

## **DISCERNMENT PAPERS HELP SHARPEN FOCUS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL**

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'."

Each paper provides a reflection on some elements of the relevant pastoral reality, articulates a theological vision, outlines a number of challenges to be overcome, suggests prioritised questions to be answered and develops some proposals for change.

They will be foundational to the next stage of discernment toward the Plenary Council - the development of the working paper, or *Instrumentum Laboris* - and ultimately the agenda for the Council assemblies.

Professor Renee Kohler-Ryan, who was chair of the group that reflected on the theme of "Conversion, Renewal and Reform", said the members of the group agreed on which issues were important, but not necessarily how the Church could address them pastorally.

"The paper reflects this tension," she said. "Inevitably, readers will wish that we gave some easy answers. That wasn't really our job, though. Instead, we wanted to point out areas and questions for the delegates to the Plenary Council to pray, discuss and respond.

"Our paper is really a prayerful request for delegates to listen to each other and to respond to Christ's call for ongoing personal and communal conversion, renewal and reform."

Peter Grace, chair of the "Missionary and Evangelising" group, said its discernment paper "names the challenging realities we face as a Church in Australia in the 21st century".

"It is a call to action for God's people, particularly those entrusted with making decisions that set the course to be followed by the Church in Australia," he said.

"I hope that people will read and reflect on the paper with open minds and open hearts and will be stirred by the Holy Spirit to be agents of mission and evangelisation."

[Click here to access the six thematic papers.](#)