

7-11-2022

Plenary Impressions of the 5th Plenary Council of Australia

Angela McCarthy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McCarthy, Angela. "Plenary Impressions of the 5th Plenary Council of Australia." *Pastoral Liturgy* 53, no. 1 (2022): 1-13.
<https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy/vol53/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pastoral Liturgy by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact researchonline@nd.edu.au.



Plenary Impressions of the 5th Plenary Council of Australia By Angela McCarthy

These impressions were recorded each day of the Council as a way of capturing the action and mood of such a major synodal event for the Catholic Church of Australia. They were sent out widely by email and included on the Catalyst for Renewal website during the time of the Council: <https://catalystforrenewal.org.au/uncategorised/angela-mccarthy-diary-pc-a2/>

Plenary Impressions Sunday 3 July 2022

Today is a furiously wet and wild winter day in Sydney but there is plenty of warmth in the collegiality of the members gathering in hotels in College Street Sydney. We are in good accommodation and I appreciate the studio room with a little kitchenette! I've spent time today re-reading all the Statutes, handbook, and the final copy of the Framework of Motions which is the material that we will begin work on tomorrow.

Tonight we celebrated the opening Mass at the McKillop Centre in North Sydney followed by a very noisy and happy drinks and finger food session. So many familiar faces and so many people that we have got to know online last year but now meet face to face. The feeling was very positive and with a sense of getting started and getting the work done for a better Church. The homilist tonight was Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green from the diocese of Wilcannia Forbes. Very apt as it was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday and he spoke well of his relationship with First Nations people. He was also very funny and that warmed us up. The music and liturgy were of course excellent and a real sense of unity as we all spoke and sang with one voice. We need to be at the venue at 8am tomorrow morning ready to go.

A recent webinar with a conversation between Sr Joan Chittister and John Warhurst has continued to hold inspiration for me. We have been asked to do a sacred act for the Church. Sacred in that it is the work of the Holy Spirit and we are to work hard to rebuild the Catholic Church in Australia. We need to seek the wisdom revealed in our spiritual conversations and have the 'courage of conscience along with the conscience to be courageous'. Joan also reminded us that in every age that is dying there is a new age coming to life. We want to be part of that newness and life. In the dark times the eye begins to see the light with the help of the Holy Spirit. And finally, as Teilhard de Chardin said, only one task is worthy of our efforts and that is to construct the future.

In Pope Francis' recent Apostolic Constitution, *Praedicate evangelium*, there is an emphasis on the role of the baptised where he has made it clear that governance within the Catholic Church does not require ordination, it requires baptism. Therefore, lay people are recognised as being able to enter governance at the highest levels. The way in which leadership in our schools, health systems and Catholic welfare associations are run is a ministerial work. This is not less than anything that is led by someone who is ordained for in our baptism we enter into the priesthood of Christ. That does not mean power, but it means that we must be Christ centred and missionary in everything that we do. The weather here is a challenge and my new umbrella blew inside out tonight and is now useless so the raincoat will have to suffice! Hopefully tomorrow will be a little more moderate as we walk down College Street to the Cathedral College.

Many blessings on you all and please hold the whole Plenary Council in your prayers.
Angela

Plenary Impressions Monday 4 July 2022

Today was the beginning of the hard work for us all and the rain diminished so that we got down to the Cathedral College quite dry but on the way back this evening the fast and furious rain has soaked my boots which I hope will dry by the morning. We don't get this kind of rain in Perth so it is novel and wet! One of the members at our table was late this morning because his train from Western Sydney was stopped due to flooding on the tracks and he had to come the rest of the way by bus in dreadful traffic.

And so, to the work of the Council. Today we began by finding our tables and getting to know our companions with whom we will share the week. The only one known to me at our table is Bishop Gerry Holohan of Bunbury. Next step was to ensure that all the technology was working, and it took quite some time for the numerous assistants to sort out those among the 250+ people who found it difficult. By 8.30 we were all set and began in prayer. It was a wide-ranging prayer that spoke of the state of our Church today and called us to emphasise the role of the Holy Spirit and used the meeting between God and Moses at the burning bush as a scriptural base. Archbishop Timothy's opening address did likewise and I really need to read it again when it is published. The call is for each of us to make a real difference by listening and praying and speaking.

The next hour and a half was taken up with procedural matters where we had to vote to accept, or not, the various things required of the Council. This was done by holding up red or green cards and was efficiently completed. Morning tea enabled us to catch up with other members and it was very good to be able to greet the members who we got to know online last October. Much better face to face!

The session before lunch was for spiritual conversation and it took our table a while to sit comfortably with each other in the space. Our discernment was in regard to the two of the eight parts that are our agenda for the week. Part 1 is *Reconciliation: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts* and we were presented with 3 motions with amendments for us to consider. Seated beside me is an Aboriginal woman from Darwin and it was indeed wonderful to have her with us sharing her story of faith and her convictions about the future. The bag that I am using I bought at New Norcia and she knows the family of the woman who designed it – a lovely connection. The second part for today's work was about healing in the Church and the sexual abuse crisis: *Choosing Repentance – Seeking Healing*.

The text we are working from, *Motions and Amendments*, can be seen on the website: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/> In our spiritual conversations we listen, pray and speak about what we hear in our prayers as a way of discerning what the Spirit wants for the Church in Australia. This is not easy and it takes a while to work together and it takes considerable concentration and energy. If it emerges that there is an amendment that the whole table wants then we have to email it through before the end of the session. Very pressured! Following a long lunch break (where I popped over to David Jones to buy a new raincoat and umbrella since mine blew inside out last night) we moved into the voting. There are two kinds of votes, consultative and deliberative. The members who have a consultative vote, which is most of us, vote in the afternoon and then the bishops have overnight to pray about it and they have their deliberative vote in the morning. It is surprising how long this process takes as each amendment has to be voted on and then the completed motion. The results of our voting and that of the bishops in the morning will be available on the website at 1p.m. tomorrow.

The first section that we voted on was in regard to support for NATSICC and its recommendations as well as the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We had Aboriginal people speak to us before these votes and it too is about healing the past and ensuring that our future is different. The next section about the healing needed for those affected by the sexual abuse crisis I found very difficult. It was

accompanied by a ritual of song and prayer of lament that was beautifully presented by young musicians and readers. It was heart rending but puts us all in a place where we want to do better. There were speakers from the floor who spoke of the effects of abuse and its ongoing disablement of people and relationships. The sense that I discerned from those around me is that the vast majority of us agree that God's compassion and mercy shown in all we do is a necessary component of our future. This evening our daily Mass is to be celebrated by the Ukrainian bishop in his rite before he flies back home tomorrow. Our prayer is in solidarity with them all.

There is so much to pray about and so much to do! This Council will not solve every problem and will not be what everyone would like to see but my personal sense of it tells me that it will begin changes that can then develop into other things and in the long run it will make a very good difference to our Church in Australia. It already has energised many other groups to form and have their say and examine who we are now and who we want to be in the future. With the continual gifts of the Spirit we will make a difference.

Many blessings on you all and your support
Angela McCarthy

Plenary impressions Tuesday 5 July 2022

Sydney weather was kinder to us today with less rain and wind. Still very cold and wet though. One of the members on our table went through each of the weather reports for the various places where our members belong and the only place with remotely pleasant weather was Darwin with 24 degrees and sunny. Everywhere else, even Cairns, was cold and wet.

Our day began as usual in prayer and Anne Frawley Mangan and her team did an excellent job of leading us in sung and spoken prayer. The intention is to help us to focus prayerfully on the work of the day and it certainly had that effect with its creative dimension and excellent music. The first session is about accepting the minutes (which you have to read between 10pm and 8am) with any corrections being submitted by 10pm. It is a little tedious in some ways but very necessary. Then we had the deliberative vote by the bishops which was done on hard copy and counted by hand. That took some time, and the expectation was that we would remain in prayerful silence. Mmmm. That didn't quite work all the time! A couple of funny *faux pas* by the chairperson had us in a bit of a garrulous frame of mind. The results of that voting were published at 1pm this afternoon. It felt good to have some of the work passed and applause was heartfelt. We also have the Periti (experts) speak on various topics and today we heard from Fr Patrick McInerney SSC on Part Three and Sr Clare Condon SGS who spoke on Part Four. Both were excellent and helped to focus us. Morning tea encouraged lots more conversation and then we had to settle to hard work.

Serious hard work was involved today in our spiritual conversation as we worked on Part Three, *Called by Christ – Sent Forth as Missionary Disciples* and Part Four, *Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men*. It is sometimes hard to keep in mind that we are now in a distinct part of the process that does not require new material but the examination and preparation of the final materials that will then be formed into a document to go to Rome. Once we all get together at our table, now much more at ease with each other, there is the temptation to recreate the wheel but that is not our job. The spiritual conversation was easier today with each of us taking the time in silent prayer first, then spending 3 minutes speaking about what we heard the Holy Spirit saying in our prayer and how we feel. Some very different voices of the Spirit were heard and it took some time for us to reconcile our direction. The silence between each speaker and the silent prayer in preparation have required considerable effort on my part because my mind gets so excited it goes off on tangents!! What we have to focus on is whether we support the motions and the overall

direction of whether the motions in question will support our direction of bringing our Church in Australia towards a more Christ-centred and missionary focus.

The spiritual conversation around Part Four was even more difficult as there were diametrically opposed views on the place of women in the Church. I found it a challenge to remain silent and only speak for the allotted three minutes particularly when some of the clerics were so different in their point of view to me. The sticking point was the ordination of women to the diaconate. On our table there are three women, two bishops, one layman and three priests so the women are struggling for a voice at times. We are not going to agree on some things so it was a matter of concentrating on the motions and what they will contribute to the mission of the Church. Very difficult!

After a very nice lunch, we went back in for the voting. During lunch the drafting committee worked feverishly on the further amendments that were submitted. We get 15 minutes to do that before lunch! A touch of pressure there!! There were extra motions then to vote on which is a general vote meaning yes or no and all members, including bishops vote on the amendments. The consultative vote is for the final materials and the bishops don't vote on that until tomorrow. In between the votes people can offer personal interventions on the motion in hand and that has to be sent to the secretary by 10pm the night before. The Secretary, Fr David Ransom, then has to schedule them and finally sent them out before midnight. He will certainly need a rest after this week. I was surprised at some of the motions in Part Four that got rejected!! There is much to read and listen to constantly and while the voting is taking place we are meant to remain in prayerful silence – not always easy... We concluded after 5pm and then went across to the cathedral for Mass and then back into the hall for an ecumenical dinner. The Greek Patriarch was there and he led us in prayer, and a leader within the Church of Christ spoke to us about Christian unity and he was excellent. It was a lovely dinner and Fr Patrick McInerney sat with us and he was fabulous to talk to about interfaith dialogue. But now I'm ready for bed! This is strenuous but exciting and very challenging at the same time. The Spirit is working overtime and She's very good!!

Many blessings
Angela McCarthy

Plenary impressions Wednesday 6 July

Early this morning I read many of the personal interventions, particularly in regard to the third form of the Rite of Reconciliation, as well as the minutes, in order to be prepared for the day. Not all of them will be read out to the assembly but they are all recorded as Acts of the Plenary and therefore remain part of the material and among them there is a great diversity of opinion. The motions about lay preaching are controversial and we will see what will happen there. **However, nothing could have prepared me for the devastation of this morning's deliberative vote!!** The bishops rejected the entire section, Part 4 *Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men*. To say many were aghast is an understatement and Bishop Holohan with us at our table was, like many others, shaking his head and wondering what went wrong.

There are three ways to vote: placet (I agree), placet juxta modum (I agree with qualifications) and non placet (I don't agree). There were 43 bishops voting and we needed 28 to agree but only 25 agreed and 10 voted to agree with qualifications and 8 dissented. A 2/3 majority vote of 'placet' is required. There was a definite uproar, and it was hard to know what to do next. We were asked to pray and speak with each other but that was near impossible for some of us. We adjourned for morning tea and there were many tears and hugs and all the bishops I spoke to it were as surprised and disturbed as many of the lay people. When we were meant to reassemble many of us, women and men, clergy, religious and lay, disrupted the Council by refusing to go to our seats and begin the

next session. There were talks from the floor and the disruption continued for some time until the Vice President of the Council, Bishop Shane MacKinlay, gave us options for a way forward. Eventually we all went back to our tables as the steering committee had met at morning tea and come up with a change of schedule. The Holy Spirit was being called upon big time throughout and someone even said that the fruits of the Spirit are peace and tranquillity – but not yet! This major disruption was a way to move the Council into a totally different frame of mind and become more mature in our deliberations and discernment. Thank you, Holy Spirit.

Scripture each day important and the morning's prayer, scripture and acknowledgment of country was so apt for what happened later, it was amazing. We sang "Holy Spirit come" as a response to much of the prayer and She did! She stirred us up and really made us look at everything differently. Our beautiful prayer and song was about creation and the gift of the spirit in country and how the Spirit moved to bring everything to creation. Through our heartbreak over the vote we had to move differently in this Council and work much harder. After we resettled, we were asked to pray silently for some time and then for everyone at the table to speak about what they thought had happened. Two of the men at our table were very reluctant but I reminded them that it was important that everyone was heard, whatever their point of view and so they spoke. It was difficult to say the least. At lunchtime there were two meetings. The bishops all met with the steering committee and there was a large gathering of other women and men in the library to find a way forward. The bishops decided not to use the 'placet juxta modum' even though it could not be removed. Another move forward was for the bishops to take another vote according to article 24.6 in the statutes that gave an option for reforming a vote. A motion was moved, and they all voted again and there were 42 who agreed, and one disagreed. Now we have a way forward. We spent the afternoon putting together suggestions of changes to Part 4 and the miracle was that everyone on our table, despite our differences, fully cooperated and contributed. I offered to write it up and it had to be emailed through to the secretary, Fr David Ranson, by 7pm. I have completed that now and cooked myself some bacon and eggs to have with a glass of wine so now I'm feeling better.

Tomorrow will have a rescheduled format which we will know in the morning. We are also reminded of our fragility because three members went down with COVID-19 yesterday and Archbishop Tim is quite ill. He came in for the bishops' meeting at lunchtime and spoke to the Council but needed to return to his hotel after that. He reminded us of our need for unity. Prayers needed for him and for the whole Council. By the end of the afternoon, we were all feeling a lot better but aware that the whole Council has now shifted to a different place and a different way of acting. The Holy Spirit has definitely been active in our midst. Not a day for the faint hearted though...

Peace to you all, please pray for the Council
Angela

Plenary impressions 7 July 2022

What a difference a day makes!! After the trauma of yesterday the Council seemed to completely reform today and there was much energy in the room and much goodwill. The Holy Spirit has completely re-energised and directed us in a different direction.

We began with prayer which seemed to be prophetic. The reading was from Matthew 7:25 Jesus taught the crowds, saying...'The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.' This Council is founded on the rock that is Christ and it will not fail. The prayer this morning, as with all the prayers and liturgy, had been prepared weeks ago but they were completely relevant – as it always the case! One of the comments made yesterday when we had to process what had happened about the bishops' vote on

Part 4 about equality for women and men, was that the 'placet juxta modum' vote that defeated Part 4 was described as 'manure'. We all know different names for that substance, but the effect is to make things grow and it is a rich image. This morning for our prayer when we arrived every table had on it what looked like manure!!! It was rich earth and for part of our prayer we were given seeds and asked to plant the seeds in the earth. It felt so strong as an image of what the Spirit was directing us to do. The use of creation images continued in word and song as well as the continued prayer of Francis of Assisi's Canticle of Creation. The acknowledgement of country was given by three women from Broome as well as their colleague, Adain. They had brought with them a message stick that was carefully painted, and Erica explained all the imagery which was very beautiful and rich with meaning specifically for the Council.

Because of the disruption yesterday we had to change our whole mode of operating so that we get through the business as required. Bishop Shane and the steering committee and writing committee had worked hard overnight and the explanation of the way forward was clear. We will be spending less time in discernment but more time working as a whole group. No interventions will be given in person, but they are all recorded in the Acts of the Council. It is important to read them before the day begins and they are all available to us online. Instead of all amendments being written up and then examined we went through each document and by a show of red or green cards we showed which parts of the document needed to be amended and then the writing was done during morning tea and lunch. The writing committee have done an incredible job, as has the secretariat and the steering committee. The minutes come in by 9pm and then corrections are sent in and they are back online before midnight. Mostly I read them in the early morning as I can't last until that late at night but copies are on the tables by 8.30. Because of yesterday's trauma and the way in which people spoke from the floor, the minutes were not available in full until all those who spoke had checked the content because someone was typing them up as they spoke and it is really important that what is recorded is accurate.

The contentious Part 4 of course is a concern and that was rewritten today and we were given hard copy just before we left the hall today. I have just read it and it is a greatly improved version. I feel quite moved by the way in which it has been recast. It uses the scriptural image of Mary the Mother of God as a model of discipleship which is important. What I wrote up from our table has been included. The various references and motions are much better expressed so I look forward to the bishops' vote tomorrow.

When votes are being taken it can be quite limiting as it takes time. Might I say, it can also be quite boring!! However, we now have much to cover so while the votes are taking place and being counted we get on with the reading and discussion. The table I am at has become rejuvenated and our conversations are open and supportive. Some had reservations about the section *Integral Ecology and Conversion for the Sake of our Common Home* but our conversation was so supportive that it became much easier to work through. Holy Spirit has really worked in the room and in our hearts. I'm so deeply encouraged now.

We also worked through the section on governance and voted. Again, the conversations were strong, productive and worthwhile. The new method of dealing with amendments works very well and Bishop Shane and his steering committee are to be commended on their flexibility and the way in which they allowed the Spirit to lead us forward.

The rain stopped today so it was mild enough for us to go up onto the roof to eat lunch. What a relief to get fresh air. We had another 4 cases of COVID in the room so I'm wearing a mask most of the time as are many others. Archbishop Tim is quite ill and did not come today. Hopefully he will be well enough tomorrow to be able to come for a while.

Tomorrow, we begin with 7.45am Mass because the end of the day might get a bit pressured and then we have our closing dinner. The closing Mass is at 10.30am on Saturday. Suddenly it seems like the week has flown by and yet only yesterday it felt like an eternity of pain. How strong is the Spirit among us – whether we like it or not. I will be in a podcast at 5.30 with two other members and Michael Kenny. That will be aired on the Plenary Council website. At the beginning of each day, we see a 5 minute video of the previous day and the clip shows the power of the disruption and there I am in the front looking formidable! The one the previous day showed me yawning during the Mass in the cathedral. These are simply the ways in which we live and have our being in a Council!! Our day concluded today with a further prayer and song from our Broome members. We once again were presented with the message stick and then they called on us all to lift our hands in blessing over each other while they sang a blessing song for us. Bishop Holohan standing next to me expressed it beautifully when he said that the experience brought him a strong feeling of peace. As I said, what a difference a day makes!!!

Blessings on you all and thanks for your prayers – I feel fully supported by them
Angela McCarthy

Plenary impressions Friday 8 July 2022

No-one could have imagined the direction of the Council and how we would have been directed today by the Spirit. Some of you will already have been onto the Plenary Council website to check the voting that was announced at 6.30pm AEST and discovered the good news. Part 4 and Part 5 were passed and there was only one exception for the whole work of the Council. Part 4 was completely rewritten yesterday and the four writers, Bishop Paul Bird, Professor Renee Kohler-Ryan, Sr Melissa Dwyer and Fr Richard Lennan, are to be commended because of their fidelity to the desires of the national consultation plus the tradition and then the earnest desires of the members of the Council. They were able to reorder and rewrite with the help of submissions from each table and the document was resoundingly passed by both the members and the bishops. There were still a couple of bishop dissenters but that is where we are in the Church.



The morning began in brilliant chilly sunshine with Mass at 7.45, fully sung with Archbishop Fisher as presider, and then we moved into the hard work of the day. Because we had lost time on Wednesday the reordering of the agenda reduced our time for discussion, but we didn't miss out on prayer time. The work was simply more efficient. We made more use of the red and green cards to see if there was a consensus in the room and where there wasn't then more discernment was given time. By this time those white wooden chairs were no longer very comfortable! Lot's of old bones in the room.

As I described to you yesterday there was fresh earth in the centre of the table into which we planted seeds. Miraculously they had sprouted some pansies and full bloom by this morning!! During the prayer we added water and the music and text fitted beautifully. We prayed the whole of St Francis' *Creation Canticle* which fitted perfectly. The whole movement of prayer was wonderful and led us into the day and made so much sense in relation to what we were doing. Our thanks again to the prayer and liturgy team, particularly Anne Frawley-Mangan and Sophie Morley. The mood today was even jocular at times and during the voting there was a few laughs to keep us going. We worked through Part 4 *Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men* and Part 6 *Formation and Leadership for Mission and Ministry*. We also had to vote on Part 5 *Communion in Grace: Sacrament to the Word*. When Part 4 was passed with only 1 bishop dissenting in regard to the introduction there was an audible breath out and then much applause. Of the other motions, the most dissention was 5 votes from the bishops so that was wonderful. The mood in the room was energised and fully cooperative. At our table we were all conscious of the change that was so incredible considering where we were on Wednesday morning. I was having a conversation with one of our members in Bunbury who was online just to keep her in touch with the feeling. As you can see in the picture below, the big screen at the end had all the online people. There were more and more of them as the COVID-19 cases increased. They formed two 'rooms' for discussion and discernment and made wonderful contributions. Note the white chairs which we will never forget. Today was the sad news that Sr Marion has now got COVID-19. She has led us through much of the online gatherings and she was very instrumental in the facilitation team.



There were film crews (on the left) for the live streaming, plus up on the stage the observers which included the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Balvo, Cardinal John Dew from New Zealand, Rev John Gilmore from the Council of Churches, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo from Myanmar plus the media. Really rather wonderful.

Part 5 *Communion in Grace: Sacrament to the World* was one of the lengthier sections and required some time. There were no personal interventions delivered because of the time imperative but in the new format one person from each table could speak. This is the only section that had one motion rejected and that was about canon 767 to ask Rome that lay preachers be allowed to preach in the Eucharistic assembly. The previous motion had asked for lay people to participate in the formal ministry of Preaching in the Latin Church and it was accepted. This particularly allows for all the lay people throughout Australia who preach in the absence of a priest. Another controversial section called for the Pope to consider where the third form of the Rite of Penance could be used in a more extensive way considering the particular needs in Australia. I heard from many people that this is deeply desired and from priests whose concern it is that they simply cannot get around all the places in regional areas that require the sacrament. It is also important for those who have been hurt by the Church but earnestly desire healing but cannot come face to face with a priest. Much work to be done.

Part 6 Formation and Leadership for Mission and Ministry had been processed yesterday but we needed to vote on it. All motions were accepted as amended and will make a difference, when implemented, to the formation of all the faithful, clergy and lay people. There was excitement about how this can improve our missionary focus.

As you can imagine this was all very intense work, but the day got lighter in spirit as we progressed. The voting was close to unanimous on many of the motions which was encouraging. As I've said before, this will not fix everything, but it will give us impetus for change and focus our resources on positive directions. It will not solve every problem or answer every prayer.

As the day wore on and we wore out, there was increasing jocularity. The final motions were about the implementation of the Fifth Plenary Council, the abrogation of decrees of the previous Plenary Council and the closing of the Council. That was very funny in the end because there was one dissenting bishop in regard to the closing! There was also a persistent invalid vote from the consultative members and for the closing motion there it was again, the invalid vote. There was a hearty laugh to accompany that announcement.

My deep admiration is for the secretariat who have only just recently sent through the minutes of today. Bishop Shane MacKinlay has been a superb leader. He has an extraordinary mind! When someone makes a comment or a suggestion for inclusion, he is immediately able to say 'but that is included back in section X in paragraph XX'. Very impressive. They all must be exhausted.

Most people got to go back to their hotel then until dinner began at 7pm but I was involved in a podcast until 6.30pm which is now on the website: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/> Scroll down until you get to #Listen to the Spirit.

The dinner was wonderful but most of us finished up by 9pm and I headed back here to write to you all and prepare for the final session tomorrow morning and then the closing Mass in the cathedral. At the dinner we each were given a place mat prepared by children in Catholic schools around Australia and a beautiful glass cross made by students from Prendiville College in Perth. They will be special treasures for me. For the next couple of weeks, I will be processing what has happened and feeling immensely grateful and privileged to have been part of a wonderful Council that will make a difference to our Church in Australia. My companions at dinner were Fr Frank Brennan SJ, Bishop

Eugene Hurley (Darwin), Bishop Ken Howell (Brisbane) and Archbishop Patrick O'Regan from Adelaide. We thoroughly enjoyed each other's company. Eugene Hurley and my husband John were close friends a long time ago, so it was good to catch up. Bishop Ken and Archbishop Patrick have also been to liturgy conferences that I have attended so it was good to catch up with them too and have a laugh. Frank Brennan's father, Sir Francis Gerard Brennan who was the 10th Chief Justice of Australia and who wrote the main judgement in the Mabo case, recently died so it was wonderful to hear all the details of the funeral. William Barton, a favourite classical musician of mine, played the didgeridoo and sang at the funeral.

Now it is time to call it a day and I am very grateful for all your prayers and support as this has made it possible. Thank you for your messages!

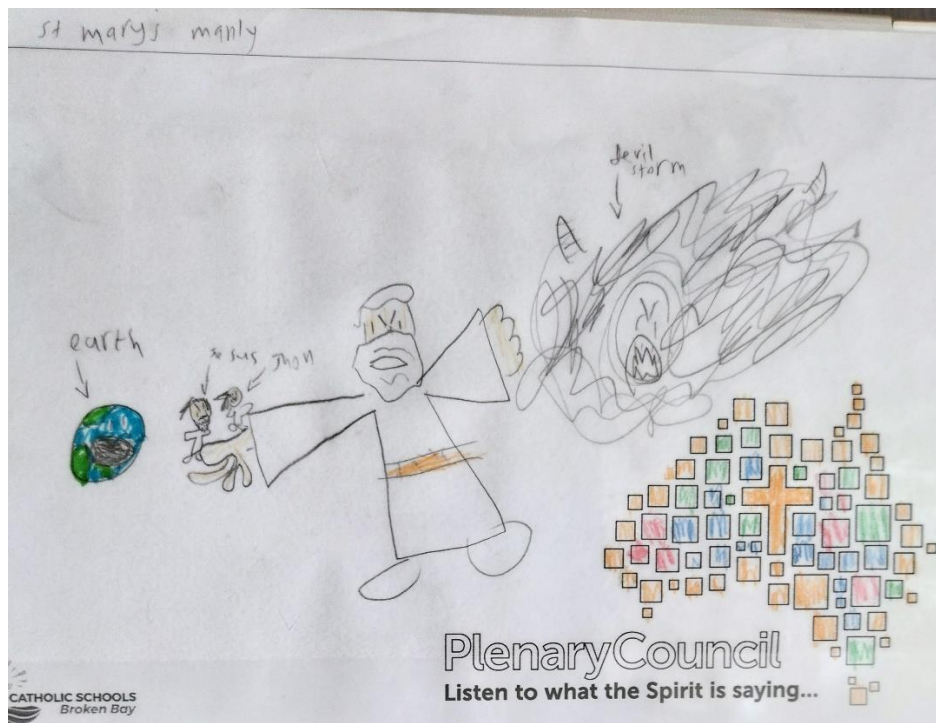
Blessings

Angela McCarthy

Plenary impressions 9 July 2022

This morning Sydney was bathed in glorious sunshine again. Quite symbolic when you consider the workings of the Council over this week. We'd been through a very dark storm and now through the graced moments of the Spirit we are out the other side and full of desire to go forward and make a difference for our Church in Australia through the work we have done this week.

At the dinner last night, we each had a placemat in front of us prepared by a child from a Catholic school. Here is mine by Jack who is 8 years old.



Jack has drawn the devil storm with Jesus holding it back from the world. How prophetic is Jack. I will write to him and thank him. We felt that storm on Wednesday, but Jesus' Spirit protected us from all harm. This morning the atmosphere in the room at 9am was clearly euphoric. We had survived the week, had formed some great motions that will now take us forward, had made new friends, good friends and worked together with old friends. Besides that, the introductory statements that will now be formed into decrees have profound theological bases from which we can work. Needless to

say, we are tired!! Below is what our candle looked like this morning! After Wednesday it had to be propped up with a tealight candle in the middle because it was so diminished. I love the symbol of the candle because it diminishes itself in order to give light and warmth. That is what happened to each member. We have become diminished because we have given our best during this week. It has been a true expression of synodality.



Our prayer this morning was quite simple because we were limited in time since the closing Mass was to begin at 10.30am. I was however, deeply moved by the acknowledgement of country, once again from an Aboriginal member. His last name is Walker because his family walked a lot of the country. He talked about how when you went to a new country you started a smoking fire and it would be seen and someone would come to welcome you. They would then advise on which direction you should go to avoid any sacred areas or families doing 'sorry time' after someone had died. He said you always do this with care, and care for those passing through your country because if anything happened to them you would be blamed. He suggested that Catholics are good at blaming and I have seen quite a bit of that on FaceBook this week which is completely counterproductive and ill informed.

He also talked about when he was sat down by an elder who drew three circles in the sand and named the natural world, the human world and the sacred. This helped him understand the Trinity; our God is a relationship that all of Creation mirrors. The business of the day was to approve two sets of minutes, examine the decrees from the canonical committee and approve by the straw poll. So good to see a room full of green cards raised by hand!



Then we accepted the final statement, again by straw poll. Now the materials will be fully put together then presented to the ACBC at their November meeting. They will then be sent to Rome for *recognitio* (review). Once they have been approved, they will return to Australia and there will be a six-month waiting period until we can begin implementation. Let's spend the year in prayer for the implementation and do what we can in the meantime!

There were observers there for the week and it was wonderful to hear them speak this morning. Our new Nuncio, Archbishop Charles Balvo, talked about how he is Peter in our midst and bore a message from Pope Francis. That connection with the Universal Church is strong. He also reminded us of the Emmaus story in Luke's gospel and how now we have to announce all of this to the world as the world is watching. He said he was also impressed with what we have achieved and wondered whether it would be possible in his own country. New Zealand Cardinal John Dew spoke with great admiration of what we have achieved and the example that we have set. The Rev John Gilmore, President of the National Council of Churches also wondered whether his church, the Church of Christ, would be able to achieve a Plenary Council. He was impressed with how the differences of each table were expressed in cooperation (after Wednesday!) and how every member was invested in this Council. Cardinal Charles Maung Bo from Myanmar also spoke with admiration and presented three magnificent tapestries from his people to be gifted to the main organisations that propelled the Plenary Council into action.

After Archbishop Timothy spoke briefly to close the assembly there was a standing ovation of quite some duration for him and for the end of the 5th Plenary Council of Australia! It felt very, very good. We then went over to the cathedral to celebrate Mass. It was a powerful moment. The music was excellent, of cathedral worth! Again, it felt good. We responded with one voice.

From the final statement of the 5th Plenary Council, we read: 'We have seen God at work in these days, comforting and disrupting in order to lead his people into a future of God's making. This has been a time of grace, and for that we give humble thanks. "May God who has begun the good work in us bring it to fulfilment" (Phil 1:6)'.

Once again, thank you all for your prayers that have held us over the past week. The four-year journey has come to a definitive point, but there is now much work to be done in the implementation so let's get to work.



Many blessings on you all and with gratitude for all your prayers of support.
Angela McCarthy