



Lenten Listening 2020

A Lenten resource to facilitate local discernment
on the six Plenary Council 2020 Themes, in conjunction
with the Lenten Year A Scripture texts.



PlenaryCouncil2020
Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

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About this Resource

A Lenten resource to facilitate local discernment on the six Plenary Council 2020 Themes, in conjunction with the Lenten Year A Scripture texts.

As we journey together towards the Plenary Council sessions in 2020 and 2021, all Australians are invited to contribute through listening and discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying to us here and now.

This Lenten program experience draws on the rich Scripture texts of this Year A Lenten Season, and invites us to reflect on these in conjunction with the Plenary themes, to discern what the Spirit is saying to us **in our own local communities** today. The focus, therefore, moves from a national conversation to a local community conversation, whether it be our parish, school or other ecclesial community group.

This will be a process of communal discernment, rather than individual discernment. The process you will engage with is a process of prayer, contemplation, sharing with one another and seeking God's direction, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Each week will look at one of the 6 themes arising from the Plenary Council, and follow the discernment process, as outlined in the Plenary Council Phase 2 Listening and Discernment guide, "Let's Listen & Discern."

The themes are as follows:

Week 1: Prayerful and Eucharistic

Week 2: Missionary and Evangelising

Week 3: Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal

Week 4: Humble, Healing and Merciful

Week 5: Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform

Week 6: A Joyful, Hope-Filled and Servant Community

Each session lasts 2 hours.

This is a privileged time to spend with each other in our faith family. Let's be honest, open, and respectful, bringing a listening heart to our conversations.

There is also a practical dimension to our gathering. At the conclusion of each session, you are invited to offer the fruits of your reflection, with regard to possible actions to be progressed to your Parish Priest or school or community leaders, for continued discernment within the whole community.

May this time of reflection be a fruitful one at this significant time in the life of our Australian Church.

Preparing to Discern

This Lenten journey is a little different to others that you may have previously undertaken.

These 6 sessions of reflection are founded on the 6 themes that have arisen from the Plenary Council Listening Sessions as areas where the people in Australia believe that God is inviting us to move towards.

We will also draw on the Scripture texts from the Lenten Readings to allow God to speak through God's Word into our hearts and our communities. God's word in sacred Scripture is a powerful means to engage with what God



wishes to speak today. Pope Francis reminds us to receive the Scriptures “not as a human word but as what it really is, the word of God”. They are not just empty words. It is the Holy Spirit that “makes human words written in human fashion become the word of God”. When we read the Scriptures, we are entering into a true dialogue, a true encounter, a participation in the great story of salvation. As well as speaking to us personally, the Scriptures speak to us communally, “for we urgently need to grow in our knowledge and love of the Scriptures and of the risen Lord, who continues to speak his word and to break bread in the community of believers.” (*Quotes from Aperuit Illis*)

Combined together with the Plenary Themes, we seek to allow God to speak to our time and place in our local communities in Australia today.

As we enter a process of discernment, it is important to understanding what discernment is, and what it is not.

God’s Will, Not Mine

The first point that is essential to understand is that discernment involves trying to discover God’s will, and not ours. This involves an attitude of surrender, of being open and expectant to what God wants to reveal. We do not come with a pre-conceived idea of what the result will be. We let it unfold. We come with a desire to do God’s will, as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “thy will be done”. Do we truly desire this? If we do, then we will more likely be able to do so.

We may find it presumptuous to even think that we can know the mind of God. So how can we really know this?

Sensus fidelium

As a starting point, we should understand the term ‘sensus fidelium’. The faithful, as a whole, do have a capacity to listen and discern:

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.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/pages/about-us/theology/>

In relationship with Jesus

On a personal note, the answer to the above question becomes clearer the more we are in relationship with Jesus. The more we know Jesus, love Jesus and are used to communicating with Jesus through prayer and listening through Scripture, people, and the circumstances in our lives, the more we will be on the same page as Jesus and get a better sense of what he is asking. Through our relationship with him, Jesus continues to reveal his love for us. This is the basis for our discernment.

Each theme clearly puts Christ at the centre – we are called to be a Christ-centred Church. Let’s keep this at the forefront of our gathering. Christ is present when we gather, as we listen to what God is asking of us through the Holy Spirit.

Founded in Prayer

Founding this whole exercise in prayer is crucial. It is prayer and the Holy Spirit that will guide us. Ensure that your prayer is real, heartfelt and authentic.

Learning to Listen

Learning to listen is also important. Listening involves firstly creating a quiet space free of noise and distraction. Sometimes we need to remove this noise just in order to be able to listen to ourselves!

Learning to listen to God is also something we need to grow into – to differentiate God’s gentle voice amongst other internal voices.

We also try to remove our own internal buzz to be able to really listen to the other and to God. Deep and intentional listening to others in our group is a great gift that we can give them and is essential in a communal exercise such as this. Any conclusion arrived at should be as a result of deep listening, both to God speaking within yourself, and to the others in the group.

Communal Discernment

Indeed, this discernment we are undertaking is not a personal one, but a communal discernment. We need to keep this at the forefront of our ponderings. We are listening to the Spirit speaking to us as a group, and to guide us forward however God wishes.

Leading to Action

Discernment ultimately requires action, a decision to move and to act. At some point we need to decide what to do with what we have discerned. There can be some concern as to whether we have chosen the right path. However, we must trust that Jesus is accompanying us on this path. We do the best we can, and God meets us there. We can take a first step and continue to discern and seek guidance as we go along.

Empowered to Respond

If God is calling us to do something and puts a mission in our heart, God always gives us the grace to do it. If we think we can’t possibly take it on, we are invited to let go of our fear and to trust in God. God has a God-sized vision for our communities, and we are invited to co-operate with God’s work. It is God’s work, not just ours.

When we have made a decision, a usual sign that confirms it is from God is an experience of peacefulness and ‘rightness’ about the decision. For example, when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, he came to a sense of peace where he was able to say, “Not my will, but your will be done”. The rich young man, on the other hand, felt sadness after making his own decision. Our feelings about a decision can be a guide.

References:

Resources on Discernment (videos and articles)
<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/introduction-to-discernment/>
Discernment for Dummies Animated Series by Fr Dave Callaghan MGL
<http://mglpriestsandbrothers.org/animated-spirituality/>

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