

## Will Australia be obedient to the Holy Spirit at the Plenary Council?

Australia's capacity to discern the motions being put forward to the final session of the historical Plenary Council will rely heavily on whether the faithful will "allow the Holy Spirit breathing room", ACU theologian Rev. Dr Ormond Rush said.

Dr Rush is an internationally respected systematic theologian, priest of the Diocese of Townsville, and expert adviser for the Plenary Council. He said at a public event in Brisbane organised by the Australian Catholic Theological Association (ACTA) to discuss the themes of the Plenary Council Framework for Motions, that the Church cannot forget or leave out the third person of the Trinity.

"We won't be a fully renewed Church until we allow the Holy Spirit breathing room among us," Dr Rush said at the first of two ACTA Plenary Council Conversations.

"The Church is powerless, clueless, without the Spirit enlightening it to discern how to apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ in new situations."

Dr Rush was invited to unpack the seventh theme of the Framework for Motions, *At the Service of Communion, Participation, and Mission: Governance* at the event, which was sponsored by ACU's Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, Catholic Theological College of the University of Divinity, Melbourne and BBI: The Australian Institute of Higher Education. More than 400 people tuned into the live-streamed event.

He joined fellow ACU theologian and Plenary Council member for Brisbane, Dr Maeve Louise Heaney, ACU honorary doctorate recipient Sr Melissa Dwyer FDCC, Archbishop Christopher Prowse, Bishop Shane Mackinlay, Dr Julie Trinidad, and Toni Janke at the public and live-streamed event on June 16.

Focusing on the term "participation", Fr Rush said the Church in Australia had a unique opportunity to practice what the Second Vatican Council termed '*sensus fidei*', or the capacity for the baptised, through the gift of the Holy Spirit "to discern the signs of the times in light of the Gospel" at the Plenary Council.

"As the Church moves through time, into an unknown future, history throws up new questions that the Church, let alone humanity, has never before had to deal with," Dr Rush said.

"And as it searches its primary sources, of Scripture and the living tradition, how does the Holy Spirit assist the Church and its leaders to find answers to those seemingly imponderable questions?"

"This is what the Plenary Council is attempting to do."

Acknowledging that the reception of the Second Vatican Council "had hardly begun even 55 years after its close", and that historically the Church has taken an average of 100 years to implement a council, Dr Rush said the Pope was "moving the needle here" with the notion of synodality.

"In no way is it meant to downplay the role of the oversight of the hierarchy in the Church's three offices of Christ, but it does require all of us, lay and ordained, to what the Pope calls a 'synodal conversion'," Dr Rush said.

"All of us are being challenged to reimagine what a common obedience to the Holy Spirit might mean."

ACTA President Dr Heaney said the collaboration between Bishops and theologians at the Second Vatican Council was the inspiration for the ACTA Plenary Council Conversations event.

"In an analogue way in which the collaboration between bishops and theologians contributed to the achievements of that Council, we think the future of the Church in Australia, and its service to society, depends on similar collaborative work with Australian's theologians, and in this case, in the Plenary Council that we're celebrating," she said.

Dr Heaney said Australia's theologians were pleased to support the Church in improving its theological literacy and capacity to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit, especially towards the Plenary Council.

Plenary Council Conversations: Part 2 will be held in Brisbane on July 1 from 6-8pm. Register for the in-person and online event [here](#).

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