



## Plenary Council Second Assembly 3 - 9 July

### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PLENARY COUNCIL AND A SYNOD?

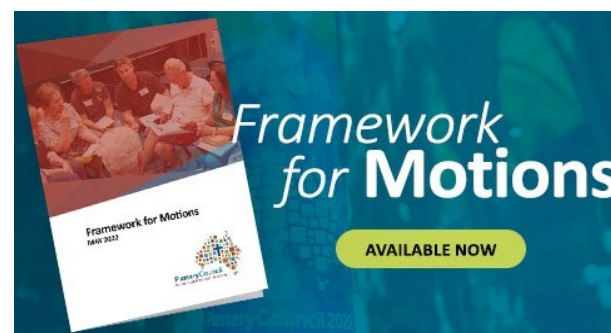
Next month, the four year journey of Australia's fifth Plenary Council will conclude with its second and final Assembly.

In March 2020, Pope Francis announced a Synod of Bishops on Synodality. The process began in 2021 and will conclude in October 2023.

Pope Paul VI created the worldwide Synod of Bishops in the final year of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis' leadership has broadened the scope of consultation for the Synod of Bishops to include the people of God. This was demonstrated in the Synod on Families in 2015 and the Synod on the Amazon in 2019

Both gatherings can be influential for the Church. A Plenary Council is the highest form of gathering of a local church and has legislative and governance authority. The decisions that are made at the Council become binding for the Catholic Church in Australia. A Synod does not have this legislative and governance authority.

The membership and the processes for a Plenary Council are structured by Canon Law. After all the required bishops, diocesan clerical officials and others are included, around one third of participants can be lay people. Agenda items that are considered to be contrary to official Church teaching are not included. Ultimately, it will only be the bishops who will have the final vote on the recommendations that will then go to the Vatican.



The document containing the framework that will form the basis of the proposals for consideration at the July Assembly can be downloaded from:

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/>

**The closing Mass at 10.30am on Saturday 9 July in St Mary's Cathedral is open everyone.**

### TOWARDS A CHURCH OF CO-RESPONSIBILITY & SYNODALITY

Sr Nathalie Becquart

*In 2021, Pope Francis appointed Sr Nathalie as an undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, making her the first woman to have the right to vote in the Catholic Synod of Bishops.*

The arc of the Church is bent towards co-responsibility or synodality. Let me explain.

The way of being Church has evolved over the centuries. When, after the early centuries of persecution, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the early tradition of egalitarianism gave way to a more clerical and hierarchical governance system that actually took on many features of the Empire. Throughout the long reign of Christendom and up to the Second Vatican Council, the Church often understood itself predominantly as a perfect society. Its institutional functions and dynamics were steeped in clericalism.

Ministries gradually became the domain of the ordained. They were all subsumed under a very cultic priesthood (set apart for the sacraments). The shift towards the celibate priesthood as the normative form of ministry effectively deprived the Church of the richness of ministries as attested by the New Testament.

At the Second Vatican Council, there was a shift in the Church's self-understanding. The dominant metaphor of "a *societas perfecta*" gave way to a more biblical image of a pilgrim people. The priesthood of the faithful was rediscovered along with the affirmation that the working of the Holy Spirit was granted not to the ordained only but to all baptised. Ecclesial ministries were understood in such a way as to fully honour what Paul says, "everyone is given the grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ".

Pope Francis affirms that 'this path of synodality' is precisely what "God expects of the Church of the third millennium." He gave new impetus to the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, stating that the path of synodality represents an indispensable prerequisite for infusing the Church with a renewed missionary impulse: all the members of the Church are called to be active subjects of evangelisation and "missionary disciples".

Pope Francis has applied a critical lens through which the Church is renewed for the sake of its mission for the poor. The Church is helped to decentralise and impelled towards the peripheries. The Church, the People of God, should walk together, sharing the burdens of humanity, listening to the cry of the poor, reforming itself and its own action, first by listening to

the voice of the humble, the *anawim* of the Hebrew Scriptures, who were at the heart of Jesus' public ministry.

### DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY RESPONSE TO THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON SYNODALITY

People in Broken Bay were invited to respond to Pope Francis' invitation to participate in the Synod on Synodality by responding to the questionnaire on the Bishops' Conference website. This was available from October 2021 to March 2022.

A consolidation of diocesan responses was created with responses also from these consultations:

#### *Diocesan Pastoral Mission*

The PM journey was a diocesan synodal discernment process that centred on how we as a diocese can better evangelise. This process was undertaken to help the Diocesan Evangelisation team set relevant goals, objectives, and initiatives over the coming years to better support evangelisation in parishes and faith communities of the Diocese.

#### *Pastoral Discernment Central Coast (PDCC)*

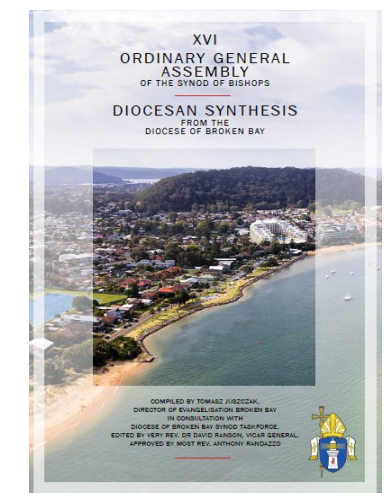
The PDCC synodal journey focused on a particular region in the Diocese of Broken Bay, the Central Coast. The aim of this process was to identify the pastoral needs of the region using a process of consultation through all contexts of Catholic life; parish, school, CatholicCare etc.

#### *Plenary Council*

The Australian Bishops called for a Plenary Council to be held in 2020 with the theme: "Listen to what the Spirit is Saying."

#### *Synod on Youth*

In 2017 the Diocese of Broken Bay lead a Diocesan process for the 2018 Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary Assembly: Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.



Diocesan Synod response is available at:  
<https://www.bbcatholic.org.au/our-faith/evangelisation/synod-of-bishops-diocesan-synthesis>