

Plenary Council 2020: Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Plenary Council?

A Plenary Council is the highest formal gathering of all local churches in a country. A Plenary Council, or synod, can discuss and legislate on a wide range of issues, including matters of faith, morals and discipline. The last time a plenary council was held in Australia was in 1937 and prior to that in 1885, 1895 and 1905. [Read more >](#)

Why are we having a Plenary Council in Australia?

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has identified that, 'The circumstances of the Church in Australia in our time, including the patterns of change that are evident within the community of the Church, the issues confronting the Church in modern multicultural and secular Australia, the increase in entrusting responsibility for and leadership of the Church's mission to laity, and even the changing face of the Episcopate, prompt the Church to review, analyse, and discern the signs of the times, to listen anew to the Spirit, and to chart its course into the future.' Accordingly, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) has decided to celebrate a Plenary Council for the Church in Australia in 2020. [Read more >](#)

What is a Synodal Church?

Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) identifies a synodal church as a church 'which listens, which realises that listening 'is more than simply hearing.' (EG, 171) 'It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth.'

When will the Plenary Council take place?

Preparation for the Plenary Council will take place over a period of three years. The Plenary Council will be celebrated in 2020 across two sessions, in October 2020 and May 2021.

The national timeline is as follows:

2018: "Year of Listening" (local listening and dialogue sessions and data compilation)

June 2018 - Ash Wednesday 2019: Listening and Dialogue Phase

2019: "Year of Discerning" (summary reports from 2019 written up as agenda for 2020)

2020: "Year of Proposing" (two Plenary Council sessions Oct 2020 and May 2021, at which proposals will be voted on)

Who can be part of the Plenary Council process?

All Catholics are invited to be part of the process that leads to the two Plenary Council sessions.



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

**FREQUENTLY
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Plenary Council 2020

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Who will attend the Plenary Council sessions?

All bishops must attend and it is thought that there will also be a presence of lay people, priests and religious. [Read more >](#)

What is happening now?

All Catholics are invited to participate in local 'listening and dialogue' sessions from June 2018 – Ash Wednesday 2019 (6 March).

What are the listening and dialogue sessions?

The Plenary Council Facilitation Team has prepared a Listening and Dialogue guide to facilitate the process. [Read more >](#)

At the end of the listening and dialogue process, participants are invited to upload their feedback to the Plenary Council 2020 question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* [WATCH ONLINE: Fr Kevin Lenehan talks about Listening and Discernment >](#)

Who can participate in the listening and dialogue sessions?

Every community in every parish, Catholic primary and secondary schools, Catholic agencies, religious institutes and ecclesial movements are invited to participate. In addition, where possible we are encouraged to reach out to as many people in the Catholic community as possible to enable all to offer a response to the Plenary question: *What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?*

Where did the Plenary Council 2020 question come from?

The question has been carefully discerned by the Plenary Council 2020 facilitation team and approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Who are the people involved in the Plenary Council 2020?

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has appointed a national facilitator, Lana Turvey-Collins, who is assisted by a national facilitation team and an executive committee with representatives from around Australia.

The members of the Melbourne Plenary Council Working Group are:

- Fr Brendan Reed (Chair)
- Cathy Jenkins (Director, AOFE and Diocesan Coordinator for the Plenary Council 2020)
- Tiffany Davis (Assistant Director, AOFE)
- Jacqui Giuliano (AOFE)
- Tina Mattei (Archdiocese of Melbourne Communications)
- Kevin Meese (Catholic Missions and connected via the facilitation team)
- Fr Mark Reynolds (PP)
- Mary Ryan (AOFE)
- Fr Hien Vu (PP)
- Paul Zammit (Catholic Care)