



PlenaryCouncil2020

*'Listen to what the Spirit is saying...'* REV 2:7

# WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS ASKING OF US IN AUSTRALIA AT THIS TIME?

**PLENARY 2020 SMALL GROUP BOOKLET  
A SIMPLE THREE TO FIVE SESSION PROGRAM**



DIOCESE of PARRAMATTA





# EASY STEPS TO GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP BOOKLET

## ACCEPT THE INVITATION!

A special council of lay and ordained representatives gathers in 2020 to make decisions about the future of the Church in Australia. Our voices will help shape the agenda of the council.

## GATHER WITH FRIENDS, FAMILY OR COLLEAGUES

A small group of three to eight people is ideal as you have the chance to share and listen with others. One or more people act as host and group leader. The next page is for them.

## COMMIT TO SEVERAL SESSIONS

Find a day, time and location that works for you and agree to meet for three to five sessions (60 to 90 minutes is ideal). The number of sessions is determined by number of topics you agree to discuss.

## SEND YOUR SUBMISSION TO THE PLENARY

This booklet guides you in how to make one or more responses to the plenary. You can respond after each of your sessions.

## OPTIONAL

### OFFER FEEDBACK TO YOUR LOCAL AREA OR TO OUR DIOCESE

Sessions 1 to 4 offer a chance to provide feedback to the national plenary, whereas Session 5 offers an opportunity to provide feedback to your local community and to our local Diocese.

### NEXT STEPS?

If you enjoyed meeting together, consider some of the options offered in this booklet for follow up activities.

# HOSTING OR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

## BEING CLEAR ABOUT THE PURPOSE: RESPECTFUL LISTENING AND DIALOGUE

We want our gathering to be enjoyable, safe and welcoming to all involved.

We are gathering to listen and dialogue. We come from all backgrounds and perspectives and providing an affirming and respectful space for our dialogue is important.

All views are welcome and it is an opportunity to voice our insights, listen to others without interrupting, and come to new understandings through our sharing.

People may wish to remain silent. We are asked not to correct others, or speak against them, but to preface our insights with “My opinion is...” or My story is...”

**This is a spiritual process.** We are seeking to understand what God is asking of us.

## WHERE CAN WE HOST OUR GATHERING?

The space we gather in will hopefully be free of distractions (e.g. other activities and background noise) and have room for all participants to sit.

Examples include a café, home (someone may wish to host), parish meeting room, or classroom.

A small table with candle and Christian symbol (e.g. cross or Bible) offers a good focus. Ensure there is adequate heating, refreshments (take turns to cater?) and access to restrooms.

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE? ALL ARE WELCOME

Everyone is welcome, Catholic and non-Catholic, no matter our faith or views, this is a time of respectful dialogue about a very important question.

## HOW DOES EACH SESSION WORK?

Each session should generally last between 60 and 90 minutes. The finish time should be agreed to at the start. The group leader introduces and guides each session, keeping an eye on the time.

Participants give their permission for the group leader to politely interrupt as needed, so as:

- to offer someone else an opportunity to speak
- to remind of the spirit of respectful listening and dialogue
- to move participants to the next section of the session.

## OUR GROUP IS TOO BIG!

A good size is three to eight people. Divide larger groups into two or more smaller groups, as long as each has a group leader.

## FINALLY

- Enjoy each other's company!
- Be ready to be surprised and challenged by what we hear
- If in doubt, contact your local coordinator for support

### NOTES

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# HOW A SESSION WORKS

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2. Exploring the Plenary 2020
3. Listening to the Word of God
4. Choosing a topic
5. Sharing and listening
6. Giving feedback to Plenary

## SESSION 5 (OPTIONAL) WORKS A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY

1. Welcome, explore Plenary and Listen to God's Word
2. Share and listen about what is happening in our local area and Diocese
3. Give feedback to our Diocese
4. Consider next steps and pathways for our group

## IMPORTANT FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

Our share group is a safe space for us to offer our personal stories and reflections

Therefore, we honour the confidential nature of our sharing

We ask permission before sharing anything discussed within our group

However, please note that if information is shared about a person currently at risk of harm, consider the following options:

➤ LIFELINE AUSTRALIA 13 11 14

➤ NSW POLICE CRIME STOPPERS 1800 333 000

➤ SAFEGUARDING OFFICE PARRAMATTA DIOCESE 02 8838 3419

➤ CATHOLICCARE SOCIAL SERVICES (OFFERS RANGE OF SUPPORT)  
02 8843 2500





# SESSION ONE

## WHAT'S THE PLENARY COUNCIL SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS



### WELCOME (5 MINUTES)

*The group leader welcomes people as needed.*

*Suggested icebreaker:*

Share your name, your background and briefly describe an activity that you enjoy. (One minute per person)

*Depending on the faith background of members, we either gather in prayer (option A) or in solidarity (option B).*

### OPTION A:

Let's turn to the back cover of booklet and share the plenary prayer together.

### OPTION B:

Let us be present to one another during this time.

### WHAT IS PLENARY 2020 ALL ABOUT? (10 MINUTES)

*Recommended: Play Plenary Council 2020 – An overview video by Lana Turvey-Collins (10 minutes)*

 <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/watch>

*OR* Read the overview of the Plenary (next page)

### SHORT DISCUSSION (ONE MINUTE PER PERSON)

*Each person is invited to share their response to the following questions:*

- What excites you about the Plenary?
- What questions do you still have?

*The group leader or another member is asked to note any questions. Before the next session, they check the 'Frequently asked Questions' section of the plenary website for possible responses. They can email the plenary team or their diocesan contact if they cannot find the answers they seek. See back cover for details. Next meeting, they share any responses to questions raised.*

## ***Have you already watched Plenary Council 2020 - An Overview by Lana Turvey-Collins?***

***Skip to page 12***

### **WHAT IS A PLENARY COUNCIL?**

A plenary council is the highest form of gathering that a church in a particular country can have. It is a process by which lay people and clergy can be heard. The last major assembly for the Catholic Church of Australia took place more than eighty years ago in 1937.

A plenary is different from an assembly, in that it has legislative power, i.e. the final decisions of a plenary council become law and have binding power. The responsibility of making these decisions falls on the conference of bishops who do so only after discerning the will of the Holy Spirit with the people.

Pope Francis expresses his hope “that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.”

### **WHY ARE THE BISHOPS HOLDING A PLENARY COUNCIL?**

- The contemporary society of Australia has changed significantly, and the Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse has been a significant and influential event that requires deep consideration and response.
- “The Church is not the presence in our society it once was. We need to take a measure of that and make decisions accordingly. The culture in which we have to proclaim the Gospel is very different to what it was even 20 or 30 years ago.” Archbishop Mark Coleridge
- The bishops are asking for everyone to participate. We are encouraged to speak boldly and with passion, and to listen openly with a humble heart.

## WHO PARTICIPATES IN THE COUNCIL? WHEN IS IT HELD?

There are two types of delegates:

- Those who must be called: Includes active bishops, vicars general and episcopal vicars, religious superiors, deans, and rectors of major seminaries.
- Those who may be called: Includes retired bishops, other clergy and lay people.

Observers, advisors and consultants may also be invited. There will be a process for nomination of those who may be called which is yet to be decided.

The Plenary Council Meeting is in two parts: Adelaide (2020) and Sydney (2021).

## HOW WILL OUR VOICE BE HEARD?

The Plenary Process was launched at Pentecost in May 2018.

- *Between now and 6 March 2019:* We are all asked to consider the question of “What do you think God is asking of us at this time?” Groups and individuals submit their responses to the plenary website or through the PO Box address.
- *All responses are read and compiled by the plenary team.*
- In May 2019, major themes emerging from our feedback are announced. Teams are formed across the country to consider these themes, and we are invited to consider the possibilities for how these themes can come to life in the future.
- In 2020, these themes are consolidated into formal submissions to the Plenary Council where they are discussed and voted upon by the bishops.
- In 2021 and beyond, we bring to life the decisions of the plenary.

# WHAT IS GOD ASKING OF US IN AUSTRALIA AT THIS TIME?

## INTRODUCTION (2 MINUTES)

**Group Leader:** We now have the opportunity to share our initial responses to the Plenary question. Before we do so, we recognise that we all come from different experiences and backgrounds. As such, certain responses may contradict one another or challenge our own viewpoints.

In the spirit of respectful listening and dialogue, we ask that we respect the following:

- While someone is speaking, we do not interrupt.
- We speak only from our own viewpoint, not seeking to correct or challenge another's stance, but to offer our own position. Phrases like: "I think differently..." or "In my opinion..." may help.
- Sometimes, if there are strong emotions, or if we need to allow others to speak, we are asked at this time to give our permission for the group leader to politely interrupt. Is that okay?

Our voices are important. Let us speak boldly and with passion, and listen with an open and humble heart.

## LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD (3 MINUTES)

*The group leader invites someone to read this section.*

There is an ancient story in the Bible, about a prophet who is asked to become aware of God's presence.

A reading from the First Book of Kings. (1 Kings 19: 11-13)

*The Lord said to Elijah, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."*

*Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

**PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE PLENARY QUESTION  
(5 MINUTES)**

In the Bible reading, Elijah in trying to listen to what God is asking, discovers that God is not in violence and terror, but is found in a place of stillness and contemplation. We are invited to come to a stillness within our own heart now. Let us acknowledge what is uppermost in our thoughts, but then we are invited to go deeper. For instance, our initial response might be about things I am personally frustrated or joyful about in my own backyard. These are valuable insights. However, what happens after these frustrations and joys are expressed? Are there deeper yearnings or hopes in my heart?

*Reflect on the statement below and write down a list of topics for further discussion. Consider why each of these topics is important to you.*

**WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS ASKING OF US IN AUSTRALIA AT THIS TIME?**

**SHARING (25 MINUTES FOR ONE HOUR SESSION;  
50 MINUTES FOR 90 MINUTE SESSION)**

*Consider the size of the group. Here is a guide for roughly how long each person is invited to share:*

TIME FOR INDIVIDUAL SHARING		
NUMBER OF PEOPLE	60 MINUTE SESSION	90 MINUTE SESSION
3	8 minutes	16 minutes
5	5 minutes	10 minutes
8	3 minutes	6 minutes

A suggested approach:

- Each person shares one main topic. Members listen respectfully and do not interrupt or comment.
- All participants make a note of each topic as it is shared.
- The group leader thanks the person for their contribution and invites the next person to share.
- As time permits, go around the circle again and so on.

## WHAT ARE THE RESPONSES FROM OTHERS IN MY GROUP?

### RESPONDING TO WHAT WE HAVE SHARED (5 MINUTES)

**Group Leader:** We now have the opportunity to reflect on what we have heard so far.

*Some phrases you may find helpful are:*

- 'I am interested to hear more about...' or
- 'I think your topic of ... is important because...'

### FOR NEXT TIME

**Group Leader:** In our next session we will choose our top three topics that we think God is asking us to discuss further. Let us talk with others, and pray and think about topics we would most like to discuss. We will also have the chance to hear back about any questions raised about the plenary.

We are asked before the next session to reflect on the topics we have shared with each other and prioritise them.

### OPTION A (FOR FAITH GROUP):

You can pray the words below, or you might like to say 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.*

### OPTION B:

Let us give thanks to one another and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.





# SESSION TWO

## OUR FIRST TOPIC

# 2

### WELCOME (3 MINUTES)

*The group leader welcomes people as needed, especially any new members. Acknowledge any absent members and make a point to follow up if needed. Suggested icebreaker:*

What has been one highlight you have experienced since we last met? (One minute per person).

*Depending on the faith background of members, we either gather in prayer (option A) or in solidarity (option B).*

### OPTION A:

Let's turn to the back cover of booklet and share the plenary prayer together.

### OPTION B:

Let us be present to one another during this time.

### DISCOVERING MORE ABOUT THE PLENARY (5 MINUTES)

We begin by reminding ourselves about the Plenary. We recall it is a process by which lay people and clergy can be heard, whose voices form the agenda for the council meetings in 2020 and 2021, where decisions for the future of the church will be made.

### OPTION A:

Here are the responses to our questions from last week.

*The designated person shares the responses.*

### OPTION B:

As there were no questions from last week, we share a short reflection from Fr Noel Connelly, from the Plenary Council Facilitation Team:

*The group leader invites a volunteer to read:*

*Lay people have not always been encouraged to speak up and we clergy have not always appreciated our responsibility to invite the*



*[collective sense of faith and wisdom from the People of God] and to listen humbly. We all have much to learn and it may be a little messy and hurtful in the process. Consulting, speaking up, listening, discerning are all skills and they take practice to master.*

*I imagine that the first time we speak boldly, it may be clumsy and/or angry. It will probably be even more difficult for us to listen humbly, neither pointing a finger at, nor judging others, but with open kind hearts trying to appreciate what the Spirit is saying through each of us. It will require of us virtues like charity, open-mindedness, trust and patience. Charity to be kind, respect and listen to one another. Open-mindedness because “we cannot dialogue with people if we already know all the answers to their problems”. And, above all, trusting and patient because, as Pope Francis has shown us, we need not be afraid of open and fraternal debate because that is how we will find what the Spirit wants.*

***Fr Noel Connolly SSC, Plenary Council Facilitation Team  
A Pope who is not afraid of open discussion and even  
dissent in the Church (see Plenary Website for full article)***

*Time for short discussion.*

### **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD (3 MINUTES)**

In the Bible, the Gospel according to Luke recounts a story of how two disciples who had experienced Jesus’ crucifixion, are leaving Jerusalem, three days after Jesus’ death. (Luke 24:13-19)

*Two disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him.*

*He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” Jesus asked.*

### **REFLECTING ON THE WORD OF GOD (2 MINUTES)**

In the Bible reading, Jesus meets the disciples where they are at. He gives them time and space to share their story and asks follow up questions. Jesus could have simply told them everything yet he respectfully listens. On the flip side, the disciples begin their story downcast. Yet they are freed from the limits of their own story. Once they allow Jesus to speak

“their hearts burn within them”. Before we relate our stories of life and faith, let us pause. We can sometimes list things off the top of our head, both good and bad. Our plenary question invites us deeper.

What is it that makes your heart burn within you? What are you truly passionate about?

*Pause for silent reflection*

### CHOOSING OUR FIRST TOPIC (3 MINUTES)

**Group Leader:** From our sharing last week, what are the top three topics we think God is asking us to discuss in depth?

*Each member shares their top three topics.*

*The group leader makes a note and the topic with the most interest becomes the discussion topic for this week.*

*There may be two or more topics with a similar theme.*

### OUR FIRST TOPIC FOR OUR LISTENING AND DIALOGUE ENCOUNTER IS:

### REMINDER: RESPECTFUL LISTENING AND DIALOGUE POINTS

**Group Leader:** In the spirit of respectful listening and dialogue, we ask that we respect the following:

- While someone is speaking, we do not interrupt.
- We speak only from our own viewpoint, not seeking to correct or challenge another's stance, but to offer our own position. Phrases like: "I think differently..." or "In my opinion..." may help.
- Sometimes, if there are strong emotions, or if we need to allow others to speak, we are asked at this time to give our permission for the group leader to politely interrupt. Is that okay?

Our voices are important. Let us speak boldly and with passion, and listen with an open and humble heart.

### REFLECTION (3 MINUTES)

*In silence, for your group's chosen topic reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church*

**WHAT HAVE I EXPERIENCED IN THIS AREA?**

### SHARE AND LISTEN (20 MINUTES FOR ONE HOUR SESSION; 50 MINUTES FOR 90 MINUTE SESSION)

*Take turns to share aloud with each other your personal experience of faith, life and the Church. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.*

### REFLECTION (2 MINUTES)

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

**HOW HAS ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE INFLUENCED MY OWN?**

### SHARE (3 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...'*

### REFLECTION (3 MINUTES)

*Reflect on the statement below in light of what you have shared and heard*

**WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS ASKING OF US IN AUSTRALIA AT THIS TIME?**

### DISCUSS (5 MINUTES)

**WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH FOR THE PLENARY COUNCIL TO CONSIDER IN 2020?**

### RESPOND (5 MINUTES)

*Your voice is important to shaping the future of the Church, and you are invited to submit a written response directly to the Plenary Council team online at [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)*

*You may do so at this time, or, if your group will be holding more than one Listening and Dialogue Encounter session, you may choose to compile the responses from the various sessions and make one submission at the last session.*

**If you choose to submit a response at this time,  
go to the Plenary Council webpage**

** [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)**

**where you will find a SUBMISSION link.**

**This will become your submission to the Plenary Council.**

## THE THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR SUBMISSION 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?
3. Do you have a story of your experience of faith or the Church you would like to share?

If you are making a personal submission, and are open to the Plenary Council team contacting you about sharing more details of your story, complete the contact details section.

## FOR NEXT TIME

**Group Leader:** In our next session we will choose our **second topic** which we think God is asking us to discuss further. Let us talk with others, pray and think about topics we would most like to discuss.

## OPTION A (FOR FAITH GROUP):

*You can pray the words below, or you might like to say 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.*

## OPTION B:

Let us give thanks to one another and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.





# SESSION THREE

## OUR SECOND TOPIC

# 3

### WELCOME (3 MINUTES)

*The group leader welcomes people as needed, especially any new members. Acknowledge any absent members and make a point to follow up if needed. Suggested icebreaker:*

Who else can you invite to a listening and dialogue session?  
(One minute per person).

*Depending on the faith background of members, we either gather in prayer (option A) or in solidarity (option B).*

### OPTION A:

Let's turn to the back cover of booklet and share the plenary prayer together.

### OPTION B:

Let us be present to one another during this time.

### DISCOVERING MORE ABOUT THE PLENARY (5 MINUTES)

We begin by reminding ourselves about the Plenary.

*The group leader invites a volunteer to read:*

*We are blessed with great diversity in our Catholic Church in Australia - many perspectives, experiences and encounters of faith, walks of life and vision for Church. We are called to explore what it is that we are called to, how we are called to be the presence of Jesus in Australia for today, and for generations to come. United by faith, we shall: "Listen to what the Spirit is saying." (Book of Revelations)*

*The Plenary Council logo reflects a "community of communities", drawing upon the message from Pope Francis about the nature of Church who says that the Church "is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach."*

*The colours of the logo are inspired by the colours of our sunburnt country - Ochre of the Red Centre, green from the Gum tree*

*leaves, deep blue of the Ocean we are surrounded by and that of our Nation's flag. They are tones and textures that reflect our beautifully unique Australian identity.*

***From the Plenary Website (About > Logo and Scripture)***

*Time for short discussion.*

## **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD (3 MINUTES)**

In the Bible, the Gospel according to Luke recounts a story of how Jesus visits the home of good friends. (Luke 10:38-42)

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

*"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

## **REFLECTING ON THE WORD OF GOD (2 MINUTES)**

We may feel sympathy for Martha, and see Mary as not pulling her weight. Yet the passage observes that Martha is distracted and Jesus notes that she is worried and upset. Sometimes we race ahead with our own agendas, perhaps forgetting to be still and sit at the feet of God and others. So let us pause before choosing our topic for discussion. There may be many pressing needs, crowding our mind for attention. Let us focus, eyes fixed on Jesus, and consider beyond all the buzz of noise what is really being asked of us at this time.

*Pause for silent reflection*

## **CHOOSING OUR TOPIC (3 MINUTES)**

**Group Leader:** Which topic do we think God is asking us to consider this session?

*Each member shares their top three topics.*

*The group leader makes a note and the topic with the most interest becomes the discussion topic for this session.*

*There may be two or more topics with a similar theme.*



## OUR TOPIC FOR THIS LISTENING AND DIALOGUE ENCOUNTER IS:

### REMINDER: RESPECTFUL LISTENING AND DIALOGUE POINTS

**Group Leader:** In the spirit of respectful listening and dialogue, we ask that we respect the following:

- While someone is speaking, we do not interrupt.
- We speak only from our own viewpoint, not seeking to correct or challenge another's stance, but to offer our own position. Phrases like: "I think differently..." or "In my opinion..." may help.
- Sometimes, if there are strong emotions, or if we need to allow others to speak, we are asked at this time to give our permission for the group leader to politely interrupt. Is that okay?

Our voices are important. Let us speak boldly and with passion, and listen with an open and humble heart.

### REFLECTION (3 MINUTES)

*In silence, for your group's chosen topic reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church*

## WHAT HAVE I EXPERIENCED IN THIS AREA?

## SHARE AND LISTEN (20 MINUTES FOR ONE HOUR SESSION; 50 MINUTES FOR 90 MINUTE SESSION)

*Take turns to share aloud with each other your personal experience of faith, life and the Church. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.*

### REFLECTION (2 MINUTES)

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

**HOW HAS ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE INFLUENCED MY OWN?**

### SHARE (3 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...'*

### REFLECTION (3 MINUTES)

*Reflect on the statement below in light of what you have shared and heard*

**WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS ASKING OF US IN AUSTRALIA AT THIS TIME?**

## DISCUSS (5 MINUTES)

**WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH FOR THE PLENARY COUNCIL TO CONSIDER IN 2020?**

## RESPOND (5 MINUTES)

See pages 20 – 21

## FOR NEXT TIME

Group Leader: In our next session we will choose our third topic which we think God is asking us to discuss further. Let us talk with others, and pray and think about topics we would most like to discuss.

## OPTION A (FOR FAITH GROUP):

*You can pray the words below, or you might like to say 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.*

## OPTION B:

Let us give thanks to one another and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.



# SESSION FOUR

## OUR THIRD TOPIC

# 4

### WELCOME (3 MINUTES)

*The group leader welcomes people as needed, especially any new members. Acknowledge any absent members and make a point to follow up if needed. Suggested icebreaker:*

Who else can you invite to a listening and dialogue session?  
(One minute per person).

*Depending on the faith background of members, we either gather in prayer (option A) or solidarity (option B).*

### OPTION A:

Let's turn to the back cover of booklet and share the plenary prayer together.

### OPTION B:

Let us be present to one another during this time.

### DISCOVERING MORE ABOUT THE PLENARY (5 MINUTES)

We begin by reminding ourselves about the Plenary through the words of Fr Ormond Rush.

*The group leader invites a volunteer to read:*

#### ***Our hope for Plenary 2020***

*"... When the Plenary Council is over and done, and final decisions have been made for the future of the Australian churches, each and every person who has taken up the opportunity to express their "sense of the faith" should be able to say: "I have had an opportunity to have my say, without reservation, and I must say that I have been listened to with genuine respect by my sisters and brothers of whatever ideological stripe.*

*And I, with genuine respect, have truly tried to listen to the other voices ... , open to the possibility that their [sense of faith], coming from the same Spirit as mine, might just be a necessary uncovering of the blind spots in my own perspective. The Plenary Council has*

*been for me an experience of the wondrous workings of the Holy Spirit ... and I accept as coming from God what the Plenary Council has decided."*

**Ormond Rush Plenary Council Participation and Reception:  
Synodality and Discerning the Sensus Fidelium  
(See Plenary 2020 Website for full article)**

*Time for short discussion.*

## **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD (3 MINUTES)**

In the Bible, the Gospel according to Luke recounts a story of Jesus' return to his hometown. (Luke 4:16-20)

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

*Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

## **REFLECTING ON THE WORD OF GOD (2 MINUTES)**

In this striking passage, we gain a sense of Jesus' priorities. We have been reflecting on what God might be asking for us in Australia. Take another look at this passage. Consider our discussions of the last few weeks. Before we relate our stories of life and faith this time, let us pause to consider the distinction between "What are we asking for in Australia at this time?" versus "What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?"

*Pause for silent reflection*

## **CHOOSING OUR TOPIC (3 MINUTES)**

**Group Leader:** Which topic do we think God is asking us to consider this session?

*Each member shares their top three topics.*

*The group leader makes a note and the topic with the most interest becomes the discussion topic for this session.*

*There may be two or more topics with a similar theme.*

## REMINDER: RESPECTFUL LISTENING AND DIALOGUE POINTS

**Group Leader:** In the spirit of respectful listening and dialogue, we ask that we respect the following:

- While someone is speaking, we do not interrupt.

### OUR TOPIC FOR THIS LISTENING AND DIALOGUE ENCOUNTER IS:

- We speak only from our own viewpoint, not seeking to correct or challenge another's stance, but to offer our own position. Phrases like: "I think differently..." or "In my opinion..." may help.
- Sometimes, if there are strong emotions, or if we need to allow others to speak, we are asked at this time to give our permission for the group leader to politely interrupt. Is that okay?

Our voices are important. Let us speak boldly and with passion, and listen with an open and humble heart.

## REFLECTION (3 MINUTES)

In silence, for your group's chosen topic reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church

### WHAT HAVE I EXPERIENCED IN THIS AREA?

## **SHARE AND LISTEN (20 MINUTES FOR ONE HOUR SESSION; 50 MINUTES FOR 90 MINUTE SESSION)**

Take turns to share aloud with each other your personal experience of faith, life and the Church. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.

### **REFLECTION (2 MINUTES)**

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

**HOW HAS ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE INFLUENCED MY OWN?**

### **SHARE (3 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...'

### **REFLECTION (3 MINUTES)**

*Reflect on the statement below in light of what you have shared and heard*

**WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS ASKING OF US IN  
AUSTRALIA AT THIS TIME?**



## DISCUSS (5 MINUTES)

**WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH FOR THE PLENARY COUNCIL TO CONSIDER IN 2020?**

## RESPOND (5 MINUTES)

See pages 20 – 21

## FOR NEXT TIME

**Group Leader:** In our next session (optional) we are invited to offer a local response and consider the next steps for our small group.

Alternatively, if your group has more topics they would like to submit to Plenary 2020, you can repeat this session as many times as you wish, keeping the “local response” session (Session 5) till the end.

## OPTION A (FOR FAITH GROUP):

*You can pray the words below, or you might like to say 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.*

## OPTION B:

Let us give thanks to one another and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.



# SESSION FIVE

## OUR LOCAL RESPONSE & NEXT STEPS

# 5

### WELCOME (3 MINUTES)

*The group leader welcomes people as needed, especially any new members. Acknowledge any absent members and make a point to follow up if needed. Suggested icebreaker:*

What has been my favourite part of these sessions?  
(One minute per person).

*Depending on the faith background of members, we either gather in prayer (option A) or solidarity (option B).*

### OPTION A:

Let's turn to the back cover of booklet and share the plenary prayer together.

### OPTION B:

Let us be present to one another during this time.

### DISCOVERING MORE ABOUT THE PLENARY (5 MINUTES)

We begin by reminding ourselves about the Plenary.

*The group leader invites a volunteer to read:*

*In the time after Jesus' death, the fire of the Holy Spirit transcended difference and people of different cultures and languages could speak and understand one another.*

*In this first stage of preparation for the Plenary Council - open **Listening and Dialogue**, my prayer is that even if we deeply disagree with one another, that we are able to create space to share our stories: our experiences of faith and of the Church.*

*All people are welcome, invited to share freely from your heart and mind. In this process, we have a chance to speak boldly and to listen humbly to others, so that our hearts may be transformed and we can discover the pathway toward the future for our Church to which God is leading us.*

**Lana Turvey-Collins** *The Beginning of a Journey*  
(See Plenary 2020 website for full article)

*Time for short discussion.*

## LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD (3 MINUTES)

In the Bible, the Acts of the Apostles offers a description of the early church. (Acts 2:42-47)

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

## REFLECTING ON THE WORD OF GOD (2 MINUTES)

When we think about a faith community, what are our priorities? How do our priorities for local community compare to the description of the early church we read in scriptures? When it comes to our local community, let us consider the difference between “What are we asking for in Australia at this time?” versus “What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?”

*Pause for silent reflection*

## REMINDER: RESPECTFUL LISTENING AND DIALOGUE POINTS

**Group Leader:** In the spirit of respectful listening and dialogue, we ask that we respect the following:

- While someone is speaking, we do not interrupt.
- We speak only from our own viewpoint, not seeking to correct or challenge another's stance, but to offer our own position. Phrases like: “I think differently...” or “In my opinion...” may help.
- Sometimes, if there are strong emotions, or if we need to allow others to speak, we are asked at this time to give our permission for the group leader to politely interrupt. Is that okay?

Our voices are important. Let us speak boldly and with passion, and listen with an open and humble heart.

**WHAT IS OUR BEST EXPERIENCE OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY?  
(10 MINUTES)**

**Group Leader:** Let us brainstorm the positive things happening in our area.

**THE STRENGTHS OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY ARE:**

**WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU SEE IN OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY AT  
THIS TIME? (10 MINUTES)**

**Group Leader:** Let us brainstorm the challenges in our area.

**THE CHALLENGES OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY ARE:**

**WHAT HOPES OR DREAMS DO YOU THINK GOD HAS FOR THE  
FUTURE OF YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY? (10 MINUTES)**

**Group Leader:** Let us brainstorm the hopes and dreams we have for our area.

**THE HOPES AND DREAMS OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY ARE:**

WHAT BROADER FEEDBACK DO YOU WANT TO OFFER TO BISHOP VINCENT LONG AND OUR DEANERY AND DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCILS? IDEAS? QUESTIONS? (10 MINUTES)

**Group Leader:** Let us brainstorm ideas and feedback for Bishop Vincent Long and his advisory councils.

**OUR FEEDBACK IS:**

RESPOND

You can offer your responses online at

 [surveymonkey.com/r/parra2018](https://surveymonkey.com/r/parra2018)

Post to **Pastoral Planning Office, 51-59 Allawah St, Blacktown**

Take a photo and send to  [pastoralplanning@parracatholic.org](mailto:pastoralplanning@parracatholic.org)

## Next Steps (Optional)

### REFLECT (3 MINUTES)

Before we finish our time together, we are invited to consider further options both individually and as a group. In silence, we may wish to read through the suggestions offered on the Pathways pages (see page 41).

### SHARING (TWO MINUTES EACH PERSON)

**WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO EXPLORE INDIVIDUALLY?**

**WHAT AM I INTERESTED IN EXPLORING WITH A GROUP?**

### CLOSING

**Group Leader:** As we give thanks for our time together, each of us is invited to share briefly how we have found the experience of this small group.

*Time for sharing*

### OPTION A (FOR FAITH GROUP):

You can pray the words below, or you might like to say 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.*

### OPTION B:

Let us give thanks to one another and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.







# PATHWAYS

## SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES & WAYS TO BE INVOLVED GOING FORWARD

### CONNECTING WITH THE PARISH OR WIDER COMMUNITY

**FIND OUT** what groups and ministries are offered by your parish, and join one of them. These could be community groups (e.g. youth, young adult, senior, ladies), outreach (e.g. St. Vincent de Paul, assisting the homebound, social justice), liturgical ministry (e.g. as a reader, choir), part of a working bee to maintain the parish, etc.

**KEEP IN TOUCH** with people from the plenary sessions, accompanying each other to Mass, parish events and groups.

**ORGANISE NEW GROUPS** from the connections made at the forums (e.g. parish-school, parish-local community group) and make it a point to meet on a regular basis, even if regular means once every few months.

**SIGN UP** to a local charity or community volunteer group in your local area.

### START OR JOIN A SPIRITUALITY/PRAYER GROUP SUCH AS:

**ADORATION** – Offers the richness of quiet prayer and meditation before the Blessed Sacrament.

**MARIAN GROUPS** – Rosary Circles, Divine Mercy and other special devotional prayer groups.

**CHRISTIAN MEDITATION** – Christian meditation is the process of deliberately focusing on specific thoughts (such as a Bible passage) and reflecting on their meaning in the context of the love of God. Learn more about Benedictine spirituality and meditation at <http://wccm.org/>

**CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL** – A spiritual movement within the Catholic Church that emphasises the availability of the power and the many gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer, and the need for a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ in order to live life to the fullest. Learn more about the Charismatic Renewal movement at <http://www.ccr.org.au>

## EXPLORE YOUR FAITH THROUGH COURSES SUCH AS:

**ALPHA** – Alpha is a series of sessions exploring the Christian faith, usually run over a number of weeks by lay leaders on behalf of the parish. Each talk looks at a different question around faith and is designed to create conversation. No two Alphas look the same, but generally they have three key things in common: food, a talk and good conversation. Learn more about Alpha at

📄 <https://alpha.org/catholic-context/home>

**CATHOLICISM** – A DVD study program from Word on Fire by Bishop Robert Barron. Learn more about this resource at 📄 <https://www.wordonfire.org>

**CaFE (CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLORATION)** – CaFE helps people of all ages in a relaxed, welcoming ‘café’ style atmosphere to learn, share and pray together. A wide range of resources on faith formation, Sacraments and youth ministry are available at 📄 <https://faithcafe.org/>

## START/JOIN A BIBLE STUDY GROUP SUCH AS:

**THE LITTLE ROCK SCRIPTURE STUDY** – The Little Rock Scripture Study explores one or more books of the Bible over 5 to 12 sessions. The study sets are independent, each using a study guide and the New Collegeville Bible Commentary. For further information, see 📄 <https://littlerockscripture.org>

**THE GREAT ADVENTURE – BIBLE TIMELINE** – Study program designed to help Catholics grow in confidence in reading and understanding the Bible and how it applies to their daily lives. Learn more about this resource at

📄 <https://biblestudyforcatholics.com>

**WALKING WITH PURPOSE** – Bible study program for women that link everyday challenges and struggles with the solutions given through the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church. For more information, see

📄 <https://walkingwithpurpose.com/>

## YOUTH

**FORMATION & TRAINING** – A diverse range of programs bring young people together for training and formation in specific skills required for ministry with students, youth and young adults in schools, parishes and movements.

**LIFTED** – A unique and dynamic brand of large-scale faith-based events mirroring the positive ingredients of popular culture. Committed young Catholics are invited to renew and celebrate but are called to mission in inviting other friends, colleagues and peers into this unique experience of Church.

**GET CONNECTED** – Contact your local community for ways to connect with local youth groups, ministries or activities.

**CONTACT CATHOLIC YOUTH PARRAMATTA FOR THESE AND MORE IDEAS**

📍 <https://parracatholic.org/cyp>

## FURTHER STUDY

**INSTITUTE FOR MISSION** – The Institute for Mission is a work of the diocese and offers a wide range of programs for those in ministry. For current offerings see 📍 <http://www.ifm.org.au/programs>

**FORMAL STUDY** – A number of institutions offer a range of courses. Apart from semester-long courses, these institutions also offer the number of short courses which may be taken independently, and offered in intensive mode or online. Often, these units can be accredited towards a formal award pursued at a later date.

**AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY (ACU)**

📍 <http://www.acu.edu.au/courses/theology>

**NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY (NDU)**

📍 <https://www.notredame.edu.au/study/programs>

**THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION (BBI)**

📍 <https://www.bbi.catholic.edu.au/higher-education/BBI-Units>

***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.***



**PlenaryCouncil2020**

*'Listen to what the Spirit is saying...' REV 2:7*



**TO FIND OUT MORE PLEASE CONTACT**

**RICHARD OR TANYA**

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☎ (02) 8838 3460

🌐 [PARRACATHOLIC.ORG/HAVEYOURLAY](http://PARRACATHOLIC.ORG/HAVEYOURLAY)