

Toward a transparent, inclusive and humble church

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Plenary INSIGHT

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FACING UP FACE-TO-FACE

Welcome to my Second Assembly blog series. I head off to Sydney tomorrow morning. I expect many of my fellow Plenary Council members from the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese will be on the same flight.

I anticipate that the Second Assembly will have quite a different character to the first one, because it will be face to face. Meeting up with online friends and colleagues in person will be exciting. No longer will we be meeting virtually from our offices and homes but sitting together at 30 tables in small groups of eight or nine. The new dynamic will have many benefits in networking and collective wisdom, but some costs in concentrating on the job at hand. There won't be much spare time.

The application of the Code of Conduct for members has been eased somewhat because the authorities have realised that it was too heavy-handed at the First Assembly. Chatham House rules will apply and blogs like mine will be able to report discussions, without attribution to individuals, more freely.

Preparations over the past month for members have been extensive through weekly Coffee Conversations on Tuesday evenings. Members have offered plenty of opinions about how things could be done better, such as requesting the opportunity to suggest new motions rather than merely amendments to those produced by the authorities. But we have not made any headway.

Last week in a Coffee Conversation Bishop Shane Mackinlay announced to some consternation that, first, the possibility of a Third Assembly had been ruled out, and secondly, that in the event of the bishops' deliberative votes being at odds with the consultative votes no explanation would be given by the bishops to the assembly. When I took the latter issue up privately with Bishop Mackinlay he engaged immediately in an extensive conversation, though without any variation to the gist of his announcement. Let's hope the consultative and deliberative votes don't diverge.

Covid remains a worry and it is expected that some of us will be struck down during the week. Arrangements to deal with this eventuality are in place. Before we begin, and on several occasions

during the week, each member must undergo a RAT test. Members who are laid low can continue to participate from their hotel rooms if they feel well enough.

I suggested some amendments to the Framework of Motions issued on 31 May 31^s. In doing so I chose to concentrate on two sections, governance reform and women in the church. I also accepted an invitation to be one of nine scrutineers and have been trained for that role. All consultative voting will be done online, while the bishops' deliberative votes will be cast each morning using paper ballots.

Finally, after a general invitation was issued, I put my name forward to move and speak to one of the governance motions. However, I was later told that all motions would be moved by the chair as not enough volunteers had come forward.

The final proposed amendments were released on June 29 in the [Motions and Amendments](#) document. Keep it on hand during the week so that you can follow what's going on. It's not too different from the earlier [Framework of Motions](#) as, apart from some textual changes, very few of the 616 amendments suggested were allowed to go forward.

The motions and amendments still pose difficult choices as Members try to navigate between the perfect and the good, a point I made in a recent article in Eureka Street and La Croix on June 23. The question I will ask myself about each motion is 'Even if we should be able to do better, is this a good enough start to be acceptable'?

Our venue is Cathedral Hall and members are based in four hotels within 700 metres of the central location, in my case The Boulevard Hotel. The Opening Mass on Sunday July 3 will be at Mary Mackillop Chapel in North Sydney at 5.00pm, followed by dinner at Mary Mackillop Place. I will then race back to the hotel by 7.30 pm to be one of the guests on the first evening of Plenary Tracker 2, discussing what to expect at the Second Assembly. Make sure you [register](#) for this series.

The Assembly members should always remember that the twin origins of the Plenary Council lie in the crises of identity and performance that the church is facing and the awful revelations about the church from the Royal Commission into institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We must face up to our failures and respond boldly and creatively. The dismal results of the 2021 Census for the church should be on our minds too. Our response must be couched not in vague generalities but in concrete reform proposals. That is the responsibility of Plenary Council members. I promise to try my best and pray that I am not found wanting.

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