



Plenary Council 2020
Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

Facilitator's Handbook

What is a Plenary Council? Why a Plenary Council?

A Plenary Council is a formal meeting of the bishops and other representatives of all the dioceses and eparchies of the Catholic Church in Australia. Its purpose is to discern what God is asking of us in Australia at this present time. While the church should be asking that question continually, a Plenary Council is a particularly graced instrument for seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance. And it has the authority to make church laws on the results of its discernment.

While the future directions for the church in Australia are voted on by the bishops, a process of long listening to the Holy Spirit will guide the decisions being made. Listening to the Holy Spirit, speaking through the voices of the faithful who have participated around Australia will also guide the changes that are a result of the council. The 2020 Plenary Council will differ greatly from the 1937 Council in that it will allow everyone a chance to participate and express what the Spirit is saying to them in their heart.

From the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) through to the modern era most decisions of substance rested in the hands of councils or synods. The Council of Trent prescribed annual synods and the 1917 Code of Canon Law legislated for bishops to hold one every ten years. Finally, Vatican II desired, "that the venerable institution of synods and councils flourish with fresh vigour." (*Christus Dominus*, 36)

Vatican II taught that the Church should be more dialogic and participatory in its processes, involving all the baptised in the Church. The council teaches that the whole Church has been given the gift of divine revelation, as well as the gift to interpret it faithfully. The bishops have a ministry of teaching that necessarily involves a process of listening to the voices of the faithful before they speak.

One of Pope Francis' favourite quotes from Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, 12) concerns how the bishops have access to the Holy Spirit, so that they are faithfully interpreting and applying what God has revealed and is revealing. And that access comes through a special gift that all the baptised have received at their baptism when they are anointed with chrism. That gift is called "a sense for the faith" (*sensus fidei*). Moreover, the whole church together has this special gift, what is called "the faithful's sense of the faith" (*sensus fidelium*).

Through this, Vatican II teaches, the Church is "infallible in believing". So, this "sense of the faithful" is a sacred conduit for finding out what God is asking of us in Australia at this present time. The bishops' role of "oversight" is to ensure that contemporary interpretations of divine revelation are faithful to the past. But, equally importantly, to ensure that God's present activity in human history is being attended to. This is done by attending and interpreting to the signs of the times and listening to the faithful.

This, then, is what we hope to tap into during the preparatory stage leading up to the Plenary Council. We will be having "open dialogue and listening sessions". Each person's perspective will be valued. No individual has an infallible sense of the faith. We only have a sense of what God is wanting by allowing as many as possible to

have a voice in the conversation God wants to have with the church. Singularly we see a special viewpoint; together we see much more.

We hope over the next three years “to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”. This was the instruction given to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the Book of Revelation. From that time on Christians have met to listen to the Spirit at times of important decisions. We are called to do so again.

Vatican II spoke of how God, who spoke in the past, “continues to converse” with the church (*Dei Verbum*, 8). Through our Plenary Council 2020, the Catholic Church hopes to enter more intensely into that divine-human dialogue.

Logo and Scripture



We are blessed with great diversity in our Catholic Church in Australia – many perspectives, experiences and encounters of faith, walks of life and vision for Church. We are called to explore what it is that we are called to, how we are called to be the presence of Jesus in Australia for today, and for generations to come. United by faith, we shall:

“Listen to what the Spirit is saying.” Rev 2:7

The Plenary Council logo reflects a “community of communities”, drawing upon the message from Pope Francis about the nature of Church. He wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

“It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.”

EG28

The colours are inspired by the colours of our sunburnt country – Ochre of the Red Centre, green from the Gum tree leaves, deep blue of the Ocean we are surrounded by and that of our Nation’s flag. They are tones and textures that reflect our beautifully unique Australian identity.

Plenary Council Prayer

*Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.
O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.
Give us the grace to see your face in one another
and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.
Give us the courage to tell our stories
and to speak boldly of your truth.
Give us ears to listen humbly to each other
and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.
Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
bread for the journey from age to age.
Amen.
Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.*

Plenary Council YouTube Channel

<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/watch/>

There are some very useful clips that introduce the Plenary Council and invite participation.

Process for Plenary Council

At the moment we are in the active “listening and dialogue phase” which will conclude at Ash Wednesday, 6th March 2019. The purpose of this phase is to engage people with the question: ***what do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*** And actively encourage people to go and record what they are saying on the Plenary Council website or through the PO Box address.

These responses are then collated by the Pastoral Research Office and major themes emerging from our feedback will be announced. Teams will then be formed across the country to consider these themes and we will then again be invited to consider the possibilities for how these themes can come to life in the future.

In 2020 these themes are consolidated into formal submissions to the Plenary Council where they are discussed and voted upon. There will be a variety of people engaged in writing these formal submission and a formal process for selecting delegates of the Plenary Council beyond the Australian bishops.

Participating in a Dialogue Session

Some important reminders

- Ensure the space is welcoming and inviting (you may want to consider a community hall to extend beyond the church boundaries).
- Begin the meeting with a Welcome to Country followed by prayer. You can choose a prayer that suits your local community and appropriate for the circumstances.

Statement of Acknowledgement:

We would like to Acknowledge that the land we meet on today is the traditional lands for the Kurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their Country. We also acknowledge the Kurna people as the traditional custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kurna people today.

- People might not know each other so a warm up activity is essential.
- Outlining the Plenary Council 2020, its processes and answering any questions people have should be part of the agenda.
- Encourage people to speak freely from their hearts and minds.
- Some silence sitting with the question will allow people to participate more thoughtfully.

Respectful listening and dialogue points

Group leader: In the spirit of respectful listening and dialogue remind participants to respect the following:

- While someone is speaking we do not interrupt.
- We speak only from our own viewpoint, not seeking to correct or challenge another's stance, but to offer our own position. Phrases like: "I think differently..." or "In my opinion..." may help.
- Sometimes, if there are strong emotions, or if we need to allow others to speak, we are asked at this time to give our permission for the group leader to politely interrupt. Is that okay?

Important for all participants

The share group is a safe space for us to offer our personal stories and reflections.

Therefore, we honour the confidential nature of the sharing

We should ask permission before sharing anything discussed within the group

However, please note that if information is shared about a person currently at risk of harm, consider the following options:

- Lifeline Australia 13 11 14
- Crimestoppers 1800 333 000
- Centacare Family Services 8215 6700
- Professional Standards Office 8210 8275
- SA Police 131 444

Some useful tips for engaging those on the fringes

You may need to consider how to approach those who are not regular mass attenders but have something to say about what God is asking of us in Australia at this time. The way you approach this may not be as formal. Each context will require some thought and reflection. It may also require adapting the question to suit your context.

- As a teacher in a secondary school you might ask your RE class to go and take a picture on their smartphone of who God is for them. After some reflection then ask them what is God asking of us at this time. In our school? In our neighbourhood? In Australia and in our world?
- Similarly with primary school aged children you might ask them who is God and then ask them to creatively (using crafts, paints etc.) design what God asks of us in our school? In our neighbourhood? In Australia and in our world?
- To engage with parents of your school community. You might first ask them why they have chosen to send their child to a Catholic school and then later ask them the church in Australia wants to hear from them about what is being asked of us in Australia at this time.
- Host informal occasions such as coffee catch ups, dinner parties etc. to ask people to engage with the idea that the church in Australia is looking to gather information from people in Australia. Be upfront about its purpose.
- For disengaged people, it is not about guessing why they are disengaged but encouraging them to explain how their disengagement or lack of interest has come to be? This may point to some useful information about what is being asked of us as a church. Encourage conversation about their experience and try to gently explore this.
- Host a conversation in your native language and using the particular gifts of your culture.
- Sit with an elderly person or sick person in hospital and gain wisdom from their rich experience of church and life.

How to make a Plenary Council Submission

It is important that people move to stage of submitting their response online.

<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say/>

If people are not confident using the online tool they can send their information to the PO Box address listening on the website.

Frequently Asked Questions of Plenary Council

Quite often people will have questions about the Plenary Council. Download these useful FAQ's to assist you with your dialogue session.

<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/frequently-asked-questions/>



If you would like further support for your local Plenary Council endeavours please feel free to contact Sarah Moffatt smoffatt@adelaide.catholic.org.au or 8210 8110.