

FIRST ASSEMBLY OF PLENARY COUNCIL POSTPONED

In response to the dramatic changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the bishops of Australia have made the “difficult, but necessary” decision to postpone the first assembly of the Plenary Council.

Changes in the ways people live, work and communicate due to the pandemic led the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council to consult with the advisory and planning teams, as well as the wider Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

The decision was made to postpone the assembly scheduled for October this year.

Plenary Council president Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB said in a time of such upheaval, including severe restrictions on travel and group meetings, the postponement was unavoidable.

“Even though it is possible Australia may have moved through the worst of this health crisis by October, our capacity to adequately continue the process of discernment and formation - for everyone in the Church and in particular for the delegates - is severely compromised,” he said.

Archbishop Costelloe said the Church’s focus at the moment, and for the foreseeable future, is ensuring people continue to be cared for pastorally, spiritually and emotionally during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

“The bishops remain committed to the Plenary Council journey and affirm that two assemblies will take place. This allows for the maturation of the discussions and discernment of the first assembly to develop with clarity and lead into the second gathering,” Archbishop Costelloe said.

“The timing, the order and the location of the two assemblies will need to be re-examined, but it is hoped that having one assembly in Adelaide and the other in Sydney might still be possible.”

Plenary Council facilitator Lana Turvey-Collins said work has already begun to consider how the changed timeline provides opportunities to embed the practices of dialogue, listening and communal discernment.

“There is obvious disappointment in the postponement of the first assembly, especially so soon after the excitement of announcing the Plenary Council delegates,” she said.

“But once the pandemic has eased, people will have a thirst to look to the future - and the Plenary Council is about the future of the Church.”

Announcements and up-to-date information will be made available through the Plenary Council website, the PlenaryPost electronic newsletter and social media channels.

Media Enquiries