

Welcome to PlenaryPost

As some parts of the country return to something closer to normal, there's a sense of relief that the two assemblies of the Plenary Council -- previously postponed due to COVID-19 -- are locked in. We will gather in Adelaide in October 2021, 12 months later than we had planned, for the first assembly. The second assembly will be held in Sydney in July 2022.

On the feast of Pentecost last month, we reached another milestone by publishing the discernment papers on each of the six National Themes for Discernment. They're now [available for you to read and digest](#).

We've also been trying to adjust within the Plenary Council Facilitation Team to the loss of Fr Noel Connolly SSC, whom some of us have known for many years. Indeed, he's been a major contributor to the life of the Church in Australia and beyond for decades. He leaves a hole in our team and our hearts.

Catch up on those stories and lots more in this issue of PlenaryPost.

FacilitatorFocus:

Finding a new normal -- COVID-19 and the loss of Noel Connolly

by Lana Turvey-Collins



Now that we are moving into a new "normal", we are beginning to discover what "living with COVID-19" feels like in our day-to-day lives and throughout society. I have found it interesting to observe the various ways individuals, families and organisations have adapted to cope.

Of course, some have not been able to adapt, some have not survived and some have struggled deeply to cope. The poorest of the poor in our communities and those who've survived wars and trauma to arrive on our shores, those suffering family violence, poverty, hunger, loneliness or despair – those who Jesus named "the little ones" – are the ones who we must not lose sight of, nor turn away from. The little ones are who our Baptism calls us to be with, to accompany and to invite into our hearts.

As you may be aware, on June 6 our very dear friend and colleague Fr Noel Connolly SSC passed away. Fr Noel frequently reminded us that building God's Kingdom meant being uncomfortable and encountering the whole world around us; Pope Francis put it as having "the smell of the sheep".

The longer journey toward the assemblies of the fifth Plenary Council to be held in Australia gives each of us time to hear the voice of the little ones, to ensure

that the vulnerable, those who have "small" voices in our communities, are heard. And indeed it gives us time to be still, to truly receive the grace and impact of discernment as we continue to listen to the quiet whisper of the Spirit, guiding us with her wisdom.

Personally, no words can explain the love and admiration I have for Noel. He was my mentor, teacher, friend and guide. His friendship and his wisdom has shaped who I have become. I see the world through God's loving missionary eyes because of what Noel taught me by his own words and deeds. He concelebrated our wedding, blessed our first home and enriched our family journey beyond words.

I will be forever grateful to have been on the road to Emmaus with him. On the Plenary Council journey, he made our hearts burn within us and I know his spirit lives on in all of us. His membership and contribution on the facilitation team cannot be overestimated and he is deeply missed.

Goodbye our dear friend -- for now. May you be held in the palm of God's hand and truly experience the fullness of the Kingdom which you helped so many to glimpse here on earth.

Peace,

Lana

CuriosityCorner

We will address a new question in each e-newsletter. To catch up on previous editions, you can check out [the Plenary Council FAQ page](#). If you have a

question, email it to us and we will include it in future editions of **PlenaryPost**.

The question for this edition is...

Can I pray for the success of the Plenary Council?

Yes, you can. And we'd be most grateful if you did. The Plenary Council prayer was composed to coincide with the opening of the Plenary Council process at Pentecost 2018, but it will guide the three-year journey towards the final session in July 2022.

[You can access the prayer here in multiple formats.](#)

TalkTheology

When we return to our parishes

by Fr Noel Connolly RIP, Plenary Council Facilitation Team

Fr Noel Connolly wrote this article soon before his death on June 6.

What will we do when we finally get back to our parishes? I don't think anyone really knows, but I suspect it will not be business as usual. For many it will be a joy to return to the Masses they have missed so much; for others it may be a little more complicated.

Our lives have been turned upside down and we will have had months to think with only streamed Masses to accompany us. There is much to rethink and rebuild. There will be questions that we will only slowly come to appreciate.

That is why I believe that it is fortunate that the assemblies of the Plenary Council have been delayed. We will need time to come to grips with our new reality.

[Click here to read Fr Noel's full article.](#)

News&Notes



Dates locked in for Plenary Council assemblies

The two assemblies for the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia will be held in Adelaide from October 3-10, 2021, and in Sydney from July 4-9, 2022.

The new dates mean that the celebration of the Plenary Council has effectively moved 12 months from the original plan of a first assembly in October 2020 and a second assembly in June/July 2021.

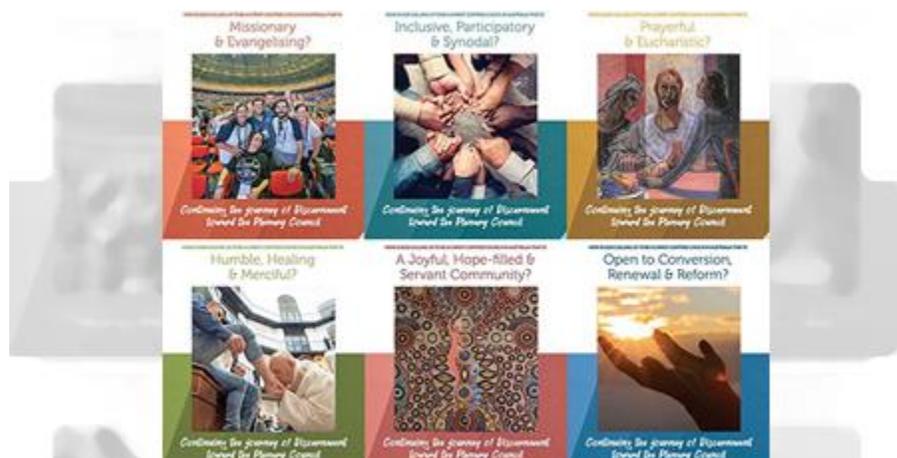
Plenary Council president Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB said the

confirmation of the specific dates will help in the formulation of a revised program of preparation for Council delegates, who were announced in March, and for the whole Catholic community.

Archbishop Costelloe said the bishops' preference to hold the second assembly in April 2022, announced last month, had to be revisited.

“The confluence of a number of events in April 2022, including the New South Wales school holidays, Easter in the Latin Rite and Easter in the Eastern Rite, meant that the plan to hold the second assembly then was unworkable,” he said.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)



Discernment papers released to help shape agenda

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB says the six discernment papers for the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia signify the latest milestone as the Church considers its present circumstances and discerns its future.

Six Discernment and Writing Groups, one each for the six national themes for discernment that emerged from the Council's Listening and Dialogue phase, were tasked with writing papers to bring some major themes and issues into focus.

"The papers are the fruits of communal discernment. The aim of the discernment process was to draw upon the lived faith and experiences of more than 220,000 Australians, the living tradition of the Church, sacred Scripture, papal teachings and additional insights from outside the Church," said Archbishop Costelloe, the Plenary Council president.

Archbishop Costelloe said the papers are an important contribution to the Church in Australia's ongoing discernment towards the Plenary Council.

"While not the final word on the six thematic areas which emerged from the Listening and Dialogue process, I encourage everyone to receive them in the spirit of faith and discernment with which they have been written," he said.

"They both invite and challenge us to continue to 'listen to what the Spirit is saying'."

[Click here to read more.](#)



Plenary Council, Church mourns Noel Connolly SSC

The Plenary Council Facilitation Team lost one of its key members this month, when Fr Noel Connolly SSC returned to God. Fr Connolly was a founding member of the Facilitation Team and internationally regarded for his work in the area of mission, in particular.

Among countless online tributes, the Plenary Council offered the following message.

"Noel touched countless lives, as he never tired of living his mission, through educating, teaching, discerning and persevering despite sickness and all odds," the post said.

"He was a dear and dedicated friend to all of us and we will miss him dearly."

Fr Connolly served for almost six years as regional director of the St Columbans Mission Society for Australia and New Zealand. Confrere Fr Jim Mulroneo said of Fr Connolly: "He loved the world and loved people."

“He believed in the bounty of the blessings received from investing in the truth and, above all, he loved God, the trace of whose finger in the arena of human affairs he spent a lifetime discerning,” Fr Mulroney wrote.

[Click here to read more about Fr Connolly.](#)



Dioceses profile their Plenary Council delegates

Following the announcement of the delegates for the Plenary Council a couple of months ago, a number of local publications and communications offices have profiled some of their diocesan selections.

In Brisbane Archdiocese, Albany Creek youth coordinator Tom Warren says he plans to ensure the voice of young Catholics is heard at the Council assemblies.

And while he said jokingly, he may have been picked because he was known to be “noisy”, he wanted to make sure young people were not viewed as “just

noisy”.

“I want to show that the youth do care about these things,” he said.

“I remember on my first (Plenary Council) session I was very sceptical on the process.

“But my first experience was hearing Archbishop Mark Coleridge saying we needed to be bold, we need to speak out, we need to hear what the Spirit’s saying... after that I came away inspired and wanting to be part of the process and really put my back behind it and really get into it.”

[Click here to read more about Tom Warren.](#)

In Maitland-Newcastle Diocese, Bernadette Gibson said she feels a "great sense of responsibility that I am just representing every average parishioner and trying to make sure that their voice is there".

Ms Gibson will represent her diocese alongside Bishop Bill Wright, vicar general Fr Andrew Doohan and Helen Belcher.

“Since the nomination I had just been doing a lot of praying and just saying, if the Holy Spirit wants me there, then I'll be open to that,” Ms Gibson said.

“I keep saying I feel very humble but I really do, plus I feel a great sense of responsibility.”

[Click here to read more about Ms Gibson's story.](#)



New Bishop of Sale appointed

Msgr Greg Bennet has just been announced as new Bishop of Sale, the diocese that covers most of southeastern and eastern Victoria.

Msgr Bennet has held significant leadership and ministry roles in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, including in the ongoing formation of priests and as a former director of the Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation.

As the new Bishop of Sale, Msgr Bennet will be a delegate to the Plenary Council. It's not yet known when he will be ordained bishop.

[Click here to read more.](#)



Vatican II and the Plenary Council of Australia

A theologian and expert on ecumenical councils says the Church in Australia has a chance to take up some of the key opportunities the Second Vatican Council created for the universal Church.

Fr Ormond Rush, an associate professor at the Australian Catholic University, recently published a book on Vatican II, saying it's a Council "that wants to be more pastoral and grounded in people's lives".

He said greater roles for lay people, especially women, was a discussion point at Vatican II and will likely be so at the Plenary Council.

"We've got a long way to go, and hopefully there'll be a listening to what many of the people in putting their submissions to the (Plenary) Council have highlighted – that we need greater participation of women at all levels of the Church," he said.

[Click here to read more from The Catholic Leader.](#)



Church events over the coming weeks

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday: The Catholic Church in Australia will this weekend mark Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, which usually also marks the start of NAIDOC Week -- postponed until later in the year because of COVID-19. While the Church typically celebrates the event locally, restrictions due to the pandemic mean there will be a livestreamed national Mass this Sunday morning from St Francis Xavier's Cathedral in Adelaide. [Find out more here.](#)

Sea Sunday: Sea Sunday is a chance for the Church to recognise and financially support the work of Catholic chaplains who support those who work on the oceans, including container ships and cruise ships. Pastoral care during the pandemic has changed and, in some ways, become more important than ever. The Church this year marks 100 years of the Apostleship of the Sea ministry. Sea Sunday 2020 falls on July 12. [Click here to learn more and to donate.](#)

National Catholic Men's Gathering: The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference was set to hold its inaugural National Catholic Men's Gathering in July, but postponed the event in April and planned to hold the gathering in July 2021. Some aspects of the event will now proceed using digital technology, with a range of resources to be published on August 15, the Feast of Our Lady

of the Assumption. [Click here to find out more.](#)

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