

# LOCAL ANIMATOR AND FACILITATOR NOTES

for the Diocese of Broken Bay



Thank you for supporting the faith and hope of our Catholic community of Broken Bay. Your role as a Local Animator or facilitator in your local parish, school or faith community will enable those within your community or network to share their voice toward Plenary Council 2020. The Plenary Council gives us all an important opportunity to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church in Australia. By facilitating or coordinating dialogue in your local community, you will shape the agenda for the Plenary Council in dialogue with others.

## PREPARATION

- 1** It is recommended that as a Local Animator or facilitator of dialogue that you **bring a few people together** to help plan for and organise your Listening and Dialogue Session/s. You do not have to undertake this process alone and can work beside others to bring such sessions to life. Assisting team members might include parish or school staff, ministry or service leaders in the community, people who are willing to offer hospitality at sessions, and others who may be eager to lead listening sessions in their own specific groups or context (e.g. a music ministry leader). The Plenary Council encourages this type of collaboration and 'synodality' within our local communities, that is, 'walking together' at the local level to bring about new life in the Church.
- 2** As an organising team, people will naturally ask you and others questions about the Plenary Council and you may have questions yourself. To **be as informed as possible about the Plenary Council** visit the official website <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au> where you can learn more about this national process, read and download the helpful Frequently Asked Questions page, and watch introductory videos so you can feel confident in leading dialogue at a local level.
- 3** As an organising team it is important that you **read through the *Listening and Dialogue Guide*** included within, so you can guide participants through the process. You can then plan when your participants need to move through the five steps involved. From experience, the ideal amount of time to dedicate to a Listening and Dialogue Session is 2 hours. However, if you are intending to use it with a smaller group, you can adjust the times suggested by the Guide (especially Steps 3, 4 and 5) to complete the process in 1 hour or so.

- 4 In your planning and in consultation with your parish priest, principal or local leader, your organising team might decide that you would like to run a Listening and Dialogue Session with a larger group (e.g. thirty parishioners or all of school or agency staff). This will require your leadership or that of a local facilitator. Alternatively, a parish or school community may prefer to ask specific and smaller groups of the community (e.g. the Parish Pastoral Council, ministry groups, senior teaching staff etc.) to hold their own listening sessions. In this case, you might simply provide these smaller groups with a basic explanation of the process and invite them to facilitate dialogue among themselves. It might be that communities decide to host a mix of large and small gatherings where dialogue can take place. Respecting your local situation or context, **you are free to decide how you would like to structure dialogue** in your local community. The important thing is that people have an opportunity to share their experience and insights towards the future of our Church.
- 5 Next, you can consider **when and where to host your session** (e.g. daytime or evening, week days or weekends), reserving your venue according to the commitments and activities of your people and with the intent of maximising participation.
- 6 Importantly, as an organising team, you will need to **decide how responses from your Listening and Dialogue Session/s will be formally submitted** to the Plenary Council website at <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>. All submissions from our Diocese, and indeed across the country, are to be submitted to this one website. The formal submission of responses is an essential step if the experience and insights of your people are to shape the agenda of the Plenary Council itself.



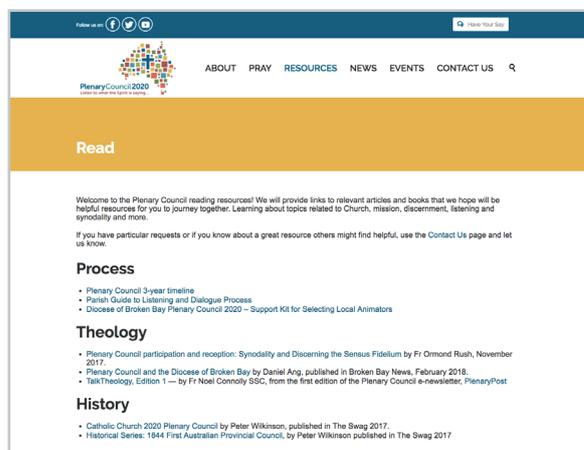
Below are some suggestions on how you might organise and ensure a formal submission from your parish/school/faith community is made:

- a. The *Listening and Dialogue Guide* recommends inviting participants to break into small groups of between four to six people. Each of those small groups could choose **one person in their group** to submit on their behalf. This is an ideal way as this person can best sum up the insights of the conversation that was held in their small group;
- b. Alternatively, **every individual group member** or participant at the session could be invited to submit their own individual response following the Listening and Dialogue Session. This demands little of your time as the Local Animator or facilitator but may risk fewer formal submissions to the Plenary Council website being made following the session;
- c. As Local Animator or facilitator **you could collect all responses** from the session and submit these on behalf of all the gathered participants. This will demand some of your time and attention following the session, and the small group conversations may not be captured as accurately as you will not have been able to hear all that was shared. However, it may assist to ensure a number of formal submissions are in fact made to the Plenary Council website and so shape the Council agenda.

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Once the above details are decided upon, you can then begin to **promote your Listening and Dialogue Sessions** to those within your community and those beyond who are also invited to share their experience of faith and the Church.

For parishes, there are **numerous ideas for promotion, prayers, homily notes, announcements and other support materials** readily available on the Plenary Council website at <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au> click 'Resources', 'Read' then 'Parish Guide' to access this material. Much of this material can also be used in schools and agencies. You can also draw from promotional ideas and practical suggestions that were shared for parishes and schools at the Local Animator training days held in the Diocese. Background on the Plenary Council and details of your listening session can be shared through parish Masses, bulletin notices, community noticeboards and the like in the weeks prior to the gathering/s. Of course, personal invitation is always the best way to invite people to participate.



As promotion of your Listening and Dialogue Session/s takes place over some weeks, you can begin to **assemble practical materials** for the gathering itself:

- Basic hospitality for the session/s (e.g. coffee, tea and juice on arrival, biscuits or fruit, table water, mints or lollies)

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- Following a brief introduction of the Listening and Dialogue Session we recommend that you invite participants to break into small groups of four to six people. Given this, in setting up your room you could seat two groups of four at a table of eight for instance. If no tables are available, simply arrange your chairs in groups of four or six, whichever you prefer.

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- Post-it notes (one pad for each small group of four or six)

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- Pens (one pen per person)

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- Listening and Dialogue Guides* (one printed guide per person)

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- Spare note paper should it be needed

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- If holding your session/s in a large room, at least two microphones (one for the Local Animator or facilitator, and one to serve as a roving mic for comments and sharing)

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- A laptop or computer, with an internet connection, projector and projector screen or white wall (to play an introductory clip on YouTube from the President of the Plenary Council Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB). If this equipment is available, you might check prior to the arrival of participants that you can play the YouTube video online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7\\_uYCM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7_uYCM4) (5:19 secs). If this equipment is not available, a script of Archbishop Timothy's talk is included at the back of this guide and can be read out to participants instead.

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- A closing prayer. Note that the Plenary Council prayer is used at the beginning of the small group dialogue as you will see in the *Listening and Dialogue Guide*. You could repeat this prayer at the end, prepare an alternative prayer, or take up the prayer of your local parish, community or faith community to conclude the session.

With venue, dates and times, materials, promotion and helpers in place, you are now ready to facilitate your session using the *Listening and Dialogue Guide*!

# Listening and Dialogue Guide

for the Diocese of Broken Bay

## A FIVE STEP PROCESS:

**INTRODUCTION**  
(10 minutes)

**PRAY TOGETHER**  
(10 minutes)

**READ QUESTION AND REFLECT**  
(20 minutes)

**SHARE AND LISTEN**  
(60 minutes)

**REGATHER AND PRAY**  
(20 minutes)

**STEP  
01**

**Introduction**  
(up to 10 minutes)

Your Local Animator or facilitator will share a brief introduction to Plenary Council 2020, outline the process for your Listening and Dialogue Session, and invite you to break into small groups.

## LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

- **Introduce yourself** to participants, welcoming and thanking them for sharing their time and experience of faith and the Church toward Plenary Council 2020.
- **You can share** that "Plenary Council 2020 represents an extraordinary opportunity to discover and discern, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the future course for the Church in Australia. It is time to ask, "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?" Everyone's experience of faith and the Church is unique and it is important that the Plenary Council hears responses from as many people as possible. We want to invite people in this parish/school/faith community to speak boldly, and also listen with an open and humble heart. Our community of Broken Bay wants to share its faith and aspirations with the wider Australian Church. Thank you for taking part in this journey of prayer, discernment and decision."
- **Then introduce and play**, if you wish, the video from the elected President of the Plenary Council, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB. This provides a helpful introduction to the spirit and purpose of the Council. This clip is available on YouTube at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7\\_uYCM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7_uYCM4) (5:19 secs). Otherwise, you can read the script of Archbishop Timothy's talk which is included at the back of this guide.

- **Explain** that the responses from this Listening and Dialogue Session will shape the agenda of the Plenary Council. This session is structured into five steps: an introduction, prayer, reflection, sharing and regathering.
- **Invite those gathered to now break into groups of four to six**, to pray, listen and dialogue together using their *Listening and Dialogue Guide* over the next 90 minutes or so. You can emphasise the importance of genuine listening to one another without judgement and to allow each person to share their experience and view. Also **invite each group to nominate a scribe** or someone to record the insights shared, and someone to later summarise and share the conversation with the wider group. This can be the same person or another member of the small group.

## STEP 02

### Pray Together (up to 10 minutes)

**You are invited to pray together in your small group.**

You might like to read scripture, you can use the words written below or just speak to God from your heart.

*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.*

## STEP 03

### Read Question and Reflect (up to 20 minutes)

### What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

- **Reflect on the question** in silence for 5 minutes.
- Then, **as individuals, write a list of all the responses to this question** that come to mind, writing each of your individual responses on separate post-it notes. When everyone has finished writing down their thoughts or ideas, place all of your post-it notes together in the middle of your table or group.
- **As a group, arrange these post-it notes** into general categories (e.g. putting all the responses related to 'liturgy' together, those related to 'clergy' together, and so on).
- Working together, **choose the topic** that generated the most responses in your group to focus on for the next step, Step 4.
- **Our topic for our Listening and Dialogue Session is:**

*Remember that if your particular topic is not the one that generates the most responses in your group you may want to gather together again in future weeks and months to continue to talk with each other about alternative topics. If your topic is not chosen in this instance, the process that follows can be completed with other topics or themes in hand. You can also decide to submit your individual thoughts on your preferred topic directly to the Plenary Council website following the Listening and Dialogue Session (<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>). See Step 5 for details on how to submit your insights directly.*

#### LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

**After 20 minutes or so**, you can invite participants to finalise their topic of listening and discussion and move on to Step 4 ('Share and Listen') if they have not already done so.

## STEP 04

## Share and Listen (up to 60 minutes)

### **REFLECT** What have I experienced in this area? (5 minutes)

In silence, reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church **related to the topic area your group has chosen**. You may want to write your thoughts down, or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

### **SHARE AND LISTEN** Tell a story of my experience in this area (40 minutes)

Now take turns to share aloud with each other your personal experience of faith, life and the Church. Make sure everyone in your group has at least one chance to tell their story. Also choose someone in your group to take general notes in the box provided below (bullet points will suffice) if you have not already done so. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.

*Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church . . .*

### **REFLECT** How has another perspective influenced my own? (5 minutes)

After each person has shared, reflect in silence on how stories shared by other people in your group have influenced your own perspective. You may want to write your thoughts down, or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

### **SHARE** How has another perspective influenced my own? (5 minutes)

Show that you have listened deeply and openly to each other. Some phrases you may find helpful are: 'I feel your sharing has helped me to...' or 'From what you have shared with me, I now understand...'

**PRAY** (5 minutes) At the end of your **listening and sharing as a small group**, you are invited to pray together and give thanks for your sharing with each other. You can use the prayer below, or you might like to pray a prayer of gratitude in your own words.

*Creator God, we thank you for the encounter with one another today.  
We know that where two or three are gathered, you are in our midst.  
Thank you for being with us and for the courage to speak boldly and  
with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.  
We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway  
toward the future you are calling us to.  
Amen.*

## LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

**Around 10 minutes prior to the full hour** or the time dedicated to this part of the process ('Share and Listen') you can invite participants to begin to wrap up their small group discussion, giving themselves enough time to pray together in the last five minutes, and to nominate someone from their group to share a summary of their insights with the wider group if they have not already done so.

## STEP 05 **Regather and Pray** (up to 20 minutes)

Your Local Animator or facilitator will now regather all participants as one.

The nominated spokesperson of your small group will be invited to share their group's collective sense of '**What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?**' It is important that all listen with an open and humble heart. Not every group has to share if they do not wish to.

Your Local Animator or facilitator will also provide instructions on how **your shared insights are now to be submitted** to the national Plenary Council website to ensure they shape the agenda for Plenary Council 2020, whether your small group leader submits on your behalf, every participant submits their own response, or the Local Animator or facilitator agrees to submit on behalf of all gathered participants. All submissions should be made to <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>

**We thank you** for taking part in this Listening and Dialogue Session and giving your voice to the Plenary Council and the future of the Catholic Church in Australia.

## LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

It is important for you to know that as a Local Animator or facilitator you do not have to have 'the answers' or solutions to participant's hopes or concerns. The role of facilitator is to simply allow the sharing to take place across the room, enabling participants to hear one another gently and respectfully.

- a) In this final part of the gathering, simply **invite small group leaders to share** what their own group's sense of 'What God is asking of us in Australia at this time?' Offer the opportunity to share what has been prayed about and discerned, leaving 5 minutes to speak to how responses of the session are to be formally submitted to the Plenary Council website.
- b) Once participants have shared and listened with the larger group, you can **then outline your submission process**.

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## LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE: *cont'd...*

As suggestions, every small group of four or six might choose one person in their group to submit on their behalf, or every group member might submit their own individual response, or your Local Animator/facilitator might collect all responses and submit these on behalf of participants. Whichever method is chosen by you and your organising team, **what is important is that submissions are made to <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>** so that the experience and insights of those who gathered can shape the agenda of Plenary Council 2020.

Simply as information, the three questions asked on the website and which the submitter will respond to on the basis of the Listening and Dialogue Session/s, are:

1. What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?
2. What questions do you have about the future of the Church for the Plenary Council to consider in 2020? (You might consider what was not clear in conversation, or questions or uncertainties that emerged from the group).
3. Do you have a story of your experience of faith, or the Church you would like to share?

Please note that when submitting to the Plenary Council website the submitter will be invited to keep a copy of their response for their own records. Those who submit a response can receive this copy by entering their email address when asked to during the submission process. **It is important that you do keep a copy of responses for yourself and your community.** This will enable you as a participant to share your group's insights with your own parish priest, school principal, parishioners and other Church leaders to take your ideas and thoughts forwards in community.

Indeed, following your submission to the Plenary Council website, we also invite you to share your group responses directly with our own Diocese via **[plenarycouncil@bbcatholic.org.au](mailto:plenarycouncil@bbcatholic.org.au)**

- c) The Local Animator, facilitator or local leader can **then offer a word of thanks** to all participants for giving their time and heart to the Plenary Council process through this Listening and Dialogue Session. This is followed by a closing prayer.

*\* Following your Listening and Dialogue Session, you will have many post-it notes left behind containing feedback from your community on topics that mattered to participants but may not have been discussed due to time. You or another member of your organising team might like to type up these additional responses and email them to **[plenarycouncil@bbcatholic.org.au](mailto:plenarycouncil@bbcatholic.org.au)** with your community name and date of dialogue. This is helpful material which will inform possible future directions and initiatives within our own Diocese of Broken Bay. Local Animators and facilitators are also free to share their experience of the dialogue itself and their personal thoughts on what has been shared.*

**Thank you for generously serving as a Local Animator or facilitator for your local community!**

***Message of the President of Plenary Council 2020, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, on the importance of all people speaking and listening as the Plenary process begins across Australia.***

“As you may have heard, Pope Francis has just recently given his formal approval for the Catholic Church in Australia to hold a Plenary Council in 2020. At the same time, he has accepted the proposal from the Catholic bishops of Australia that I should take on the role of President of the Plenary Council. I am very grateful to the bishops and to Pope Francis for appointing me to this important task. I certainly want to add my voice to the voices of so many others in the Church in thanking Pope Francis for this approval.

Along with so many others I look forward to doing all I can to see that the promise of the Plenary Council is realised. We are facing many challenges in the Church in Australia at this time. The calling of the Plenary Council is a sign of hope for us all and also I think a call to action.

At the heart of this Plenary Council is our conviction that the time is right for all of us to ask a fundamental question: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

At first glance it sounds like a simple enough question, but certainly the more I think about it the more challenging it becomes. How are we supposed to know what is in God’s mind? I think the scripture quote we have chosen to guide us through the Plenary can help us here. It comes from the Book of Revelations: ‘Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’

There are two really important ideas here. The first is that God is speaking, in all kinds of ways. The second is that before everything else, our job is to listen. We will need to listen to many different voices, for God speaks in many different ways, some of them likely to surprise us.

First and foremost of course we will listen to God speaking to us through the Scriptures and especially the Gospels. We will listen to God speaking through the teachings, the life and the prayer of the Church. We will listen to God speaking through the realities of our own lives and the challenges of our own times. And we will also listen to God speaking to us through each other.

One of the ideas guiding us as we prepare for this Plenary is this – that one of the ways we listen to God is by listening to each other. Of course, we can’t listen to each other if no one speaks. That is why it is so important that everyone, without exception, has the chance, and takes the opportunity, to speak from the heart about what he or she believes God is asking of us. No matter where you might find yourself in relation to the Church – deeply involved, only partially engaged, uncertain or disillusioned, or even angry, on the margins, or perhaps a friendly or critical outsider looking in – we need to hear from you for we are sure that God speaks to us all, and the Church needs to listen to everyone.

Listening can sometimes be a difficult or confronting thing. Sometimes when we listen really carefully, we hear things that surprise us or even unsettle us. We might have some

of our strongly held views challenged or even turned upside down. So, we are all going to need courage, and humility, and trust. Most of all we are going to need constantly to remind ourselves that what we are on about ultimately is discovering, as best we can, what God wants for the Church and from the Church – which is to say what God wants for us and from us.

The website for the Plenary Council is now live and is a great source of information about what the Plenary Council is all about, how you can be involved, and what progress is being made. So log on and have a look.

We have the Pope's formal approval, groups are being established around the country and momentum is building. So let's not be afraid. Let's not be cynical. Let's not be bystanders. Let's do our praying, do our reflecting, do our speaking and discussing, and do our listening. And let's trust that God, who has brought us to this point, will bring our hopes and all our efforts to a conclusion which really does reflect what the Spirit is saying to the Church in Australia at this time. So come and join us in this journey towards Plenary Council 2020."

**For more information or support**, please contact your Local Animator, facilitator or community leader, or otherwise one of the contacts below. We are eager to support your participation and involvement in any way we can.

Parishes, Religious Orders, Movements, Migrant Communities (**Pina Bernard**)

Email: [pina.bernard@bbccatholic.org.au](mailto:pina.bernard@bbccatholic.org.au)

Phone: 8379 1627

Catholic Schools (**Anthony Maher**)

Email: [anthony.maher1@dbb.catholic.edu.au](mailto:anthony.maher1@dbb.catholic.edu.au)

Phone: 9847 0306

Youth Leaders (**Kelly Paget**)

Email: [kelly.paget@bbccatholic.org.au](mailto:kelly.paget@bbccatholic.org.au)

Phone: 8379 1633



Office for  
Evangelisation  
**CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF  
BROKEN BAY**

