



## Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst

### MEDIA RELEASE

Date: 4 October 2021

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### **Subject: Catholics working to create better Church and respond to the 'Cry of the Earth and Cry of the Poor'**

The Catholic Church in Australia has been gearing up for the First Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council, which is taking over the next six days. 278 Members from Catholic Communities across the country are gathering online and in COVID-safe hubs to develop concrete proposals to create a more synodal, Christ-centred Church, which not only focusses on internal issues, but also responds to “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

The Members for the Diocese of Sandhurst include Bishop Shane Mackinlay, Fr Joe Taylor EV, Fr Brian Boyle EP, Ms Cathy Jenkins and Ms Ruth Lawlor. With the exception of Shepparton member Fr Jo Taylor, will join online using the Bishop’s office in Bendigo as a hub.

The Plenary Council is significant and is considered the most authoritative gathering of the Catholic Church in Australia. This will be the first such gathering in Australia since 1937. Members of the Plenary Council, represent the voices of Catholic communities across Australia. They will consider sixteen questions which were developed using input from 17,457 submissions from over 222,000 people during the Listening and Dialogue Phase of the Plenary and formed in to six themes in the subsequent Listening and Discernment Phase.

The structure of the Church, formation, co-responsibility, the role of women, inclusivity, ecumenical relationships, the learning from First Nations Australians, environmental issues, tackling poverty, and healing the wounds of abuse, (which will be given more time than any other) are all topics on the table.

When seeking answers to the sixteen questions, members are using a Spiritual Conversation Process, in which they pray for an inner freedom to truly engage with the process of intentional speaking and intentional listening to create an environment in which genuinely spiritual conversations can take place.

Expert advisers, ‘periti’ have been engaged to provide additional support and to nourish and deepen the existing pool of knowledge amongst the members.

Members will gather online as a full group after a streamed Mass each morning, then the work of discernment will take place in smaller groups of 10-30 people. In July 2022 Members will gather in Sydney for the Second Assembly the Plenary Council.



Earlier Bishop Mackinlay, Bishop of Sandhurst and Vice-president of the Plenary Council, said that over the week First Assembly members will “... spend the week planting the seeds for renewing the Church for mission ... (and) create a plan for the nine months between the assemblies, allowing those seeds to germinate, with the work of the members complemented by the prayers, discernment and input of the People of God in Australia.”

The Plenary was opened on Sunday 3 October with Mass celebrated at St Mary’s Cathedral Perth, by Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, Bishop of Perth and President of the Australian Plenary Council. In his Homily, Bishop Costelloe said:

“... perhaps the most important thing God is asking of us at this time is to return the Church to Christ and return Christ to the Church. What has always been true in theory and in principle urgently needs to become true in the day-to-day experience of everyone who encounters us. We must become, even more than we are already, a community of true disciples.”

As part of the Plenary Programme, Bishop Shane Mackinlay, celebrated Mass at St Kilian’s Church Bendigo this morning, on the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi, (4 October). He said we can look to St Francis, the Saint who so loved creation and those living in poverty to inspire the work of the Fifth Plenary Council.

“During this Plenary Council, we too are seeking to rebuild Christ’s Church, responding in a very concrete way to Pope Francis’ repeated call for us to become a more synodal church: a Church committed to journeying together in reciprocal listening to one another, listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, and most importantly listening to the Holy Spirit; a Church which gives witness to the Christian vision of community, participation, solidarity and joint responsibility,” said Bishop Shane in his Homily.

Bishop Mackinlay connected the life of St Francis and the recent teaching of Pope Francis, including in his encyclical letters *Laudato Si’* (‘Praise Be to You’ on Care for Our Common Home) and *Fratelli Tutti* (‘Brothers and Sisters All’).

“The work of renewing our Church and being more faithful to the mission entrusted to us requires that we always bear in mind not only the needs of our Church life and structures, but also the needs and challenges being faced by all our sisters and brothers, and our responsibilities to the common home that we are entrusted with caring for,” he said.

“As St Francis was called to rebuild Christ’s Church, may we during this Plenary Council be inspired, encouraged, and renewed by his vision and commitment, to turn again towards all our sisters and brothers, as stewards together of God’s extraordinary creation. In this way, may we in this time work to ‘create a more missionary, Christ-centred Church in Australia’.”

To find out more about the Plenary Council and the questions being discerned go to:  
[www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)

Bishop Shane Mackinlay is available for comment.



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Photograph courtesy of : Diocese of Sandhurst

Suggested photo caption: *Mass celebrated by Bishop Shane Mackinlay celebrated on Monday 4 October, was streamed nationally. Plenary Members from across the country are logging in for daily Mass and the daily assemblies of the First Assembly of the Plenary Council from 3-10 October.*

Further resources and references: