

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NATIONAL THEMES FOR DISCERNMENT OPENS NEXT PHASE FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

The Plenary Council 2020 moves into its next phase of preparation today with the announcement of the National Themes for Discernment that emerged from a historic process of listening to the voices of more than 222,000 people.

Between May 2018 and March 2019, almost 17,500 submissions, from individuals and groups of all sizes, addressed the Plenary Council's central question: "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"

Over several days of listening to what the people of God said, with intense moments of prayer and discernment, the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council and its Executive Committee, joined by the Facilitation Team, considered what people were longing for. Six National Themes for Discernment emerged.

"The National Centre for Pastoral Research was able to pinpoint more than 100 recurring subject areas from those 17,500 submissions," said Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, president of the Plenary Council.

"In some ways, those subject areas described what one might call 'the messy reality' of Catholic life in Australia today. The voices of the faithful help all of us to understand something of the historical experience and the current reality of the Catholic Church in Australia.

"We worked to discern what people were yearning for as we move into this next stage of preparing for the Plenary Council."

Archbishop Costelloe said there was a clear desire expressed for the Church to renew herself and focus on the person of Jesus Christ.

"Accordingly, the six National Themes for Discernment flow from that primary goal of being a Christ-centred community of people," he explained.

The six National Themes for Discernment invite people to reflect, to pray and to consider how God is calling the People of God to be a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is:

- Missionary and Evangelising
- Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal
- Prayerful and Eucharistic
- Humble, Healing and Merciful
- A Joyful, Hope-Filled and Servant Community
- Open to conversion, Renewal and Reform.

Plenary Council facilitator Lana Turvey-Collins said many topics relate to one or more of the National Themes for Discernment and this next stage of preparation - "Listening and Discernment" - is a time of prayerful consideration of the "big" questions that have been raised by the faithful.

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“The emergence of the National Themes for Discernment is an important moment in our journey towards the Plenary Council. It is an expression of the sense of the faith from the faithful and, from this, we can proceed in our discernment of what the Spirit is saying to us in Australia,” Ms Turvey-Collins said.

Part of that progression will take place later this month, when the Australian bishops gather for a retreat prior to their *Ad Limina Apostolorum* visit in Rome.

Archbishop Costelloe said: “We will take the opportunity to reflect carefully on the National Themes for Discernment and share our reflections and conclusions with the Plenary Council’s Facilitation Team and the Executive Committee, based on our own prayerful discernment and pastoral experience.”

Ms Turvey-Collins said those reflections and conclusions will be supplemented by a period of several months, beginning in August, when people across the country will again be asked to engage locally with the Plenary Council process.

“This discernment process will involve establishing working groups for each National Theme for Discernment. People in faith communities across Australia will also be called to participate locally in their own communal Listening and Discernment encounters,” she said.

“The fruits of what is discerned during this time will shape the agenda for the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.”

More information on the National Themes for Discernment can be found on the re-launched Plenary Council website: www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au