

Plenary Council 2020

What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?



The Bishop Speaks

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Plenary Council for the Church in Australia is going to take place over two sessions: The first in 2020 and the second in 2021. A Plenary Council is a forum for Church leaders to consider contemporary issues in the light of the Gospel and respond in terms of faith, morals, governance, discipline and worship. The participants at a Plenary Council include all the Bishops as well as some priests, religious institute leaders, and lay people. The Bishops have a deliberative vote and others have a consultative vote. A Plenary Council can enact laws which, subject to approval by the Holy See, bind Catholics in a region, in this case Australia.

At Pentecost 2018 the Church in Australia launched the first phase of preparation for the Plenary Council. This first phase is a year of consultations, open dialogue and listening. These consultations are not intended to develop a “shopping list” of changes

people want to see made or to overturn the teachings of the Church. Rather they are an opportunity for the broader Church community to reflect on and consider current issues and then to provide feedback to the Council members, so they can deliberate on them. Submissions received will assist in developing the agenda for the actual Plenary Council.

You will find a 4-step process for a *Listening and Dialogue Encounter* on the Diocesan website, armidale.catholic.org.au/, which you may like to utilise when reflecting on the key question **“What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?”** Parishes (and individuals if they wish) are then invited to make their submission to me at plenarysubmissions@armidale.catholic.org.au

It is important that I hear and have the opportunity to reflect on and respond to the reflections of our local Diocesan Church.



The Plenary Council Facilitation Team would also like to receive your responses. The same process also provides the opportunity for individuals and groups to make your submissions to them.

Below are some additional questions I invite you to reflect on which may assist you to answer the greater question of what God is asking of us as a Church at this time in Australia.

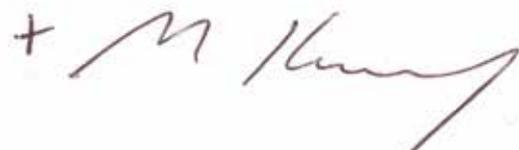
1. The family, the parish, and the school have been the three main sources of evangelical energy of the Church in Australia. What are the hallmarks of this evangelical energy? Going forward, what are our aspirations for family, parish, and school, and how can we best renew and support them into the future?
2. The Church, as Pope Benedict said, is about a person: Jesus Christ and our relationship with him. How do we keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ to ensure the Church inspires and serves the world rather than become fixated on the world? How do we effectively engage in: praying and worshipping God; passing on the faith; supporting human life and human lives; and living our Catholic moral teaching?
3. Australia has a long and proud history of collaboration between bishops, priests, religious, and laypeople. How do we continue this tradition into the future without taking anything from the uniqueness and beauty of each particular state of life?

4. Often in our two thousand year history the Church has been persecuted or humiliated in numerous ways and has even seemed close to dying. The present-day Church in Australia has certainly been humiliated and some would say even persecuted in some ways. How do we build resilience and hope in the hearts of the faithful and rebuild the Church's credibility in our society? How can each of us be proud and unashamedly Catholic; an active participant in Parish life; and a public witness to Jesus Christ and our faith in Him.

Please take some time to reflect on what God is asking of us. I look forward to receiving your thoughts and ideas.



Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale

FIVE FAST FACTS ABOUT THE PLENARY

- The last Australian Plenary Council took place in 1937.
- Pope Francis granted his approval for the Australian Plenary Council 2020 to take place and he will need to approve any decisions reached by the Plenary.
- In the early 2000's the Australian bishops first decided that the Church needed to meet together to discern a future course. About 10 years later the decision was made to have a Council for the whole Church in Australia.
- The Plenary Council 2020 will take place in two sessions – the first in October 2020 and the second in May 2021.
- The scriptural theme for the Plenary Council is "Listen to What the Spirit is saying'. (Rev 2:7)

Front Cover Photo: Ava Vaughn with sponsor Sue Newsome and Bishop Kennedy after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation on Pentecost Sunday at the Cathedral