

MEDIA RELEASE
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TECHNOLOGY IN PLACE FOR FIRST PLENARY COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

Despite large parts of the country being in lockdown, those planning the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia say all is in readiness to deliver the first assembly in October wholly online.

Bishop Shane Mackinlay, the Plenary Council's vice-president, said the Council journey has adapted to changing circumstances because of COVID-19 - and it is adapting again.

"With most of the country's population currently in lockdown or having experienced lockdowns in recent weeks, we have plans in place to ensure the first assembly opens on October 3," he said.

"Just as there was disappointment in needing first to postpone the assembly and then to move to regional hubs, the likelihood that most members will now join the assembly from their home is not what we had planned and hoped for.

"We know, though, that the Holy Spirit can and will work through this assembly, just as the Spirit has led us over the past three-and-a-half years."

Plenary Council facilitator Lana Turvey-Collins said a huge amount of work had been done to prepare for the Council to be held in hubs, with each member participating on their own device.

"As a result, this shift to most people participating from home is a pivot rather than a major detour from what we were planning," she said.

"We are receiving exceptional support from technical experts within and beyond the Church to ensure that we can make the virtual assembly one that allows for the prayer, conversation, listening and discernment we've hoped for all along."

Teams working on liturgy, communications and the assembly's program are also altering existing plans for the new format.

Bishop Mackinlay said the approximately 280 members of the Council gathered online in four groups in recent weeks to continue their formation, including from a technology perspective.

"While there has been greater exposure to videoconferencing in the past 18 months, the Microsoft Teams environment was new to some," he said.

"What we encountered over the two days each group met was a stable platform, and one on which we can participate in meaningful dialogue with one another. We were able to trial the practice of spiritual conversations that will be used during the assemblies and there were moments of prayerful encounter, even if via a screen."

It is expected that, in some areas not affected by lockdowns, members will gather in small numbers for prayer, fellowship and socialising, as the experience of provincial hubs would have provided.

Plans for the public livestreaming of some parts of each day remain in place, and some liturgies will also be celebrated online.

"This is a Council for the Church in Australia, and we look forward to a wide range of people following the assembly, hearing how conversations are unfolding and praying with the members," Ms Turvey-Collins said.

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