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'Promising seeds' planted during Plenary

"We are "wounded healers" as missionary disciples in Australia placing the holiness of Jesus and not ourselves, at the centre of all pastoral activity"
Archbishop Christopher Prowse

"I was honoured to be working with, praying with, and listening to, Catholics from all over Australia during the First Assembly. Each of their stories showed me that there are so many ways to live our Catholic faith."
Brigid Cooney

"The rubber will hit the road with the discernment of motions in Sydney. One thing is sure: this is how we now 'do' Church."
Monsignor John Woods



The Canberra and Goulburn Archdiocesan Plenary members (from left) Monsignor John Woods, Brigid Cooney, Archbishop Prowse, John Warhurst, Sally FitzGerald and Fr Tony Percy VG

"Sexuality, including justice for LGBTQI+ Catholics can't be avoided, it touches most of us in some way within the church."
John Warhurst

"A Plenary Council is about renewal of faith, pastoral outreach, morals and way of life. Input on this helpful paradigm was lacking."
Fr Tony Percy, VG

"There were days when the Spirit could be felt strongly, particularly when we saw and heard from the diversity and cross-section of Catholics involved in the process, but there were also challenging days."
Sally Fitzgerald

The long-awaited first assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia concluded in Perth on the weekend, leaving Catholics with much to absorb. Six representatives of our Archdiocese were among the 278 Council members who took part in discerning and reporting on 16 questions, grouped in six themes covering the Church's mission. This week's edition of Catholic Voice summarises and reflects on six days of "spiritual conversations" that tilled the soil of today's Church and planted seeds for new growth.

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PLENARY REFLECTIONS

'Wounded Healers' on an Australian Camino



Archbishop's Message
Archbishop Christopher Prowse

The 1st Assembly of the Plenary Council of Australia has concluded with a sense of hope.

A biblical expression used on one of the days has remained with me as a metaphor for the entire week. It is "PLANTED IN LOVE" from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (3/17).

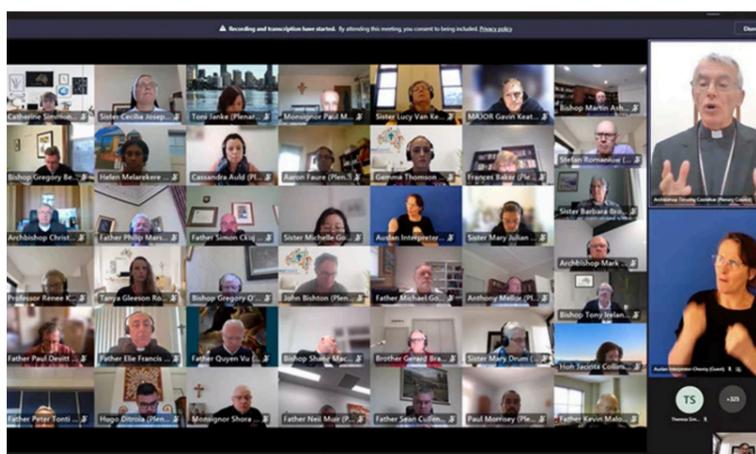
I believe many seeds of the Holy Spirit were planted in the hearts of all the members who gathered with much love and respect for each other. We truly tried to "walk together" (Synod) and listen to each other deeply. It was a time of a kind of virtual Camino. This was assisted by the

introduction of so many times of silence and deep reverence for contributions.

For me, one of the seeds of hope were so many new faces having the courage to speak boldly of their hopes for the Australian Church. There were many articulate and proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The voices of Eastern Catholics were strong and numerous. The contribution of youth was passionate and full of missionary zeal.

A practical seed of hope was the success of the virtual technology used throughout the week because of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was largely efficient and effective as a 'Plan B' to the preferred face to face mode. Our own rural Archdiocese ought to make note of this new mode of gathering.

So many seeds of love were placed for our pastoral attention



and outreach.

Some of these seeds that particularly focused my attention included the evangelising role of our First Nations Peoples in our Australian culture. Another was the amplified role of an "integral" ecology embracing all aspects of our common life together. The prime importance of conversion and the encounter with Jesus was stressed in a manner that not only includes attitudes but also social struc-

tures. The role of formation was often heard as applying to everyone and must include its liturgical expressions. The pastoral voice of rural dioceses and their needs as distinct from city dioceses was a new and fresh seed of hope.

Hearing from Catholics from the Eastern Churches was an important contribution because their voice often is forgotten despite their growing demographic in the Australian Church.

Of course, we constantly heard of victims of the Church's neglect and, shamefully, sometimes criminal acts with horrendous consequences. These were not seeds of hope, but weeds of diabolical neglect.

Therefore, as we go forward, we are "wounded healers" (Instrumentum Laboris 103-107) as missionary disciples in Australia placing the holiness of Jesus and not ourselves, at the centre of all pastoral activity.

The 1st Assembly has concluded. A vast panorama is in front of us of human yearning to see Jesus with an Australian face.

An immediate happy challenge awaiting us is to link our Plenary Council with the International Synod on Synodality. This will be made so much easier because they are linked together with the common focus on "walking together" (Synodality).

First ideas emerge on Plenary's long road

BY DON SMITH

Last week's first assembly of the Fifth Australian Plenary Council considered 16 questions covering all aspects of the church's mission in Australia under the themes of conversion, prayer, formation, governance, structures and institutions.

With outcomes yet to be finalised, the following is a summary of some of the early proposals for church renewal that arose in oral presentations by working groups to the assembly.

Under the theme of conversion (coming closer to God; to each other), one working group considered how the Church might learn from the nation's indigenous peoples, recommending indigenous Catholic leaders be included as partners in decision-making throughout parishes, dioceses and agencies.

One full day of the gathering was devoted to discussion of the church's child sex abuse crisis which also took place under the conversion theme.

For the theme of prayer, working groups considered how to embrace the different liturgical traditions that make up the church including the Eastern churches, the Latin rite, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and those who felt marginalised and excluded from the Eucharist.

Under the theme of formation, a proposal included establishing a research project into overseas experiences with the induction, training and development of clergy that could be adapted for Australia.



Several proposals were presented for strengthening the church's structures especially at the parish level, including a recommendation to establish leadership support teams in each parish to help shape a sharper missionary focus for its activities.

In the area of governance, a recommendation arose for finance and pastoral councils, particularly at the parish level, be given a deliberative, rather than consultative, vote on all matters.

Groups considering the theme of institutions looked at the future for Catholic education and Catholic social services, agencies and health and aged care ministries, and presented recommendations seeking to strengthen links between agencies and church leaders.

The full list of ideas that arose during the assembly will be released when finalised and taken forward for further work and refinement before their consideration at the second assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council in July next year.

Our parishioners' reflections

Dennis Sleigh, Sacred Heart Parish Temora

Ask five people to assess a rugby match, and you will get five distinct responses. Ask 300+ participants in the first General Assembly of the Plenary Council and they will blow your mind with their options.

As we mark the end of this session, let us celebrate the positive assessments and let us be motivated by the negative ones to seek an even better report for the next assembly in July 2022.

The recently concluded first session, I am sure, would have been even more positive if more people had been aware of what was happening and we would have applauded those successes, while praying harder for those areas where improvement is called for.

Progress has been made, but the second assembly can be better. No matter how much improvement is noted next time, let the key feature be increased awareness by all of us, arising from vastly increased media coverage.

Beth Gibson, South Belconnen Parish

Last week I dipped in and out of a few sources linked with the Assembly of the Plenary Council, a step in the ongoing

reforms of Vatican 2.

Attendants seemed to participate genuinely in the process. I was struck by a couple of bishops who expressed gratitude, and perhaps even surprise, at the level of commitment and discernment shown by lay people in their groups. An important discovery!

The assembly enabled some critical issues to be highlighted: Aboriginal spirituality; ecological conversion; the ongoing impact of child sexual abuse crimes; what does 'being a missionary Church' mean for us now; and the need for improved practices and governance arrangements to ensure all the baptised have a sense of belonging in our Catholic communities.

I hope that we will all build on the outcomes of this assembly and bring them to fulfilment in the final assembly next year.

Madeline Ryan, Immaculate Conception Tumut

What I have taken in so far is what an enormous task the Church has before herself.

Such a rich diversity of people and issues, problems to solve and opportunities to embrace, wounds to heal and efforts to be recognised. I am thankful to those who have personally committed to participating and for the coverage relayed to those of us not present.

There are myriad opportunities for our faith to flourish in this country. For too long now the Church has gradually shied away,

catering to growing secularism and watering-down the richness of the Gospel and Tradition of the Church. Like a plant that is struggling, I pray that we will be nourished by good soil, living water, and yes even some stinky fertiliser so that we may come back to life.

So I pray for the bearing of good fruit!

Soomin Chung, Korean Catholic Community Canberra

The world has truly changed a lot since the last Plenary Council in 1937, and I welcome the efforts of the Church to discuss the ways to renew itself and adapt to the current and new challenges of today. The agendas discussed ultimately stem from the universal and eternal values such as inclusiveness, justice, and love, which embody the life of Jesus.

I am glad that the Council highlighted the importance of embracing diversity, and the need to serve those at the margins of society. In this increasingly diversifying Australian society, the Church must expand its capacity to accept differences of its membership and the society to maintain its contemporary relevance. The pandemic has intensified inequality in and beyond Australia, and it has hit the most vulnerable the hardest. The impact of widening inequality is profound and long lasting. I hope the Church continues to be engaged in serving the most vulnerable.



Assembly over: where to from here?

BY PATRICK MCARDLE

A plenary council is a relatively unusual event, so it is not surprising that for many there is considerable curiosity about what happens now. Surely, after a week long 'conference' there are some outcomes? Well, not really in this context.

Firstly, the process of the 5th Plenary Council has been designed with several phases: a long preparation seeking widely among the Church members for ideas and synthesising these into an Agenda; the assembly of the delegates who met from October 3 – 10; now we move to another step – seeking clarity from the views and discussions of the last week to develop proposals; then, next July, the second assembly where the proposals will

be considered, refined and voted on. After that, some proposals will become 'law' within the Australian Church, others will be ideas and requests forwarded to the Vatican for consideration because they would apply to the universal Church. In short, there is still a long way to go with this process – it is more like the long steady journey of the Camino rather than speedy airplane hop.

However, rather excitingly, at the same time as the Plenary Council is reaching a 'mid-point', the whole Catholic Church is embarking on a journey toward the 2023 Synod of Bishops on the very theme of synodality.

Synodality is an ancient concept but one which has been given new life by Pope Francis



who has said that this is the way of being Church in the third millennium. The term means, 'being on the road together'; however, Pope Francis has emphasised the 'on the road' rather than together. He is seeking an exploration of what God is calling the Church to be in this time and in our contexts.

On Sunday, beginning the formal process for the 2023 Synod, Francis outlined three

"Synodality is an ancient concept but one which has been given new life by Pope Francis who has said that this is the way of being Church in the third millennium. The term means, 'being on the road together.'"

key words for it: communion, participation and mission. Communion expresses the nature of Church – we are all in this together; our mission is to proclaim the message of Jesus to all peoples at all times – from other sources of Francis, a message of mercy and compassion; but his focus was on participation – "enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial

duty!" (Francis, Address for the Opening of the Synod 9 October 2021). For this reason every member of the Church in every parish and every diocese is being asked to assist with this Synod.

In his remarks Francis cited Fr Yves Congar (a Vatican II advisor) that there is not a need to create another Church, but to create a different Church, one that is open to the newness that the Holy Spirit is calling us to become. We are all being invited to take part in that journey of becoming.

The Plenary Council has reached an important point – now the Church universal is taking a similar journey.

• *Patrick McArdle is the Chancellor for the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn*