge, Act structure, has also been used by Pope Francis in his social encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, where he describes the realities confronting the world, considers them in the light of the Gospels and other relevant principles and values, and proposes ways in which the challenges can be met. In "Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future" by Pope Francis, written in 2020, the three main sections of the book are "A Time to See", "A Time to Choose" and "A Time to Act".

Using the Enquiry Method for further action

Austin Ivereigh in his Postscript to Pope Francis' book, "Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future" has written the following about the See, Judge, Act, or the Enquiry Method:

"The see-judge-act method has been used often...to respond to change. [Pope] Francis had reformulated it in different terms ("contemplate-discern-propose") ... First, look at reality, however uncomfortable, above all the truth of the suffering in the margins of society. Second, discern the different forces at work, distinguishing what builds up from what destroys, what humanizes from what dehumanizes, and thus choose what is of God, rejecting the opposite. Finally, propose fresh thinking and concrete steps that stem for the diagnosis of what ails us and how we might act differently."

Following is a guide to how you might use the Enquiry Method to explore, understand and respond to the range of issues that have been raised in these five sessions or any other issues you may want to explore. You could add in the matters raised by Pope Francis.

SEE

is about finding out exactly what is happening in a situation that students are exploring.

What exactly happened? What caused this to happen and why?

How did you and others respond?

How were people affected?

JUDGE

is about applying our faith and our values to the situation and working out what needs to change. "Judge" should be used in a flexible way, depending on the issue. Whether or not you strictly "judge" may depend on the issue. You would judge the justice and fairness of dealing with, for example, the locking up of refugee children; but in considering, for example, aspects of mental illness or the actions of individuals or groups, your judgment must include assessing the situation from the point of view of those others in need. The "judge" is useful if understood in this way. Other words, such as "reflect" or "discern" could be added for this part of the process, as the passage from Austin Ivereigh (above) indicates.

What do you think about this?

What are the relevant human values? Are there any human rights involved?

What does your faith say about this situation? Does a particular Gospel story come to mind? Or something from our Catholic Social Teaching?

What should be happening?

ACT

is about setting out concrete plans for action. This is about applying our faith to actions that have the potential to change the situation we want to address.

What exactly do you want to change or see happen in this situation?

What action could you take, even a short-term action, that would be a worthwhile step towards achieving this change?

Who else could you involve in your action, and how?

Draft a Plan of Action

What is the YCS?

A major part of the mission of the YCS is to work for a fairer and more just society consistent with the teachings and values of Jesus Christ and the principles and objectives of Catholic Social Teaching.

But the YCS is more than that. There is something closer to home. The YCS also challenges students to focus on the reality of their own lives and the lives of those around them; for example, the needs of other students within their schools and local communities.

But the YCS is even more than that. Engaging with the world, from the local to the global, and working to improve the lives of our nearest neighbours through to those we will never meet will transform the YCS member. Leadership skills, self-confidence and social friendships will grow, not because they are pursued for personal improvement, but because they are the result of a commitment to something above and beyond self-interest.

So, the YCS is a "formation through action" movement. Formation means different things to different people. When we talk of formation in the YCS we talk about Christian formation: where engagement in the world and serving the needs of others is seen as inextricably linked to a commitment to Jesus Christ.

At the heart of the YCS is what is called the Review of Life or the "See, Judge, Act" methodology. It is used by YCS groups as a method or process for discovering, evaluating, and acting on a wide range of topics.

But the Review of Life is more than a methodology for dealing with social issues. It is also personal. It is a way of thinking and working our way through a wide range of issues that come into our personal lives, where the judging or evaluating part of the process helps us to better understand ourselves and our relationships with others.

And there is another dimension to the Review of Life that moves us beyond the purely human. The Review of Life is also a process in which our personal and silent reflections on the realities of a commitment to Jesus Christ can become our prayers of life.

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The Australian Young Christian Students is affiliated with the International Young Catholic Students (IYCS), which is also known as the International Young Christian Students and Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne Internationale (JECI). IYCS is a Catholic Action Movement of the Apostolate of Laity. IYCS is recognized by the Holy See as an International Catholic Organization under the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. The IYCS has affiliated Movements in 86 countries.



For more information on the YCS, see:

www.aycs.org.au

<https://iycs-jeci.org/>