

A Listening Church



Barbara Schwarz OP

There are times when [the Church] needs to regain her humility and simply listen, recognising that what others have to say can provide some light to help her better understand the Gospel.

A Church always on the defensive, which loses her humility and stops listening to others, which leaves no room for questions, loses her youth and turns into a museum.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit* 41

A SYNODAL CHURCH IS A CHURCH WHICH LISTENS

During the synod of bishops on the family in 2015, Pope Francis described a synodal church in a speech on 17 October as:

‘... a Church which listens, which realises that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he says to the Churches (Rev 2:7)’

THE PLENARY COUNCIL

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) had been discussing the possibility of a Plenary Council in Australia for quite a number of years. Archbishop Mark Coleridge, president of the ACBC, said in a recent webinar for The Tablet, that he was inspired by what he

heard Pope Francis say at the Synod on the Family in 2015, that it was a ‘turning point’ after so many years of hesitation, discussion and discernment. He recognised that it was now time for Australia to have its fifth Plenary Council.

THE JOURNEY TO THE PLENARY COUNCIL

Following a time of thorough planning, the journey to the reality of a Plenary Council began with discernment, listening and dialogue across Australia. It continued with further discernment of emerging themes and writing groups who distilled the enormous amount of submitted data. A *Working Document* to guide the Plenary Council Agenda was produced and submitted to Rome.

FIRST ASSEMBLY OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL

The Agenda for the two gatherings of the Plenary Council was published last week. Covid restrictions have impacted the initial timeline and mode of meeting. The first assembly will be from **3 to 10 October** this year. Because of the uncertainty

restrictions, the Council will assemble in multi-modal format. That is, in local groups, diocesan, inter diocesan and provincial assemblies. The second assembly will be held in Sydney from **4 to 9 July 2022**.

Both assemblies of the Plenary Council can be influential for the Church. A Plenary Council is the highest form of gathering of 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.

BROKEN BAY DELEGATES

Each diocese and archdiocese has an allocated number of delegates who will accompany the bishop or archbishop. The Broken Bay delegates who will accompany Bishop Anthony are: Fr David Ranson, Alison Newell Diocesan CCD Coordinator, Raj Rajasingam from Cathedral Parish Hornsby and Danny Casey, Director of Schools.

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION

The Plenary Council website is the best source of regularly updated information.

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

AGENDA	INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS
FAQ	MEMBERS
DISCERNMENT	RESPONSES
PLENARY PODCAST	SUBMISSIONS

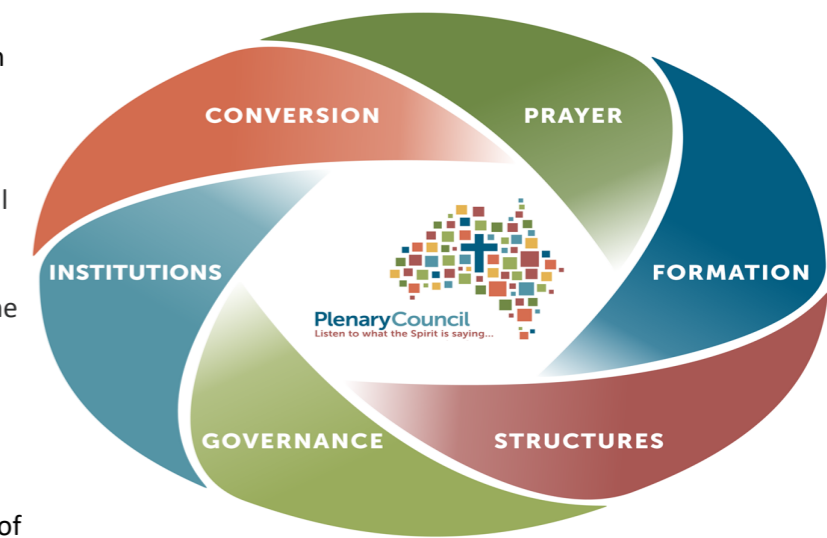
THE AGENDA

The Agenda is presented as questions around six themes.

As children of God, disciples of Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, the Members of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia are called to develop concrete proposals to create a more missionary, Christ-centred Church in Australia at this time.

CONVERSION

- How might we better accompany one another on the journey of personal and communal conversion which mission in Australia requires?
- How might we heal the wounds of abuse, coming to see through the eyes of those who have been abused?
- How might the Church in Australia open in new ways to Indigenous ways of being Christian in spirituality, theology, liturgy, and missionary discipleship? How might we learn from the First Nations peoples?
- How might the Church in Australia meet the needs of the most vulnerable, go to the peripheries, be missionary in places that may be overlooked or left behind in contemporary Australia? How might we partner with others (Christians, people of other faiths, neighbourhood community groups, government) to do this?



- How might the Church in Australia respond to the call to ‘ecological conversion’? How can we express and promote a commitment to an ‘integral ecology of life’ in all its dimensions, with particular attention to the more vulnerable people and environments in our country and region?

FORMATION

- How might we better form leaders for mission – adults, children and families, couples and single people?
- How might we better equip ordained ministers to be enablers of missionary discipleship: the Church becoming more a “priestly people” served by the ordained ministry?
- How might formation, both pre- and post-ordination, better foster the development of bishops, priests and deacons as enablers of the universal Christian vocation to holiness lived in missionary discipleship?

STRUCTURES

- How might parishes better become local centres for the formation and animation of missionary disciples?
- How might the Church in Australia be better structured for mission, considering the parish, the diocese, religious orders, the PJPs and new communities?

GOVERNANCE

- How might the People of God, lay and ordained, women and men, approach governance in the spirit of synodality and co-responsibility for more effective proclamation of the Gospel?
- How might we recast governance at every level of the Church in Australia in a more missionary key?

INSTITUTIONS

- How might we better see the future of Catholic education (primary, secondary and tertiary) through a missionary lens?
- How might we better see the future of Catholic social services, agencies and health and aged care ministries as key missionary and evangelising agencies?