



# Plenary Council 2020: Our Journey in Faith

One of the convictions of Pope Francis' teaching and witness over these past five years has been his deep trust that the Church, encompassing all of us as the People of God, grows through our mutual listening to the guidance and promptings of the Holy Spirit.

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Whether through the conversations of bishops in synods on the family and youth, in the discernment of married couples and families amidst the complexities of relationship, or through the dialogue of the individual Christian with God at prayer, it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to discern and make decisions that are faithful to the good and saving news that comes to us in Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis believes with conviction that it is in walking and working together in faith – our 'synodality' with one another at every level of the Church, in our parishes, schools and social outreach – that we can best discover pastoral responses to meet the challenges of today.

The Church in Australia has heard this call to 'synodality', to 'journeying together', and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has announced a Plenary Council to take place in 2020. Pope Francis has approved the celebration of the Plenary Council under the Presidency of Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB. Our Diocese too recognises this need to pilgrim together and seeks to begin, even now, a process of mutual listening to the Holy Spirit who guides our Church in every age.



## Foundations

As shared in the February edition of the *Broken Bay News*, a Plenary Council is the highest form of communion between the various local or particular churches (that is, dioceses) of a nation. As such Plenary Council 2020 will be not simply a meeting of bishops but a process that calls for the participation and conversation of the entire Catholic community, clergy, religious and laity.

There will be two sessions of the Plenary Council in Australia, the first in October 2020 and a second in May of 2021, in which the Australian bishops, along with religious and lay delegates, will discuss, debate and develop legislation that will shape the Church for generations to come.

The Australian bishops will be called on to vote on proposed legislation and are obliged to make their decisions on the basis of their careful discernment of the work of the Holy Spirit in the minds and hearts of all the People of God. This recognises that the sense of the faith of the faithful – what is known as the *sensus fidelium* – is a source of the Church's life and learning as it seeks to live and share the Gospel more effectively.

As such, the Plenary Council calls each one of us as Australian Catholics to the act of discernment, grounded in prayer. We are invited to attend to the 'signs of the times' and then interpret and respond to these signs in the light of our faith. To what is God calling the Church at this time? What is God asking of us in Australia? Where is the Holy Spirit calling the Church to move and how might we get there? If the future of the Church is always connected to those who currently do not believe, how might we share the Good News of Jesus with those who are not yet a part of our parish or faith communities with renewed passion, by new methods and expressions?

## Our Journey in Broken Bay

Our Plenary journey in the Diocese of Broken Bay will commence formally this year at the Feast of Pentecost (20 May) with the sharing of a Pastoral Letter by Bishop Peter. We will seek to dedicate this **first year to listening** – listening to one another by listening to God, to grow in a sense of where the Spirit might be calling the Church to move.

As a Diocese we must first listen to understand, give our full attention to the Word of God and to each other, before we undertake a process of

### A Prayer of Discernment

Father of all Goodness,  
send on each of us your Holy Spirit,  
a spirit of understanding and wisdom,  
which helps us to look at the  
present with gratitude  
and the future with hope.  
Help us to free ourselves from discouragement  
and from all kinds of resistance,  
opening us with courage and creativity  
to what the Church and the world need most.  
Grow in us the desire of discernment,  
so that our communities can be places  
of sharing and dialogue,  
witnesses of your charity and able  
to respond with generosity  
to what you ask us in each moment.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pope's Worldwide Network of Prayer – Apostleship of Prayer: "Pope's Intentions for the Challenges of Humanity."  
Click to Pray, 2018. <https://clicktopray.org>

discernment in 2019 and propose ideas for the good of the Australian Church as a whole in 2020.

However, as Pope Francis himself recognises, 'journeying together' in mutual listening is often easier said than put into practice! In fact, to listen is one of the most important and difficult things for us to do. This is because it involves a decision on our part to give attention to the 'other' and to foster within ourselves an intense expectation that the other has something to offer us that can enrich and enhance our view of life. As Pope Francis has observed, it is not by chance that the ear is the organ of hearing but also of balance.

We listen as Christians by receiving God's Word, by our humility and tenderness in prayer; by attending to the graced details of our daily life, and by our dialogue with our fellow Christians and those who do not yet know their home is with us. By these various means the Holy Spirit enables us as a Catholic community to recognise and respond to the life and mission of Jesus in the present, to make decisions informed by our Christian faith and reached by listening.

Our listening and dialogue as a Diocese throughout 2018 will not only inform the national Plenary Council but also the discernment of Bishop Peter; our parishes, schools and agencies on how best to express the life and mission of Jesus at this critical juncture of our life as Church.

### Our Steps Ahead

At our **Pentecost launch**, the call will be issued for '**Local Animators**' in each of our Broken Bay parishes and church communities, each Catholic primary and secondary school, CatholicCare centre and network, religious order and ecclesial movement to assist in coordinating and encouraging listening sessions in their local community.

A support kit will be distributed to each parish priest, principal and local leader throughout the Diocese outlining the role of these key leaders. Briefly, Local Animators will distribute Plenary Council guides that will support local conversations, and facilitate and encourage others to lead listening sessions with these guides. They will record and collate the feedback from their local community and, together with their local leader, complete a summary of the dialogue and share this with their own community as well as our Bishop and Diocese.

**Training** for these tasks will be provided to our Local Animators in August 2018.

These Local Animators will then facilitate and promote **local listening sessions** in our Catholic communities of Broken Bay from August to October. Again, guides will be provided to help with this process. During this three month period, Bishop Peter will visit many of our communities to hear firsthand the sense of faith among the people of Broken Bay.

**Regional forums** will also be convened in October to give our different regions of the

Central Coast, North Shore and Northern Beaches an opportunity to share their experience and faith in further dialogue.

Then in November and December we will hold **diocesan assemblies** with our people able to choose either the 24 November at The Cathedral Parish or 1 December at The Entrance Parish. The focus of these gatherings will be on the national agenda and an opportunity to share with the National Facilitation Team for Plenary Council 2020 a sense of where and how God is calling the Church to grow. As these months also mark the end of the Year of Youth, the youth of our Diocese will also take a central place in this dialogue and be invited to share their voice with all of us as the Catholic community of Broken Bay.

### "Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 2:7)

I encourage you, even now, to share the good news of Plenary Council 2020 with your local communities and to reflect on the ways in which your local community can engage as we anticipate the launch of the Plenary Council process at Pentecost. What is important is to share your gifts, your openness and sense of faith throughout this journey of prayer and discernment on which we are about to embark.

Please pray for the opportunities and challenges that meet us as a Church in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to keep us faithful and ever responsive to the mission of Jesus in a new chapter of evangelisation for the Church in Australia.

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# OUR JOURNEY IN FAITH

**2018**  
A YEAR OF LISTENING

LAUNCH  
AT PENTECOST

LOCAL ANIMATORS

TRAINING

LOCAL LISTENING

REGIONAL FORUMS

DIOCESAN ASSEMBLIES

**2019**  
A YEAR OF DISCERNING

**2020**  
A YEAR OF PROPOSING

## How do I get involved?

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide the Church through the process, discernment and decisions of the Plenary Council for the life and mission of the Australian Church as we anticipate the national launch at Pentecost (20 May);
2. Start authentic conversations with your friends and neighbours about what it means as a Catholic community to live the life and mission of Jesus in contemporary Australian society. What do you think God is asking of us in Australia?;
3. Reflect on the Gospel as well as the emerging social issues of our time and how these are reflected in and impact upon the practice of our faith;
4. Personally engage with others in your parish, school or network on how you might create practical opportunities to listen and dialogue with others about the future of the Church, particularly between August and October 2018;
5. Create a group in your community to promote the Plenary Council and the conversations that will be encouraged;
6. Visit the new website [www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au) and learn more about the Plenary Council. Share and play the videos in the "Resources" section of the website in your local parish, schools and communities to spread the word about this once-in-a-century opportunity;
7. Diarise the date for one of our diocesan assemblies, at Hornsby Cathedral Parish on 24 November or The Entrance Parish on 1 December.