



20 May 2018, Pentecost Sunday

**Message from  
Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB  
Archbishop of Perth**



[www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost today let us pray for each other that our hearts will be open to the renewing and strengthening power of the Holy Spirit and that the Lord's Church, of which we are all a vital part, will continue through these turbulent times to grow in fidelity to all that the gospel demands of us.

Many of you will have heard that the Catholic Bishops of Australia have decided to convene a Plenary Council for 2020. Some of you may already be well acquainted with the purpose of such a gathering, some of you may be aware in a vaguer way of what it is all about, and many of you may be hearing about it for the first time in this Pastoral Letter. My purpose in writing to you now is to share with you my own hopes for this important event and invite you to be a part of it in the ways that best work for you.

In essence a Plenary Council is a formal gathering of the bishops of the Church in a specified location, in our case the whole of Australia, in order to chart a course for the Church into the future. Such gatherings are rare – the last one held in Australia was in 1937 – and they are one of the highest and most solemn gatherings in the Church's life of the bishops and the many other delegates who will join them.

What has prompted the bishops to convene such a gathering at this time in our history? The answer, in a sense, is quite simple. Over a long period of years the bishops have been growing in the conviction that the challenges and possibilities facing the Church in Australia today are of such significance that only a solemn and formal gathering of the bishops, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can provide us with the wisdom we need to discern what God is asking of us at this time.

There will be two formal sittings of the Plenary Council: one in October of 2020 and one in May of 2021. However, precisely because of the situation in which the Church finds itself at this time, the bishops know that the whole Church in Australia, in all its diversity, must be a part of this process. For that reason, the journey, not **towards** the Plenary Council but **of** the Plenary Council, starts today, Pentecost Sunday. The website goes live today ([www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)) and the opportunity to enter into the process of listening, to the Holy Spirit and to each other, of discerning what we are being called to, and of sharing our convictions with the whole Church, begins.

Next weekend, at the Vigil Mass in the Cathedral on Saturday night, we will formally launch the journey for our archdiocese. Every parish and every agency will be invited to send a representative to this Mass to be commissioned on behalf of their community and to receive a special "Plenary Council Candle" and prayer to take back to their community. Because on that weekend we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, when we remember that at the heart of our faith there lies the conviction that God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is a communion of life and love, it is very appropriate that the communion of all our Catholic communities with each other and with the bishop, is highlighted in this way. On the following Sunday, as part of the celebrations for the Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), every parish will be invited to have their own local launch, while agencies and other communities will be asked to do so with their staff and associates around the same time, depending on their own circumstances.





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I do hope you will all become involved in this important moment for the Church. Of the three stages of the journey of the Plenary Council – preparation, celebration and implementation – the first, which begins today, is vital. The question we are all being asked to consider and discuss is this: ***What do you think God is asking of us at this time?*** At first glance it seems a simple enough question. Indeed it might appear to be too simple for such an important initiative. However, a little reflection might lead us to see how profound this question is. It is not inviting us simply to offer what we would like to see continue, or change, in the Church. Rather it is inviting us to ask whether or not what we might want is in harmony with what God is actually asking of us. We must certainly attend carefully to what we believe the Church needs to do and be. God speaks to us in our own experience and in our own hearts. At the same time we must also attend to what others believe, whether they agree with us or not, for God speaks to others as surely as God speaks to us. We will all need courage and humility and trusting faith that it is God who is guiding the Church and that the Plenary Council has, as its most fundamental task, the responsibility of calling the Church to a greater fidelity to its God-given identity and mission.

The practical details regarding the ways in which individuals and communities can engage with the Plenary Council process can be found on the website launched today. To transform what we read there into concrete action, I am hoping that every parish will have at least one person designated who, together with the parish priest, will animate the involvement of the parish community at the local level, and that every other Catholic community in the archdiocese will also appoint a coordinator. I have appointed Mr Tony Giglia as the Plenary Council Coordinator for the archdiocese. He will work closely with Dr Debra Sayce, the Acting Executive Director of Catholic Education Western Australia, who has generously agreed to be our representative on the National Executive Committee, which is developing and implementing the process of dialogue and discernment in which we are all about to become engaged. This Executive has a Facilitation Team led by Ms Lana Turvey-Collins, from Sydney, and this team, in its turn, is guided by and reports to the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council, of which I am the Chairman. And, as some of you know, I have also been nominated by the Bishops Conference as the President of the Plenary Council and this nomination has been confirmed by Pope Francis.

We are all entering together into an exciting and momentous project which is also a journey. The future of the Church is not in our hands: it is in God's hands. However God works in and through his people, and for us this means that God works in and through all of us who together make up the Church, the Body of Christ. We all need to hear each other's voices as we try to discern what God is asking of us. No one voice or group of voices is more important than any other for, as Saint Paul reminds us, in the Church *"there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:28).

Please make this journey of the Plenary Council a focus of your prayers. Please share your own experience of the Church in your lives, and your hopes and dreams for the Church, with all of us through the opportunities provided in the dialogue and listening process. Let us all open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit who alone can renew the face of the Church and who seeks to do so through us. Let us "listen to what the Spirit is saying".

Yours sincerely in Christ

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