



Easter Season

Pastoral Letter

**By The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

11 April 2023

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

These words, which I have borrowed from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 1:2), express very well my hopes and prayers for all of us as we celebrate once again the great mystery of the Lord's saving passion, death and resurrection. Each year, notwithstanding the many difficulties and challenges we all face, our faith and hope are renewed as we rejoice in the Lord's triumph over sin and death. May we hear echoing in our hearts the words of Jesus to his disciples: *take courage, do not be afraid, I am with you* (cf Matt 14:28).

As I write this letter, I am preparing to leave for Rome where I will participate in a meeting of the Preparatory Commission for the Synod on Synodality. The meeting begins on the Tuesday of Easter week and at this stage is scheduled to last for approximately ten days. During my absence, Bishop Sproxton will administer the Archdiocese with the assistance of the Curia.

Pope Francis has convened this Synod, which is primarily a gathering of the world's bishops (through a representative group of them), in order to reflect, pray, discuss and decide on how best to respond to what the Pope is convinced is God's urgent call to the Church today: to become a more synodal Church. For Pope Francis, this means a Church in which everyone is invited and enabled to play their part in ensuring that we grow in our fidelity to the Lord and respond generously to all that the Lord is asking of us. For this to happen, the Pope believes, we must



recognise each other's equal dignity as disciples of Jesus who are called to walk together, to support each other, and to learn from each other, as we continue to discern what the Lord is asking of us. *"A synodal Church"* says Pope Francis, *"is a listening Church aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which everyone has something to learn"* (Pope Francis, 17 Oct 2015).

This intuition of Pope Francis was at the heart of the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia which concluded its second and final Assembly in July last year. Many of you would have been actively involved in the work of the Plenary Council, taking part in the consultations that were carried out across the nation in the years leading up to the Council itself.

The Synod of Bishops, which will hold its first Assembly on Synodality in October of this year, has also undertaken a significant consultation of the members of the Church, this time right across the world. This consultation, too, has involved *"reciprocal listening"* and this is still going on as October draws nearer. One of my roles as a member of the Preparatory Commission is to help in gathering the fruits of this listening together and making them available to those who will gather as members of the Synodal Assembly.

All of this, of course, is designed to lead the Church to a deeper fidelity to its fundamental mission, which is to be a living sign and instrument of the ongoing presence of Christ in the world as the world's saviour: as its teacher, as its healer, and as its servant, all according to God's will.

My purpose in writing to you now is to link this worldwide endeavour to some of the initiatives which are presently unfolding, or which soon will unfold, here in our own Archdiocese. We, too, are seeking to deepen our fidelity to the Lord and to respond more generously to his call.

There are three initiatives which I would like to mention, and explain a little, in this letter. They are the Transition Project, the Liturgical Formation and Renewal Program, and the convening of a Diocesan Assembly.

The Transition Project

For the last two years we have been very fortunate to have had the services of Mr Gary Downes. Initially Gary stepped forward to offer his expertise to help us diagnose the blockages, especially in the administration side of the Archdiocese at every level, which were preventing us from being as effective in our mission as we would like to be. Having completed this task Gary accepted my invitation to continue to work with us in order to oversee the implementation of the proposals and



projects which Gary had identified as possible ways forward. Recently Gary has completed his time with us, but the work of the Transition Project goes on. Under his leadership we have taken significant steps to make sure that our clergy are as well supported as possible so that they can devote themselves to their primary role, which is to be at the service of their local communities in imitation of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. As part of this we have reviewed the operations of our Administration Centre (Griver House in Adelaide Terrace) especially in terms of our ability to provide support to our parishes. We are undertaking a similar initiative in relation to our many Social Outreach and Faith Formation Agencies, looking for ways to relieve them of some of their administrative responsibilities so that they can devote more time to their fundamental mission. While many of you may not yet have noticed any significant change in the way you personally experience the Church, my purpose in sharing this with you is to inform you of what is happening, more often than not behind the scenes, to help us become, together, a more effective witness to Christ.

Liturgical Formation and Renewal

Were we, as an Archdiocese, to devote all our resources and all our energies to the Transition Project alone, we might well be accused of operating in a way which is indistinguishable from so many other, non-religious, organisations. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The whole purpose of the Church is clearly evident in the life of our parishes, our Catholic schools and university, our youth ministries, our social outreach agencies, our faith formation agencies, the Church's engagement in health and aged-care, the work of the many religious orders and congregations present and active in the Archdiocese, and so much more. We can be confident, but not complacent: we must continue to avoid the danger of contradicting in practice what Pope Francis spoke about recently (2021) when he reminded a gathering of Catholic journalists that the Church *"is not a multinational company lead by managers who study at a table how best to sell their product"*. Rather, said the Pope, the Church *"composed of men and women who are sinners like everyone else, was born and exists to reflect the light of another, the light of Jesus, just as the moon does with the sun"*.

As he so often does, here the Pope recalls us to a fundamental truth about the Church: Christ is the heart of everything. It is because of this that, as the Transition Project continues to unfold, we have also initiated a program of Liturgical Formation and Renewal. I see this program as highlighting the spiritual basis upon which any project in the Church must rest. After all, it is in the liturgy, and in particular in the Mass, celebrated in fidelity to the Church's directives rather than our own inclinations, that we can truly meet the Christ whose light we are called to reflect. If each parish, each school and each local community and agency of the Archdiocese embraces this



simple program of liturgical formation and renewal the fruits of unity, apostolic fruitfulness and deepening of faith which will emerge will have the potential to be transformative for us all.

If you have not yet been made aware of this program, I would encourage you to speak with your parish priest or visit our [Archdiocesan website](#) where you will find five short videos. They offer a very simple “refresher” in some of the basics of our Catholic understanding of the liturgy and especially of the Eucharistic celebration. They would form a good basis for personal reflection or for parish study groups and ministry and service teams; Parish Councils, Acolytes, St Vincent de Paul Conferences, etc.

The formal part of this renewal program will conclude on the Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, still popularly known as the Feast of Corpus Christi. Each parish and other community is encouraged to make this feast day a day of special prayer, in ways that meet the needs of your own local community. It is hoped, too, that engagement with the program will lead, beyond its formal conclusion, to an ongoing deepening of our love for the liturgy as the privileged place for an encounter with the Lord and with each other as sisters and brothers in the community of faith.

Diocesan Assembly

While we are still awaiting from the Holy See the formal acceptance of the decrees of the Plenary Council, we can already begin to take steps to prepare ourselves for the important task of implementing the outcomes of the Plenary Council in our Archdiocese. In view of this I am, with this letter, formally announcing that I am convening a Diocesan Assembly in order to consider the re-establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Diocesan Pastoral Councils, though not mandated by the law of the Church, were very highly recommended by the Second Vatican Council. Under the leadership of Archbishops Goody and Foley, Perth did have a Diocesan Pastoral Council for some years, but it was discontinued in the late nineties. Our recent Plenary Council has called for the establishment or re-establishment of such Councils in every diocese, and I believe it is appropriate for us to decide whether or not the time is now right to make such a move. It is also important to clarify why such a body might be necessary and how it should operate. The Church’s law and traditions do give some indications and establish some parameters. Within these, however, we have ample scope for shaping such a body according to our local needs. At the same time, in response to the call of Pope Francis for a more synodal Church, we might ask ourselves what a Diocesan Pastoral Council might look like if it is a truly synodal body. These are the questions I will ask the Diocesan Assembly to consider.



Some practical decisions have already been made. The Assembly will take place on Saturday 23 September and will be held at Newman College in Churchlands. Mr Tony Giglia, who co-ordinated our engagement with both the Plenary Council and with the consultations for the forthcoming Synod, has been appointed as the Co-Ordinator of the Assembly. Tony will soon be communicating the process for selecting the delegates to the Assembly to parishes and other Church communities and agencies. The delegates will come from all areas of the life of the Archdiocese. Tony will also be responsible for preparing resources for the formation of delegates and for devising the methodology to be used during the Assembly.

The convening of this Diocesan Assembly is a relatively modest initiative, but it is designed to set a pattern for ongoing consultation and discernment which I hope will become a permanent feature of the life of our Archdiocese in the future. We must continue together along the path of becoming *“a synodal Church (which) is a listening Church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which everyone has something to learn”*.

The three initiatives I have shared with you in this letter – the Transition Project, the Liturgical Formation and Renewal Program, and the Diocesan Assembly – are not three distinct realities.

Rather they are inter-related initiatives which are designed to move us forward in our search for greater fidelity to the Lord. I invite you to keep them all in your prayers, look for opportunities to engage with them, and support them in any way you can.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth