



PLENARY COUNCIL ON THE AGENDA FOR DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

The Diocesan Pastoral Council, including its new members, held its first meeting for 2017 on April 29. The Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) is a group of people from various places around the diocese of Ballarat whom Bishop Paul has invited to reflect with him on the needs of the diocese. One of the key roles of the DPC is to inform the decision-making process of the Bishop by its consideration of issues raised at the meetings of the Council.

As well as induction and getting to know each other, the members of the DPC heard briefings and updates on a range of Diocesan issues. This included the diocese's pastoral planning process *Looking Forward*, and the DPC's relationship with Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC). Tracing the development and establishment of both Diocesan and Parish Pastoral Councils from the documents of the Second Vatican Council, Fr Justin noted that 90% of parishes in Ballarat diocese have a PPC. Parish Pastoral Councils emerged after Diocesan Pastoral Councils were enabled. "Like Diocesan Pastoral Councils, Parish Pastoral Councils:

- investigate the pastoral reality,
- reflect on it, and
- recommend their conclusions to the pastor."

Bishop Paul spoke about the Plenary Council to be held in Australia in 2020. Bishop Paul will be looking to the DPC for their thoughts regarding how the diocese plans and prepares for the Plenary Council. These preparations will probably happen in 2018 and will encourage involvement amongst a wide range of people in the diocese. A Plenary Council is an opportunity for the Catholic community to proclaim current convictions and its vision for the future of the Church in Australia.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference gives the following information about the Plenary Council: "A Plenary Council involves the participation of the whole Catholic community. It will provide for representation from among the laity, religious and ordained ministers, together with the bishops.

The preparatory process for a Plenary Council has potential to engage the Church community throughout Australia, including those whose participation in Church life and mission is already significant and others who may feel on the fringes. It will be essential that the preparatory process take place at both diocesan and parish levels, as well as among religious communities and lay movements."

The current members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council are Anne Eskdale, Marie Shaddock, Elizabeth Clarke, Paul O'Beirne, Thomas Thukkumury, Pauline Stapleton, Amanda Smith, Fr Justin Driscoll and Bishop Paul Bird. The DPC meets again in June.

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