

# Toward a transparent, inclusive and humble church

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## Plenary INSIGHT

A Daily Blog



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### Transparency essential for next steps of Plenary Council process

The Plenary Council (PC) is now entering a new phase. The first assembly has been completed and another nine-month journey has begun. The second assembly will be held in Sydney from 4-9 July 2022. The Catholic community and the 277 active Plenary Council members are now reduced to interested onlookers.

It is up to the Plenary Council authorities and the Australian bishops to publish in full the proceedings of the first assembly. This large document has recently been completed and sent to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) for consideration at its November 9-12 plenary meeting. Quick publication should be a high priority given the appetite in the Catholic community for more information about the proceedings.

No one, including Council members, has a clear idea of how the development of the papers for the July 2022 Assembly will take place, although we do know that it will occur from 18 October 2021 to 4 February 2022. The process should be clarified immediately. What is known is that the Steering Committee will continue to operate and that it will be joined by a Drafting Committee. But the latter body is yet to be activated. There is talk of the Periti group (the expert advisers) meeting monthly to consider the role they might play in the ensuing months.

This is the context for two further developments. The first is the parallel but separate Australian consultation for the next Synod of Bishops, scheduled for October 2023, which was launched by Pope Francis when the Plenary Council was concluding. The theme is "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission".

Catholics are invited to make online submissions to a new portal which has been set up, with the national coordinator being Dr Trudy Dantis, director of the National Centre for Pastoral Research of the ACBC. Dr Dantis has played an important role in the Plenary Council as her centre produced the summary of the Plenary Council submissions and she herself was a member of the four-person group which produced the Plenary Council Working Document (*Instrumentum Laboris*).

This new consultation (17 October-12 December) will inevitably overlap the Plenary Council process. It might possibly strengthen it through a double dose of synodality; but it is more likely that it will confuse matters. Are Australian Catholics ready to again participate enthusiastically in a church consultation process? Many will feel hurt by the cavalier way in which their 17,500 submissions in 2018-19 were ultimately disregarded by the Plenary Council authorities in the preparation of both the Working Document and the subsequent Agenda Questions.

Once again there will be a danger of dilution of submissions made in good faith. In this instance submissions will initially be considered at the diocesan level before being fed into a national process to produce a national-level Australian report. If the Catholic community is to be convinced that this second example of walking together can be trusted, then it would be wise for church authorities to provide some details about how and by whom diocesan and national reports will be produced. Otherwise, the community might feel once bitten twice shy.

The second further development, initiated by South Australian Catholics for an Evolving Church, is the lay-led Synod now planned for May 2022, prior to the Second Plenary Council Assembly. Any community engagement with the Plenary Council, such as this lay synodal initiative, must now also take into account the likely impact of the official Synod of Bishops consultations. The themes will almost certainly be similar. Indeed, it is highly likely that most new submissions will rework ideas and proposals previously presented in the context of the Plenary Council. The Catholic community must decide whether to engage on two official fronts or to continue to concentrate its attention on the Plenary Council.

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