



MOST REVEREND TERENCE BRADY DD VG  
Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, Titular Bishop of Talattula

## AD CLERUM

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### **A Time to Reach Out Differently and the Plenary Council**

*“It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others.”* - Pope Francis, address, 27 March 2020. St Peter’s Square Extraordinary Blessing “Urbi et Orbi”

The announcements of the national delegates\* and then the postponement of the first assembly of the Plenary Council\*\* provides an insight as to how quickly the plans of the Australian Church for the Plenary changed because of the pandemic crisis the world is confronting. Our lives and those of our parishioners were almost transformed overnight. Many have sadly lost their jobs, and are now contemplating their future and that of their family; family life is being redefined, so that some are enjoying opportunities to revitalise and repair relationships, while other are facing significant challenges; our schools have changed to embrace the online world more fully and priests are adapting to adopt technology to reach out to their parishioners.

The delay in the first Plenary Council assembly also gives us an opportunity to consider how our local parishes will re - form once the intensity of COVID 19 passes. How can we build on the innovative responses of many parishes in the Archdiocese, where Mass has been made available regularly via the internet or beamed through to the lounge rooms of the faithful; the Rosary is being prayed using ‘Zoom’, ‘Microsoft Teams’, ‘Skype’ and other digital media platforms; and parishioners are being directed to podcasts and videos to help sustain them in this time of isolation?

We know that live-streamed Mass and prayer resources on the internet are not ideal. Our communion with one another is something we cannot replicate digitally. I am aware that priests have also used this time to connect personally and stay in touch with parishioners by phone, regular text messages and email; and by delivering meals to members of our community with ‘Meals on Wheels.’ I have no doubt that there are several other ways priests and parishioners have found to maintain connection with each other and the broader community, while still complying with the current restrictions on physical contact.

The Plenary Council process of dialogue and discernment that we have participated in over the past 18 months or so, as well as the twilight retreats initiated by the Sydney Plenary Council Working Group have served to demonstrate the power and devotion/commitment/dedication of a community coming together to pray, share and reflect.... but COVID 19 has forced us to find ways to be imaginative and innovative – to reach out to one another in a different way.



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The twilight retreats held towards the end of 2019 in the Northern, St George and City Deaneries were initiated in response to concerns about one aspect of faith life raised by many during the dialogue and discernment stages of the Plenary Council – the call for deeper spiritual formation. During this time of isolation, the Sydney Archdiocese Plenary Working Council Group has been considering ways to continue to respond to the impetus the retreats provided and to reach out to the faithful to help them in deepening their spiritual lives.

One way we believe this can be done is to build on the twilight retreats with the production of video podcasts that focus on spirituality and prayer, both to stimulate individual and family reflection. I am thankful that Sr Jo Brady, Head of Mission Caritas Australia, and Stephen Noone, also now working with Caritas (Stephen led our training for parish ambassadors) are assisting the Plenary Council Working Group in this regard. I will advise you once the podcasts are available and I hope that they will help you as you guide and lead members of your community. Thank you for your leadership during this challenging time and your work in reaching out to your communities, with a focus on what is most important and necessary to maintain at present – our relationship with each other, the well-being of our parish family and our active/genuine response to our parishioners' calls for ongoing spiritual nourishment.

\* <https://www.catholicweekly.com.au/sydney-announcesplenary-delegates/>

\*\* The bishops will consider proposals for an alternative timeline for the Council's two assemblies at their biannual meeting in May.

Bishop Terry Brady