

Members to the Plenary Council for the Ballarat Diocese, Marie Shaddock and Felicity Knobel answer some questions about the Plenary Council



Marie Shaddock:

What are your hopes or positive aspirations for the Plenary?

My hopes are that the Holy Spirit will truly renew Australia, not just the Church. I hope that through the workings of the Plenary we can set the whole of Australia on fire with a love for God and his Church; the Church he shapes. I hope that we all, but particularly those called to participate in the Plenary, will be open to the Holy Spirit and allow him to move and act where he will. I hope as members we will practise that humility that is the basis for true discernment. “We” as Church and Country can aspire to be great again but not by looking backwards. With God the direction is always in the positive and ever new, and so we must be prepared to let go and trust. That does not

mean that we redefine the Catholic Church, all the tenets of our faith stand true. However, the mistakes we have made in the past do not define us; unless we want it to. Instead, with the creativity of the Holy Spirit to guide us, they can be a springboard into a dynamic future if we are prepared to be humble, open and by open, I mean making ourselves vulnerable to God and his designs, and pure – as in committed to exclusively doing the will of God. Then we will once again have integrity and can be a shining light, leading the way out of the depression of materialism, self-indulgence and indifferentism that is suffocating our world today.

What are your fears and challenges?

My fears and challenges are not of a physical nature. There is the extra prayer, reading and responsibilities which take time and do add pressure to life. They take their toll, but my greatest fear is that those who are cynical and sceptical will suck the Plenary dry and destroy the presence of the Holy Spirit in other people and the Plenary itself. My heart tells me the Holy Spirit is far more powerful and loving than that, but my heart also bleeds for those who for many genuine reasons are cynical and sceptical. I would ask them not to. They are missing out on so much and unfortunately often dragging others down with them. I also have a fear of those with their own agenda, that they will try to force it on others. Again, if I revert to the Holy Spirit, I don’t believe it will happen – but it is a fear. My greatest challenge is to “trust”. To trust not blindly but with faith and hope and not listen to the little voices that try to belittle what is happening. Trusting is not a single act, it’s the act of a lifetime and as surely as you think you have nailed it, down you go again. I often find myself thinking of St Peter and him jumping out of the boat to walk with Jesus on the water – and then sinking.

Has anything good come out of the Plenary so far?

Has anything good come out of the Plenary so far? Yes!! There is so much more prayer being offered, and that can only be good. So many more people are thinking beyond their own circumstances and are more aware of their fellow parishioners and their needs. Coming together to listen to each other has been so important! At times it may have been

with anger, frustration or hurt but it is and was necessary if we are going to heal, learn from our mistakes and move forward. For any parishes that were brave enough to get involved, carried out discussion groups and listened to each other, they have already begun to receive. In many cases what comes out of these discussions are the nuts-and-bolts answers for beginning to fix our ordinary parish life. It may be as simple as finding better parking options for those with reduced mobility, printing the Gospel in more than one language or adjusting Mass times. And really that is the whole point to the Plenary. It is about each individual parish and every parishioner. It starts with listening to each other, that in itself is healing. People feel more valued if you are prepared to genuinely listen to them, and that is what this exercise has been about listening and following through, allowing Holy Spirit to heal and work in our lives.

Felicity Knobel:

What issues do you think are important?

The journey of Plenary Council has been an interesting one. We can blame COVID-19 for pressing pause on so many things. It felt like momentum for Plenary Council had stopped and we all had so many other things to think about and worry about in 2020. This pandemic has shown us all what is important in our world. Our sense of belonging to a community. Working with others. Having contact with people. Being excited. Taking time to be with the people we love. These things have always been important, however, COVID-19 has shown us that these things are vital in our world and that we cannot take them for granted. We have the opportunity as the Catholic Church post COVID-19 to make people feel welcomed, to offer the hands of friendship to all, to be with others and to create something very special.



What do you hear from those you meet about the Plenary?

People are wanting change. People are wanting a Catholic Church that is listening to all. People are very definite that they do not want another round of committees or ideas they want action. The people of the Catholic Church spoke so beautifully about what was needed, what our future should include and how we wanted our Church to be moving forward. We hear the voices, we know the concerns, we know what we have to do. Plenary Council is for decisions to be made and for actions to be actioned.

Five locations, one Plenary Council Assembly. How?

Having just taken part in an online formation experience with approximately seventy-five other people from around Australia and with a wide variety of technology skills, it is truly amazing what has been organised. Our recent formation session was a great opportunity to “be with” our fellow members and to begin to see how the Plenary Council will operate. There will be five locations throughout Australia and I will be attending the hub in Melbourne. Though we will be physically with other members in Melbourne we will also be using technology to interact with the other four hubs throughout Australia.