

Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church  
Reform (ACCCR)



Response to the Synod on  
Synodality: Final submission

## AUSTRALASIAN CATHOLIC COALITION FOR CHURCH REFORM

### Synod of Bishops

# Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission A Submission from the *Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform*

## PART 1: MAIN SUBMISSION TO THE SYNOD

### Introduction

The Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) is a network of 19 organisations in Australia and one in New Zealand. Members are committed to their Catholic faith and foster collaboration and mutual support in seeking reform and renewal in our Church. The Coalition is guided by Vatican II and the leadership of Pope Francis, with a strong commitment to co-responsibility for the Church's mission among all Catholics. We believe that the voice of the people should be heard and attended to at all levels, with synodality ensuring the equality of all, with recognition of the equal status of women.

Many of the questions posed in the Synod of Bishops 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly *Preparatory Document* relate to the local or particular church, i.e., the diocese. ACCCR's concerns regarding our local churches generally require legislated application of proposed reforms across the universal Church.

#### *ACCCR priorities:*

- Inclusion of women with equality in governance and ministry;
- All governance and leadership to be synodal in practice with strong accountability, transparency and inclusion;
- Eradication of clericalism;
- Response to the suffering and healing of victims and survivors of religious sexual abuse;
- Inclusion of all, especially LGBTIQ+ people;
- Pastoral outreach to those who feel cut off from the Church owing to its official social teaching, e.g., the divorced and remarried, contraception, annulments, LGBTIQ+;
- Need for improved presentation of Jesus' teaching through better educated preaching and scriptural interpretation.

#### *Parts 2-5 of this document*

These parts explain and contextualise the submission. To provide context to the comments herein, a report on the process and procedures of the Australian Plenary Council is attached as [Part 2](#). [Part 3](#) is an edited version of the CHAT from the ACCCR Webinar on Synodality, 16 February 2022, which was introduced by Bishop Vincent Long, Parramatta Diocese. [Part 4](#) is the ACCCR proposals submitted to amend the motions for the second session of the Plenary Council for information to the Synod secretariat. Member groups of ACCCR are described at [Part 5](#), which ends with our concluding statement. The submission has been endorsed by the ACCCR as a whole.

### Initial Observations

**Information sharing and consultation adopted by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC).**

Information sharing and consultation about the Synod on Synodality by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and by most diocesan bishops has been woefully inadequate. The same issues have arisen with the processes of the Australian Plenary Council.<sup>1</sup> The lack of transparency in the way the content of the documents has developed and failure to be inclusive on the part of the ACBC has:

- minimised accountability,
- distorted priorities,
- discouraged many from making contributions, and
- failed to reflect the sense of faith of the faithful.

### **The Synod on Synodality process adopted by the Secretariat**

The process of distillation imposed by the Secretariat – 10 pages per diocese with further synthesising by Bishops’ Conferences – severely limits addressing issues in depth (V 4.1). On the basis of the syntheses by Bishops’ Conferences, a first edition of the *Instrumentum Laboris* is to be drafted, to be finalised after discussions at continental meetings. There is no provision for non-episcopal involvement after the diocesan phase and no provision for lay representation at the Synod in October 2023.

This is not a true synodal process as synodality is described in the PD and V.<sup>2</sup>

## **On Communion, Participation and Mission**

The theme of the Synod is ‘*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and mission*’ (PD 1; V 1.4).

**We long for a Church in which the People of God anointed and united in their baptism are on a journey where:**

**Communion** is realised by:

Respecting the sense of faith of the faithful in:

Accepting women as equals in every aspect of the Church;

Gender-inclusive language driving a culture of equality and inclusivity;

True inclusion of all without judgement.

**Participation** is characterised by:

Relationships of respect, inclusion, mutual leadership of service, and dignity of all;

Synodality as the key feature of local, community, small group, parish and diocesan

interactions and exercise of authority; to provide effective expression to the voices of the people, not a token listening exercise;

Contemporary developments in the natural and human sciences being integrated

with faith and tradition to meet the needs of our times;

Eradication of clericalism and rejection of autocracy.

**Mission** is inspired by:

A vision of liberty, inclusivity, and diversity, enabling compassion for every person;

The gifts of the Spirit that are the measure of authenticity in people everywhere;

Welcome for other Christians as family, sharing our common Baptism;

Respect for the spiritual wisdom of First Nations people as we walk together;

Modelling the teachings of Jesus to all.

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1 Refer to Part 2 p12

2 Abbreviations: PD – Preparatory Document; V - Vademecum

**Both documents (PD and V) set out the fundamental question for consultation as follows:**

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.”

How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church?

What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

It then suggests that responses to the question are made in terms of ten **Thematic Nuclei** (PD 30) or **Themes** (V 5.3). ACCCR follows this suggestion, providing under each thematic heading a Response and Recommendation.

**1 The journeying Companions. Who are part of it, the ones journeying together? Who are excluded, left on the margins?**

*In your local Church, who are the ones “journeying together”? When we say: “our Church,” who is part of it? Who is asking us to journey together? Who are the road companions, including those outside the ecclesial perimeter? What persons or groups are left on the margins, expressly or in fact?*

**Response**

In the 2016 census only 11.8% of Australian Catholics were engaged with the Church organisation through Mass attendance.<sup>3</sup> The proportion is continuing to decrease. The great majority of Australian Catholics, even church-going people, are either unaware of the synodal journey or are not interested. Effectively, the journeying companions constitute a tiny minority of Catholics, and even they are not led in a synodal manner. The scandals of positive discrimination and/or erasure of LGBTIQ+, and those re-partnered after marriage breakdown and women, be recognised and an apology made, for the serious spiritual, psychological and physical harm caused by unjust and cruel bullying, outdated anthropology, institutional discrimination and failure in pastoral care. Women comprise 51% of the Australian population and more than 70% of Catholics who continue to go to Mass; 40% of Australians are divorced and re-partnered and at least 10% of Australians are LGBTIQ+ people. First Nations people receive token recognition only. Catholics in the 20th percentile (lowest) of socio-economic status have almost no involvement other than as clients of St Vincent de Paul and other social services. All these groups are marginalised in relation to ministry and governance within the Australian church.

Equality, inclusion and synodality were hallmarks of Jesus’ mission but not of the Church in Australia. ‘Hypocritical’ is a common descriptor for our Church among the general body of Australians.

**Recommendation**

***That the Synod of Bishops adopt measures to ensure inclusion, equality and access in and to the Church community for all who seek it, with an essential step being to treat women equally in governance and ministry and for pastoral leaders to practice synodality in their leadership, reflecting accountability, inclusion and transparency. The implementation of community formation strategies should be prioritised to replace practices of privilege and exclusion.***

**2. Listening**

*Who is our diocese listening to? How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? What are our prejudices and stereotypes? How do we listen to our social and cultural context?*

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<sup>3</sup> The 2016 National Count of Attendance reveals that the number of people at Mass in Australia on a typical weekend was about 623,400, or **11.8 per cent** of the Catholic population; [https://ncpr.catholic.org.au > uploads > 2020/12 > M.](https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/uploads/2020/12/M.) accessed 4.8.2022.

## **Response**

It appears that most Church leaders listen to a small, closed circle of advisers. At the parish level where the majority of Catholics connect with the Church, there is widespread disgruntlement and dissatisfaction at the way pastoral leaders exercise authority, both overtly and covertly. This is now a leading cause for Catholics disengaging from Church activities. Many clerics need to learn how to respect local culture, communities and circumstances.

The Australian Plenary Council experience indicates that the hierarchy is not listening to lay Catholics.<sup>4</sup> Some 17,457 submissions presented to the Plenary Council appear to have been put aside. Cries for attention from and on behalf of women, LGBTIQ+ people, separated and re-partnered Catholics and many others commonly receive no responses. Issues that were central to submissions to the Plenary Council have been taken off the table contrary to the *sensus fidei fidelium* documented in the submissions to the PC. It is no longer enough to make parenthood statements such as, ‘The Church treasures all her people.’ Church leaders need to show it by their actions.

The consultation process proposed by the Secretariat for the Synod on Synodality has been largely ignored.

## **Recommendation**

*That the Synod of Bishops mandates regular diocesan reporting on how Church leaders demonstrate the synodal mechanisms they employ and their effective attention to the voices of the faithful. Canon 511 seems to be simply ignored without explanation by many bishops. Clear legislative direction is required in canon law to ensure that each particular church/diocese establishes Diocesan Pastoral Councils (DPC), Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC) and regular synodal mechanisms of review.*

## **3. Speaking out**

*How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication within the community and its organisations, without duplicity and opportunism?*

## **Response**

Speaking out (boldly) needs to come from two directions:

- 1 From community and Church organisation members as they assume their God-given roles as priests, pastors and leaders. Professional research and casual conversations with significant numbers of Catholics, show that the disparity between what the Church teaches officially and what Catholics believe is deepening. Contraception is but one of the many “canaries in the coal mine”. Official teaching is one thing; what Catholics believe and practise is quite another. In such an environment, free and authentic speech is crippled. Any Church teaching that is not received by the faithful is per se questionable.
- 2 A free and authentic style of communication requires an open and sincere attitude. Too often it seems that Church leaders are more conscious of loyalty and accountability to their superiors and the institution than to the community. Church politics and fear of putting a foot wrong are deeply inhibiting factors. The inadequate response to the clerical sexual abuse of children is a prime example.

Synodality demands a level of humility and respect for the people of God, at times involving deep regret and an acknowledgement of the wrongs that have been perpetrated. The undeniable history of these wrongs creates such cognitive dissonance for many young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that it

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4 Refer to Part 2 p 12.

totally undermines their faith during their formative years. They can no longer commit to a faith that has not addressed these blatant evils. Such wrong doings need an acknowledgement and conversion by the institutional church for it to regain any credibility. The arrogance of autocratic authority, indeed the teaching on papal infallibility, has created a disdain and fear of new knowledge within the institutional church and an avoidance of serious, cutting-edge scholarship in all fields of human endeavour by our church's scholars. The worst of Church practices is reinforced by the well-recognised toxic culture of clericalism. A pervasive clericalism coupled with frustration, fed by years of experience of a lack of true agency among Catholics, are major reasons for continuing disengagement.

Baptism and conversion (commitment to the vision and mission of Jesus) are about growing in agency, in a capacity to shape one's own life and engage in Spirit-inspired activities with others, to be all that we can be. This impetus is stifled by the continuing tendency for clergy and hierarchy to claim special status and pronounce on what is good for Catholics, behaviour contrary to the spirit of synodality. Humility, apology and investment in theological scholarship are desperately needed to update our message to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and proclaim the importance and centrality of the Gospel to human existence, our capacity to live in harmony and to thrive as peoples.

#### **Recommendation.**

*That the Synod of Bishops encourages all Catholics to speak from their hearts, without fear of recrimination, and ensure that their voices become constitutive factors in the formation of communities and Church; everyone's voice becomes an effective part of the re-building of our Church.*

*That the Synod of Bishops reflects upon the errors of the past with humility, acting on the assurance given by Christ that "He will be with us always", as we seek to bring new knowledge and understanding to the teachings of Jesus.*

*That the Synod of Bishops acknowledge and express repentance for the evils perpetrated by many in the church over time.*

#### **4. Celebrating**

*How do prayer and liturgical celebration inspire and direct our "journeying together"? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the Faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the sanctifying function?*

#### **Response**

The subject of prayer needs serious critical thinking, and a mature recognition of what it is and is not. Open and free discussion is a prerequisite. There is a rich diversity in the forms of personal prayer, reflecting the particular understandings of self, relationship with God and other factors which need to be reflected in liturgical celebrations. Many Catholics have taken bold steps in developing innovative liturgies. Recognition of such celebrations as Eucharistic and of baptismal priesthood would bring a currently unimaginable richness to personal and liturgical prayer. Archaic liturgical forms need to be replaced with expressions and styles that resonate with contemporary Catholics in their various cultures. Many church-going people readily affirm that they do not understand much of the Mass, not because they are uneducated or dull but because the liturgy and rituals are irrelevant to them. Many liturgical presiders still need to learn that the prayers, hopes and aspirations of the people are more important than their own roles. In other words, let celebrations belong to the people. The non-inclusive language of much of the liturgy is an additional barrier to women's full engagement. Also, the clumsy translations foisted upon the English-speaking world discourage prayerful connection with the Eucharist.

#### **Recommendation.**

***That the Synod of Bishops formally recognises baptismal priesthood in relation to leading or presiding at Eucharistic celebrations thereby promoting and facilitating the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the sanctifying function.***  
***That the Synod mandates an updating of the rituals, prayers and language of the liturgy.***

## **5. Co-responsible in the Mission**

*How is each Baptised person called to be a protagonist in the mission? How does the community support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment, in scientific research and teaching, in the promotion of social justice, in the protection of human rights, and in caring for the Common home, etc.)? How do you help them to live out these commitments in a logic of mission? How is discernment about mission-related choices made, and who participates in it?*

### **Response**

Jesus supplemented his work of healing and teaching with formation of a community. Helping that community of disciples to bond, to understand what he was about and to share his vision was a constant preoccupation. That community of women and men became the core and foundation of the later Church.

Community is at the heart of Christianity; the natural progression is from conversion (appropriation of baptism), relationships and community to celebration, not the other way around. However, a preoccupation with clerically focused liturgy and ritual has diverted attention from the fundamental exercise of mutual care, sharing, looking out for the marginalised and vulnerable (the ones lying in the ditch or sleeping rough).

Jesus' dream of a reign of God is to be realised in the hearts and lives (personal, social, economic and cultural) of the people of God (all of them).

### **Recommendation**

***That the Synod of Bishops initiates a shift of emphasis toward the basic and core fulfilment of life's potential through personal authenticity, care and concern for one another and all creation; As people thereby discover their own worth, they will be inspired to exercise and demand co-responsibility in building the Kingdom.***

## **6. Dialogue in Church and Society**

*What are the places and modes of dialogue within our diocese? How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed? How do we promote collaboration with neighbouring Dioceses, with and among religious communities in the area, with and among lay associations and movements, etc.? What experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the world of politics, economics, culture, civil society, the poor...?*

### **Response**

Before any effective dialogue can be achieved, the autocratic mode of governance of the Church reinforced by clericalism and the exclusion of women from governance and ministry, must be rejected and replaced with a synodal commitment reflected in accountability, inclusion and transparency. Currently in many Australian dioceses communication is simply a one-way street from the top down or not at all<sup>5</sup>. To become a truly "living church" where we all share the sense and experience of being and becoming more fully "the People of God on our part of the journey", requires engagement of people in the mission of each parish within their communities; then in their particular region and in the diocesan church. However, so many Catholics are not engaged in parish communities, but connect with the Church only through sending their children to Catholic schools. Very little is done to connect with them. Generally, the "people of God" hide away in their parish

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5 See Parts 2 p 12 and part 3 p 16.

churches and do not engage with the signs of the times in our nation; the church and its mission to the world has simply died. For many the Church is effective only through associated institutions; schools, health and welfare agencies, and other charitable foundations. There is a desperate need for a critical review of our institutional church. The ministry of Jesus has been institutionalised. His message was clear at the time when he lived. Its interpretation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century leaves much to be desired. Modern understandings of effective leadership and governance of large human institutions endorse the concept of synodality. But it also requires appropriate rules for effective governance.

The Australian “Light from the Southern Cross report”<sup>6</sup> shows very clearly how such management structures and synodal leadership go hand in hand and makes recommendations that ACCCR strongly endorses. Christians cannot any longer simply ignore new knowledge, especially developments in the human sciences, and expect the message of Jesus to be and remain relevant for today and for all time; Review, re-interpretation and a deeper understanding of God’s deep, creative love for each one of us is essential.

### **Recommendation**

*That the Synod of Bishops mandates the implementation of the recommendations of the report, ‘The Light from the Southern Cross’;*

*That developments in the sciences, both natural and human, are acknowledged and incorporated into all forms of expression of the vision and message of Jesus, including preaching and teaching.*

## **7. With the other Christian Denominations**

*What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations? What areas do they concern? What fruits have we drawn from this “journeying together”? What are the difficulties?*

### **Response**

The practical commitment to ecumenism already exemplified in some inter-Church collaborations at the international, country, diocesan and parish levels should be further developed. However, such activities require a more inclusive Church where the faithful are fully engaged and accept their rights, duties and responsibilities as the people of God.

### **Recommendation**

*That the Synod of Bishops requires structures to be in place for dialogue, consultation, engagement and action at diocesan and parish levels for ecumenical activities. These are to be seen as a measure of mission and to be reported on annually.*

## **8. Authority and Participation**

*How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken?*

*How is authority exercised within our particular Church? What are the practices of teamwork and co-responsibility? How are lay ministries and the assumption of responsibility by the Faithful promoted? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the particular Church? Are they a fruitful experience?*

### **Response**

Synodality is at present foreign to the governance of most dioceses, reflecting inadequate formation of many pastoral leaders. See Part 2, for examples of the need for immediate reforms to ensure a

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6 “The Light from the Southern Cross” report to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and to Catholic Religious Australia (2020)



synodal commitment, reflected in accountability, inclusion and transparency.<sup>7</sup> ‘Authority is legitimate power.’ ‘The source of power is cooperation.’ ‘As the source of power is cooperation, the carrier of power is the community.’<sup>8</sup> These comments by Lonergan offer a context or framework for reflections on authority. Authority is not a mysterious or mystical force to be exercised or handed on without reference to the community. Later in the same article, Lonergan asserts, ‘Authenticity makes power legitimate.’ Given the disparities that exist between what the Church teaches officially and what Catholics, including many ordained priests, believe and practice, the question “Is the authority exercised by the Church hierarchy legitimate?” is unavoidable. The issue is further highlighted when bishops fail to engage effectively with the people for whom they have pastoral responsibility and even ignore canon law by not creating Diocesan Pastoral Councils, not promoting Parish Pastoral Councils nor establishing diocesan synods and other means of collaboration, and when the basic good governance practices of transparency, accountability and inclusion are circumvented. These inadequacies are supported and reinforced by the toxic culture of clericalism; systemic change is essential.

### **Recommendation**

*That the Synod of Bishops initiate a thoroughgoing examination of the exercise of authority in the Church extending to all levels from curial processes to parish administration, open to appropriate public scrutiny at each level;*

*That ‘The Light from the Southern Cross’ report is adopted as a starting point for practical implementation for the reform of church governance in Australia.*

*That the synod requires every particular church/diocese to establish DPCs, PPCs and regular synodal mechanisms of review and that this be incorporated in canon law*

### **9. Discerning and Deciding**

*In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit. By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchically structured communities? How do we articulate the consultative phase with the deliberative one, the process of decision-making with the moment of decision-taking? How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?*

### **Response**

ACCCR notes this statement in PD 14.

‘The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority, because there is, at the basis of participation in every synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests. In other words, this is an ecclesial process that can only take place “at the heart of a hierarchically structured community.” It is in the fruitful bond between the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and the magisterial function of the Pastors [Bishops] that the unanimous consensus of the whole Church in the same faith is realized.’

The claim is made, without qualification, that ‘... there is, at the basis of participation in every synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests.’ This is at present idealistic in the extreme. Either it glosses over the many divergent views and positions of Catholic Australians or limits the synodal process to like-minded groups. It certainly ignores the autocratic and clericalist exercise of leadership that is reinforced by a focus on a “hierarchically structured community”. To speak of a unanimous

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<sup>7</sup> See Part 2 p12

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Lonergan. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: A Third Collection*. Ed. Robert M Doran and John D Dadosky. (Toronto, 2017; University of Toronto Press)

consensus is wishful thinking. The reality is that the Catholic Church encompasses a great diversity of beliefs, practices and cultures that fail to be recognised appropriately by an autocratic non-synodal leadership.

The broad aim of a synodal process is, realistically, to seek ways in which we can live together, with one another, not a universal consensus.

The articulation of the consultative phase with the deliberative phase has not been explored to any significant extent in Australia. . The process in the Plenary Council has included a consultative vote alongside a deliberative vote almost as two separate phases. As the agenda for discussion was controlled by the bishops, the final outcome has really been determined just by the bishops. They will claim that what has occurred is synodality and use it to show that it is a model for the Synod on Synodality in Rome.

The process was minimally consultative until, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Assembly, many women and some men (including clergy and bishops) Council members expressed their deep hurt at the bishops' rejection in their deliberative vote (22 to 18) of the consultative vote on the equality of women. The Plenary Council teetered on the brink of complete disintegration. Only the good graces and forgiveness provided to the bishops by those members who had been seriously harmed and extremely distraught, enabled the Council to continue with the redrafted motions (materially the same as those rejected) that were passed on the final day. The astute leadership of bishop Shane Mackinlay was noted. There has been no explanation or apology forthcoming and the decrees have little necessary impact on the life of the Church, and their implementation appear headed for non-synodal" business as usual".

### **Recommendation**

*That the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops review its presentation of the functional relationship between synodality and hierarchical structure, and of how synodality (the involvement of all the people of God) will be exercised in the further Synod processes, particularly the 'deliberative phase'. There must be an immediate commitment to a fundamental change in culture from autocracy and clericalism to synodality.*

## **10. Forming ourselves in Synodality**

*How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of "journeying together," listening to one another and engaging in dialogue? What formation do we offer for discernment and the exercise of authority? What tools help us to read the dynamics of the culture in which we are immersed and their impact on our style of Church?*

### **Response**

Formation "*for discernment and the exercise of authority*" is an immediate priority and a prior concern for implementation of synodality throughout the Church. This must involve the re-formation of our leaders in a commitment to synodal processes and a rejection of autocracy and clericalism. People in power in the Church are likely to behave in exactly the same way as all other people in power. Their behaviour should therefore be scrutinised rigorously to ensure that synodality can be given the chance to work.

The primary relationships of a Christian are with God, with Jesus and the Spirit. The Church whether understood as the community of believers, a canonical institution or the Body of Christ, exists to support and facilitate those personal relationships. Some people find that the embrace of, and identity with structures are helpful and appropriate for them. Others seek wider and different horizons. They may go beyond the Church without disengaging from it or may follow alternative paths. The Spirit 'blows where she will'. We all need to be attentive to the Spirit within who often leads us in ways not easily compatible with the structured Church.

It should be noted that reflection, prayer and deep discernment in the lead-up to decision-making is not a novel experience for the great majority of Catholics who have taken on the responsibilities of

marriage, parenthood, challenging careers, managing complex organisations, etc. a fact that seems to be widely overlooked in Church discussions.

If the focus of this theme is on preparing people for organisational tasks, roles and functions within an institutional context, that is one thing. If the focus is to be on facilitating the relationship with God, that is another matter.

### **Recommendation**

*That the Secretariat find ways of introducing the experience, knowledge and wisdom of lay Catholics into the deliberative phase of the synodal process and at the Synod of Bishops itself, with a commitment to re-formation of our leaders to synodal processes and a rejection of autocracy and clericalism; that the Synod of Bishops recognises the true role of the Church as facilitating salvation rather than mediating it, thereby enabling people more effectively to grow spiritually beyond the canonical Church.*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we summarise the recommendations that Australian Catholics regard as priorities for action by the Church in this country and indeed universally. These are:

- Equality of women in governance and ministry;
- All governance and leadership to be synodal in practice with a strong commitment to accountability, transparency and inclusion;
- Eradication of clericalism;
- Response to the suffering and healing of victims and survivors of religious sexual abuse and
- Inclusion of all in the invitation to be fully engaged in the sacramental life of the Church.

### ***Further Content***

Part 2. Statement on the Plenary Council process.

Part 3 Edited CHAT from the ACCCR Webinar on Synodality, 16 February 2022.

Part 4: Draft ACCCR amendments to “Framework of motions” for the second assembly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Plenary Council 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022 provided to all members (bishops and lay), the PC secretariat and *periti* for their consideration and assistance.

Part 5: Member groups of ACCCR (with brief descriptions and concluding statement).

## Part 2: Statement on the Plenary Council process in Australia

### Purpose for attachment of this response

Having grave concerns about efficacy of the Plenary Council (PC) in identifying the need for Church renewal and reform and in implementing appropriate actions in Australia, ACCCR records this statement of concerns and offers proposals essential for the evolution of our Church locally and throughout the world.

This statement seeks:

- 1 To indicate that ACCCR concerns remain about the PC process. The motions that have been passed and the decrees that have been proclaimed, have little in them that can be seen to be obligatory for any Australian bishop to implement in a way that is readily measurable.
- 2 To advise the Secretariat of the Synod on Synodality that the experience of ACCCR and Coalition Members has been anything but synodal. In particular:
  - 2.a We refer you to the critique of the process below.
  - 2.b We refer you to the enormous effort that ACCCR and Coalition Members have made to engage in synodal dialogue and collaboration with the ACBC and the PC<sup>9</sup> over more than 4 years of repeated attempts to engage in constructive and respectful dialogue to no avail. Attempts to engage with the Australian bishops by ACCCR and Coalition Members, has generally met with a simple receipt of our communications only. Our experience has been that there has been a failure of synodal dialogue or engagement. Collaboration, comment on documents, debate, striving for consensus, healing and moving forward together as a Pilgrim People of God in Australia, has been denied us by the extraordinary passivity by the Australian bishops; there has been an abject failure by the bishops to engage in any meaningful way. This is a gross failure of synodality, not to mention pastoral responsiveness.
  - 2.c The dialogue within the PC by members, *periti*, facilitators and the drafting groups has been commented on favourably by some members. The critique documented below shows many deficiencies. In spite of serious errors in the process, some positive comment on the importance of the results of the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Plenary Council has been documented. We too endorse what has been achieved, however a truly synodal journey should have achieved very much more. It is our view that the *sensus fidei fidelium* has not been adequately represented and the work of the Holy Spirit has been significantly impeded in the final outcomes.

### ACCCR Concerns

Our concerns are based on deficiencies in the PC's preparation, processes and management of the Plenary Council as a whole:

- 1 Excessive control of the agenda by the ACBC has diluted the true input of the faithful;
- 2 There was no official identification of the main issues common to all dioceses in the 2018-19 submissions;
- 3 The Content Analysis function of the NVIVO software was not used in analysing that data (or made known, if used). This could have shone a necessary light on diversity within the Church in Australia.

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9 Please note indicative documentation of some of the most important of these in Part 3 below and p16 footnote 11.

- 4 The six Discernment Group topics were determined by the PC Facilitation Team without a rigorous analysis of the themes identified in the public submissions.
- 5 The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the PC was also drafted without rigorous analysis.
- 6 The Agenda for the First Assembly was simply a series of 16 questions (not obviously related to the submissions by the faithful) with no indication as to how they could be addressed by the Assembly in an ordered manner;
- 7 The Agenda of the First Assembly was addressed by allocation of particular agenda questions to assigned groups. Reports of these groups were not the subject of proper debate in the individual groups nor by the Assembly.
- 8 In December 2021, the document, *First Assembly Proposals from Small Groups and Individual Members*, was released, described officially as “the primary source document” in preparations for the Second Assembly, but:
  - a The group reports of the First Assembly were never presented to the full Plenary Council for discussion or approval.
  - b The *Individual Members’* proposals required no more than a seconder for inclusion as “*First Assembly Proposals*”. Neither proposer nor seconder were identified.
  - c Only those proposals submitted by individual members were numerically listed, giving them an implied ranking over proposals from small groups or implicit in the ‘Themes and Observations’.
  - d Not all Plenary Council members during the First Assembly were aware that individual proposals could be part of the “primary source” document for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Assembly without the knowledge or consideration of small groups or the full assembly.
- 9 A further document, ‘*Towards the Second Assembly*’, intended to guide preparations for the Second Assembly was provided to members but was not formally made available to the faithful for constructive comment; the fate of any comment from members to the drafting groups on this document is unknown.
- 10 The drafting groups presented working documents to the meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in May and it is unclear, if or how, the proposals were modified by this meeting.
- 11 Members of the PC were provided with the “*Framework for motions*” on 30<sup>th</sup> May and were provided 15 days to submit amendments to the writing groups:
  - a The format had changed from 16 questions to 8 parts with 27 motions, making it difficult for many members to comprehend the new format and then amend such a complex, nuanced document in so little time, particularly within the constraints that were set governing the amendments.
  - b ACCCR produced a comparative document showing the proposed motions and those suggested as amendments which was sent to all Plenary Council members, *periti* and the facilitators within the constraints imposed by PC rules, on 7<sup>th</sup> June. This is shown Part 4 of this submission.
  - c A total of 616 amendments were proposed by members by 15<sup>th</sup> June.
  - d The drafting groups produced a summary document the “Final framework for motions” as the agenda for the Second Assembly with limited changes to the original document.
  - e The final proposals/motions were far removed from the original submissions and had neither been approved by the First Assembly nor agreed by PC members out of session;
- 12 There is a view, expressed publicly by some bishops, that the PC should be limited to matters within the competence of the Australian bishops and should not advise the Holy See of the perceived Australian sense of the faith on matters beyond the authority of local bishops to resolve.

- 13 It is our view that because of the above failings, the Plenary Council has made far-reaching decisions on major matters affecting our Church which have not adequately reflected the *sensus fidei fidelium*.

### **ACCCR Response**

The above deficiencies have prejudiced the Council's ability to reach appropriate outcomes, and to adequately advise the Holy See:

- through careful identification of the sense of faith of the Australian faithful;
- through effective discernment and plenary consideration;
- with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The PC flaws identified above have seriously limited the PC in serving its canonical purpose. We therefore propose that any future Plenary Councils or diocesan or wider Synods should consider the following:

- 1 That members have an effective role in interpreting the agenda for the assemblies of Councils and Synods, to ensure that the sense of the faith of the faithful is adequately discerned in consultative sessions and reflected in the resolutions of such Councils or Synods including:
  - 1.a Matters requiring changes in the local Church within the competence of local bishops, and;
  - 1.b Advice to the Holy See on matters beyond the competence of the local bishops, on proposals emanating from the Council or Synod.
- 2 That sufficient sessions of any Council or Synod be scheduled to ensure sufficient time for addressing fully the substantial matters before it.
- 3 The PC failed to adequately address the following matters identified from public submissions and extensive engagement with concerned Catholics in Australia as key to the reform of our Church:
  - 3.a Equality of women in governance and ministry acknowledging the recommendations in the 1999 'Woman and Man' report to the ACBC;
  - 3.b All governance and leadership to be synodal in practice with a strong commitment to structures and procedures that ensure accountability, transparency and inclusion, acknowledging the recommendations in 'The Light from the Southern Cross' report;
  - 3.c Eradication of clericalism;
  - 3.d Ensuring that vulnerable groups such as LGBTIQ+ people be treated equally and justly by the Church;
  - 3.e Developing an appropriate response to the suffering and healing of victims and survivors of clerical and religious sexual abuse, followed by systems and rituals for the re-inclusion of Catholics who have been alienated from the Church, especially the victims and survivors of child sexual abuse;
  - 3.f Pastoral advice to the faithful in relation to the primacy of conscience in discerning how they apply the Church's social teaching in their particular circumstances;
  - 3.g Identification and expression of important matters and teachings which are outside the competence of the Australian bishops that should be referred to the Vatican for consideration by the universal Church.

We note that in the motions passed by the Plenary Council the statements were such that none obliged bishops to implement details of any of the motions that were agreed. As such, implementation and the evaluation of outcomes depends almost totally on each bishop; it is notable that 18 of 42 bishops failed initially to support the motion on "Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men". Motions and decrees require measurable outcomes for good governance to be possible, transparent and accountable. Whilst "The Light from the Southern Cross" and "Woman

*and Man*” reports were discussed, the motions fell far short of what is required and what was initially submitted by the People of God in their 17,457 submissions. Finally, significant items (e.g., c, e and f, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion) received no specific resolution other than being mentioned in the text of a number of introductory paragraphs.

It is clear that the *sensus fidei fidelium* of the Australian people did in fact want the matter of the ordination of women to the diaconate to be supported and that this support be conveyed to the Holy See. The failure by the bishops to indicate their support for the female diaconate conveys inadequate advice to the Holy See. Similarly, the primacy of conscience and the complex issues associated with the church’s social teachings on marriage, divorce, gender, family life, contraception, abortion and euthanasia, were also serious concerns for the People of God in Australia that should also have been submitted to the Holy See for further consideration, especially the need for inclusion of those excluded by current interpretation of teaching and some pastoral practices. Again, these only received mention in introductory paragraphs and global expressions of sympathy, acknowledgement of difficulties, the need for action and as matters of regret by the Plenary Council.

### **Conclusion**

ACCCR is concerned by the flawed processes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian PC, as well as the poor preparation and execution of the diocesan consultation phase in Australia, leading up to the Synod on Synodality. We look forward to receiving the promulgation of the initial *Instrumentum Laboris* in September 2022.

Our hope is that the failure of effective synodal dialogue between the laity and the Australian bishops, in spite of huge efforts on the part of ACCCR and member organisations<sup>10</sup> will be seriously considered by the Synod Secretariat in preparing for the 2023 Assembly. Whilst the Australian PC has led to outcomes that are welcome, they are less than what could have been, had truly synodal conversations and processes taken place rather than the constrained, controlled processes that were used. Our hope was that the Plenary Council would produce outcomes that would resonate with the sense of the faith of Australian Catholics; we believe it has fallen short of what was hoped for. We are afraid that unless the Synod on Synodality continues to demand the implementation of synodal practice at diocesan and parish levels, the evolution of the Church will continue to be impeded by hierarchical, clericalist control. All the baptised are enabled to listen to what the Spirit is saying and lead us to experience the freedom and creativity of People of God on their journey as a pilgrim people.

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10 See Part 3 footnote 11 p16 for indicative attempts to dialogue with the hierarchy by ACCCR.

## Part 3: A Synodal dialogue and response.

### A Summary of Chat from ACCCR Webinar on Synodality, 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2022.

#### Purpose for attachment of this response

Throughout this submission ACCCR has attempted to provide evidence of the many ways that renewal groups in Australasia have been attempting to engage in synodal dialogue with the hierarchy and specifically the ACBC and the Plenary council secretariat. Here is a further example of such a conversation sponsored by ACCCR and the sense of the faith of the Australian people responding to this webinar. It is one of many serious attempts to engage formally and informally which has met with almost no responses from the Australian hierarchy.<sup>11</sup>

On February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, ACCCR sponsored an on-line webinar on Synodality. More than 300 people participated in the webinar. Dr Elissa Roper, an Australian theologian whose research has focused on synodality, spoke on the meaning and history of synodality in the Catholic Church. Participants were able to participate by means of the ‘chat’ function in Zoom, and more than fifty people posted comments and questions. Comments were grouped into three main themes, summarised below.

#### Plenary Council and relationship to Synod on Synodality

The largest number of comments related to the listeners’ disillusion with the process employed by the bishops during the first Assembly of the Australian Plenary Council. There was a strong feeling that submissions to the Synod on Synodality would not be taken seriously, as that was the experience with submissions to the Plenary – there was a sense of ‘dampened enthusiasm’ for

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**11** ACCCR member groups and the Coalition as a whole produced:

Catholics for Renewal, “Getting Back on Mission – reforming our Church together”, Garratt Publishing, Mulgrave Vic, Sep 2019);

A Church for All: A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council...and Beyond; J Chittister and ACCCR”, Garratt Publishing, Mulgrave Vic, Sept 2021;

The Future of Catholicism in Australia – ACCCR Convocation 1: **A vision for Catholicism: Renewal directions, priorities, hopes and aspirations.** 2.5.2021. Speaker: Sr Joan Chittister OSB <https://www.garrattpublishing.com.au/category/convocation/> accessed 4.8.2022. The Future of Catholicism in Australia – ACCCR convocation 2: **Synodality: An International Perspective**; 26.8.2021 Opened by **Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann AM, Speakers:** Jessie Rogers, **Robert Fitzgerald, Debra Zanella and John Warhurst-** <https://concernedcatholicscanberra.org/new-events/2021/8/26/acccr-convocation-no-2> accessed 4.8.2022. The **future of Catholicism in Australia: ACCCR Convocation 3: After the first assembly of the Plenary Council**; 18.11.2021. Chair: Andrea Dean; Moderator: Ellen Fanning, ABC presenter. **Session1** - Speakers All members of the Plenary Council: Claire Victory (President St Vincent de Paul), Francis Sullivan (CEO Catholic social services), Dr Nimmi Candappa (Academic engineer) and Virginia Bourke (CEO Mercy health). **Session 2** – Speakers: Robert Fitzgerald AM, former Royal Commissioner, Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Adjunct Professor Susan Pascoe AM, Commission on Methodology, 2023 Synod on Synodality, Chairs of Catholic renewal organisations: - Dr Eleanor Flynn, – Women’s Wisdom in the Church; - Emeritus Professor John Warhurst AO – Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn; - Kevin Liston, South Australian Catholics for an Evolving Church. [https://www.garrattpublishing.com.au/blog/post/convocation-three\\_nov-11/80-22](https://www.garrattpublishing.com.au/blog/post/convocation-three_nov-11/80-22) accessed 4.8.2022.

Multiple other reports and requests to the ACBC and Plenary Council secretariat have been unanswered other than simply received. It has not been possible to establish any useful dialogue with the ACBC or the Plenary Council secretariat.



Church led initiatives. Respondents spoke of ‘despair’ and ‘frustration’ about the lack of response from the Australian Bishops. There was a suggestion that “*The Light from the Southern Cross*” should be submitted to the Synod as a far more accurate response to Church reform than any offered by the Plenary process.

### **Clericalism and Problems in Parishes**

Many comments reflected on the stultifying effect of clericalism on parish life. The need for reform of priestly formation was seen as central to combating clericalism, as well as more effective parish lay leadership. For some parishes, open and honest submissions to the synod were blocked by priests or parish councils.

Clericalism and the attitude of the Church to the victims of sexual abuse was also seen as a major cause of disengagement with the Church. Several respondents spoke of their desire to engage with people who have left the Church but being unable to get past the negative attitudes engendered by abuses of power and lack of trust.

While many respondents asked for more community involvement in the life of the Church, there were several comments related to the lack of parish pastoral councils, or parish councils wholly controlled by bishops and priests.

There were calls for the Church to become transparent, accountable, inclusive and humble. In order for this to happen different models of Church need to be openly and honestly sought and discussed.

### **Women in the Church**

A heartfelt cry asking why it is so hard for women to be heard in the Catholic Church, encapsulated a number of comments around women’s role in the Church and their continuing disempowerment. The number of highly qualified women theologians and biblical scholars without leadership roles or the right to preach was remarked upon.

### **In Conclusion**

The comments and discussion following the synodality webinar revealed a high level of frustration and disillusion with current Church leadership and governance processes, whether at the episcopal or parish level. While there were some positive pleas for continuing energetic involvement, the experience of the First Assembly of the Australian Plenary Council has not led to a hopeful, optimistic outlook on the Synod on Synodality.

## **Part 4: Proposals for amendments to the Motions set out in the *Framework for Motions for the second Assembly of the PC 9 June 2022***

### **Purpose for attachment of this response**

ACCCR consistently, respectfully, meaningfully and persistently attempted to engage with the Plenary Council process. To assist PC members and to remind them that it was their solemn duty to seriously consider the expressed *sensus fidei* ACCCR provided this document below in a 5-day period. We consider it represented that *sensus fidei fidelium* authentically, derived from the submissions originally made by the People of God in Australia in their 17,547 submissions to the PC.

Secondly, we are concerned that the same behaviour and defensiveness by bishops and their use of regulations and canon law provisions that pertain to the conduct of Councils and Synods, will be used in all synods throughout the world and continue to impede synodal processes and the work of the Spirit.

Thirdly we provide the Synod with an alternative picture of the *sensus fidei fidelium* of the People of God in Australia by the content of this document, in comparison to the motions that were passed by the PC.

Finally, the Synod will note that the proposed amendments make clear a number of important principles that should apply when motions are proposed for enactment: they need to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time based (SMART). Such SMART goals need to be set if outcomes can be seen and measured. Consensus only issues of doctrine, policy or principles, may require alternative criteria to be considered for motions. We commend your examination of the amendments that were made.

### **To Plenary Council Members:**

#### **Preamble:**

Members of the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) have reviewed the final *Framework for Motions* document of the Plenary Council and propose the amendments listed here, which are within the administrative constraints imposed for PC members.

We hope that these proposals are helpful to you as you consider the *Framework Motions* and develop your own amendments for submission to the Drafting Committee. Feel free to use any or parts of these amendments for your own purposes or to take their wording and rationale into account in developing your own. Please pass them on to friends and colleagues for discussion.

The first question asked of the Australian Church was truly Spirit-inspired: “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?”. The members of the Plenary Council are working with the Spirit to ensure that the ideas and hopes in the 17,457 submissions of more than 222,000 people – the sense of the faith of the faithful - are given voice.

**Notes:** The amendments proposed to the motions in the *Framework for Motions* released on 1 June 2022 have been prepared by drawing on submissions to the Plenary Council and documents of the

Council and consultations amongst Australian Catholics over the years of preparation for the Plenary Council. These, together with the Framework for Motions, provide the context for the proposed amendments.

- 1 The use of the verb ‘adopt’ in the first proposed motions for each Theme/Part - “*That the Plenary Council adopt the above introductory statement*” is problematic, being in effect a wholesale adoption by resolution of the complete introduction. Such adoption can be reasonably seen as adopting every line of the introductory statement as a commitment of the Plenary Council or, alternatively, seen as avoiding a specific resolution on some matters in the introductory statements that do require the Assembly to take a clear position. There is a similar problem with other action verbs (e.g., endorse, support) that suggest formal adoption of a lengthy text without detailed Assembly discussion. It is certainly appropriate to “note” the introductory statement as in the following amendments which include specific positions from the introductory statements as part of the resolutions to ensure endorsement.
- 2 The amendments proposed do not alter the general intent of, or negate, the motion as originally proposed. Many of the words and proposals are drawn from the theme’s introductory statement.
- 3 Numbers refer to the paragraph in which motions are listed in the Framework for Motions. Proposed amendments and changes to original Motions are shown in blue.

Original Framework motions	ACCCR proposed amendments
<b>Introduction</b>	
17. That the Plenary Council <b>adopt</b> the above Introduction.	17. That the Plenary Council <b>note</b> the above Introduction.
<b>Part 1. Reconciliation: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts</b>	
23. That the Plenary Council <b>adopt</b> the above introductory statement of Part 1.	<p>23. That the Plenary Council <b>note</b> the above introductory statement of Part 1 <b>and commits the Australian Church to:</b></p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">a saying sorry to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in and beyond the Church for the part played by the Church in the harms they have suffered;</p>

	<p><b>b</b> continuing to work towards recognition and reconciliation; accepting the recommendations contained in the NATSICC position paper “Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Life of the Catholic Church;” and working constructively with members of NATSICC to ensure the recommendations are implemented across the Church;_and</p> <p><b>c</b> endorsing the Uluru Statement from the Heart and working actively to bring it to fruition.</p>
<p>24. That each Catholic school, parish, diocese, eparchy or organisation respond to the recommendations contained in the NATSICC position paper “Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Life of the Catholic Church” in at least the following ways:</p> <p>a. acknowledging in an appropriate manner the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which their buildings stand;</p> <p>b. <b>including</b> the online Cultural Competency in a Catholic Context course developed by NATSICC and approved by the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the orientation and/or ongoing formation of staff and volunteers to enable more effective and appropriate ministry;</p>	<p>24. That each Catholic school, parish, diocese, eparchy or organisation respond to the recommendations contained in the NATSICC position paper “Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Life of the Catholic Church” in at least the following ways <b>and report annually on progress with these goals:</b></p> <p>a. acknowledging in an appropriate manner the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which their buildings stand;</p> <p>b. <b>ensuring that</b> the online Cultural Competency in a Catholic Context course developed by NATSICC and approved by the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples <b>is included</b> in the orientation and/or ongoing formation of staff and volunteers to enable more effective and appropriate ministry;</p> <p>c. ensuring that any retreats and other formation activities offered are culturally appropriate; and</p>

<p>c. ensuring that any retreats and other formation activities offered are culturally appropriate;</p> <p>d. <b>seeking</b> to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on its committees, boards and decision-making bodies.</p>	<p>d. <b>working actively</b> to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on its committees, boards and decision-making bodies.</p>
<p>25. That the National Liturgical Commission, in partnership with NATSICC, develop <b>options for</b> the liturgically and culturally appropriate use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander symbols and rituals in Catholic liturgical contexts.</p>	<p>25. That the National Liturgical Commission, in partnership with NATSICC, develop liturgically and culturally appropriate use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander symbols and rituals in Catholic liturgical contexts and, <b>specifically, the development of a culturally and spiritually Australian Mass.</b></p>
<p><b>Part 2. Choosing Repentance – Seeking Healing</b></p>	
<p>32. That the Plenary Council <b>adopt</b> the above introductory statement of Part 2; <b>whereby the Plenary Council:</b></p> <p>a. says sorry to the survivors of abuse and their families;</p>	<p>32. That the Plenary Council <b>note</b> the above introductory statement of Part 2; <b>and commits the Australian Church to:</b></p> <p>a saying sorry to the survivors of abuse and their families <b>in these or similar terms;</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a1. We in this Plenary Council express our profound sorrow to the parents and families past and present, for the abuse and violation of our children by clergy, religious leaders lay workers and volunteers on behalf of the Catholic Church in Australia;</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a2. We express our profound sorrow to young people and vulnerable adults who were abused by clergy, religious leaders, lay workers and volunteers;</p>

<p>b. commits the Church to continue to respond with justice and compassion to survivors of abuse and their families;</p> <p>c. reaffirms the commitment of the Church in Australia to the work of implementing and improving safeguarding standards and practices; and</p> <p>d. invites all Catholics to commit to ensuring that Church environments are safe and respectful.</p>	<p>a3. We express our profound sorrow to survivors of sexual abuse and for the failure of Church authorities to acknowledge and prevent further abuse;</p> <p>a4. We acknowledge that the offences against them are the offences of the whole church, not just of certain individuals within it;</p> <p>b. responding with justice and compassion to survivors of abuse and their families by honouring the commitment made by the Australian Bishops before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse not to exploit legal strategies to avoid and delay redress to primary and secondary victims of such abuse;</p> <p>c. healing, redress and restoration to victims of abuse, survivors, their families and whistle-blowers, measured in terms of their well-being;</p> <p>d. providing pastoral care to perpetrators of child sexual abuse;</p> <p>e. implementing and improving safeguarding standards and practices and in doing so undertakes to cease erecting and using institutions dependent upon the financial and staffing support of the Church to investigate and adjudicate in such matters;</p> <p>f. adopting best practice education curriculum in relation to priestly formation, especially with regard to sexuality and developing safe relationships with women and minors;</p> <p>g. with all Catholics, ensuring that Church environments are safe and respectful, and that past evils will not be repeated; and</p> <p>h. reporting annually on progress with this resolution.</p>
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<p>33. That, in consultation with those who have been harmed by abuse, <b>consideration be given to</b> a new name for the annual “Safeguarding Sunday”, so as to better express the aims of this day, which are currently “to acknowledge the immense damage caused by the sexual abuse of children and adults at risk ... makes a commitment to practices and protocols that create and maintain safe environments for all people [and] ... invites people to pray for those harmed by abuse directly and indirectly.</p>	<p>33. That, in consultation with those who have been harmed by abuse, a new name be given to the annual “Safeguarding Sunday”, so as to better express the aims of this day, which are currently “to acknowledge the immense damage caused by the sexual abuse of children and adults at risk ... makes a commitment to practices and protocols that create and maintain safe environments for all people [and] ... invites people to pray for those harmed by abuse directly and indirectly.</p>
<p><b>Part 3. Called by Christ – Sent Forth as Missionary Disciples</b></p>	
<p>45. That the Plenary Council <b>adopt</b> the above introductory statement of Part 3.</p>	<p>45. That the Plenary Council <b>note</b> the above introductory statement of Part 3: <b>and commit to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <b>acknowledging the call to discipleship as integral to the Gospel and enacted within each person through consecration in Baptism;</b></li> <li>b. <b>affirming a culture of synodality for parishes and dioceses, where healthy and fruitful relationships between clergy and laity “recognise different but complementary charisms and opportunities for co-responsibility”, and desire “consultative and collaborative approaches to governance at all levels in the Church;”</b></li> <li>c. <b>committing to listening as providing the power to open us to the Spirit’s work of transformation, enabling genuine encounter and giving rise to missionary action;</b></li> <li>d. <b>in relation to committing to listening to the realities of LGBTIQ+ people, establishing structures that validate their experience, reform teachings that exclude and harm, and advocate for justice;.</b></li> </ul>



e. committing the Church in Australia to being centred on Christ, with a baptismal identity and on a path of missionary discipleship. This commitment involves:

e1. Development of resources, formation and advice in the promotion of hospitality, encounter, dialogue and merciful responses to the needs of our society;

e2. All Church communities, entities and collaborative bodies developing structures and policies that demonstrate their commitment to collaboration and co-responsibility, in ways that open to new possibilities discerned in the light and signals of our time;

e3. Church communities and entities promoting evangelisation through hospitality, encounter, dialogue and merciful responses in their leadership, formation and education programs;

e4. Providing regular opportunities for those formed for leadership in the Church, including seminarians, to engage in dialogue with people who experience disadvantage or exclusion, both in the Church and in society;

f. committing dioceses to mandate the establishment of Parish Pastoral Councils to:

- establish opportunities to listen to people on the peripheries – within and beyond parishes;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop plans to overcome experiences of exclusion, lack of acceptance and other boundaries;</li> <li>• provide Parish leaders with formation and resources for training in these works of evangelisation;</li> </ul> <p>g. developing of and reporting on a long-term plan to study the meaning of evangelisation and catechesis of the community in the light of the evolutionary perspective prescribed by Vatican II (GS 5). Such a long term plan must address current signs of the times including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the sanctity of life;</li> <li>• the nature of the human person including LGBTIQ+;</li> <li>• sexuality, marriage and family; the divorced and re-partnered; for the support of people to live healthy marital and sexual lives; and others alienated from the church; and</li> <li>• for an understanding of the primacy of conscience.</li> </ul> <p>In the light of such study the Australian Church should proclaim the Gospel through Catholic engagement in the public arena and contribute to public debate on issues relating to marriage and sexuality.</p>
<p>46. That those responsible for Catholic schooling and early childhood education, led by the National Catholic Education Commission and drawing upon the document <i>A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education</i> (2017), establish a national forum, which will seek to:</p> <p>a. identify and respond to the needs of the diverse and distinct circumstances of Catholic schools in Australia;</p>	<p>46. That those responsible for Catholic schooling and early childhood education, led by the National Catholic Education Commission and drawing upon the document <i>A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education</i> (2017), establish a national forum, which will seek to:</p> <p>a. identify and respond to the needs of the diverse and distinct circumstances of Catholic schools in Australia to ensure that all feel welcome and included in every Catholic school; this should include experiencing Eucharistic celebrations or scriptural readings that are not couched in patriarchal, sexist or misogynist language;</p>

<p>b. build partnerships which enhance the vision of Catholic education as an instrument of evangelisation and an essential dimension of the contemporary mission of the Church;</p> <p>c. offer a process for critical reflection and discernment of the vocation of Catholic education today;</p> <p>d. support formation opportunities for leadership development and training in religious education.</p>	<p>b. develop a long-term plan to revise all Catholic sexual ethics to reflect the best science, psychology and anthropology so that the love and relational experiences of Catholics are recognised and respected;</p> <p>c. build partnerships which enhance the vision of Catholic education as an instrument of evangelisation and <a href="#">mission facilitating the development in each student of their individuality, their giftedness, and their God-given rights</a>” and for schools to report annually on the missionary actions/activities undertaken by students within the school and their communities or other missionary activities nationally or internationally;</p> <p>d. offer a process for critical reflection and discernment of the vocation of Catholic education today; and</p> <p>e. support formation opportunities for leadership development and training in religious education.</p>
<p>47. That the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service establish a triennial National Forum of Catholic social service, health and aged care, disability, prison ministry, refugee and asylum-seeker, and justice, ecology and peace organisations; and that the purpose of this forum include:</p> <p>a. providing opportunities for dialogue that will contribute to the ability of the Church in Australia to attend to “examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel”;</p>	<p>47. That the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service establish a triennial National Forum of Catholic social service, health and aged care, disability, prison ministry, refugee and asylum-seeker, and justice, ecology and peace organisations <a href="#">and a significant number of the Catholic faithful, as well as representatives from other faiths and none</a>; and that the purpose of this forum includes:</p> <p>a. providing opportunities for dialogue that will contribute to the ability of the Church in Australia to attend to “examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” <a href="#">and to receive the Diocesan and Parish reports on behalf of the church on the progress made in the adoption of the Plenary Council motions and actions determined in 2022</a>;</p>

<p>b. identifying and exploring priorities for evangelisation through outreach, service provision, advocacy and formation;</p> <p>c. addressing gaps;</p> <p>d. seeking opportunities for collaboration; and</p> <p>e. informing the development of local social teachings to be issued by the Australian Bishops.</p>	<p>b. identifying and exploring priorities for evangelisation through outreach, service provision, advocacy and formation; and <i>utilising research carried out by the National Church Life Survey</i>;</p> <p>c. addressing gaps;</p> <p>d. seeking opportunities for collaboration; and</p> <p>e. informing the development of local social teachings to be issued by the Australian Bishops <b>and to be advocated publicly, in particular to civil governments, authorities and service providers.</b></p>
<p>48. That each diocese identifies ways of promoting ecumenical and interfaith relationships (e.g., an Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer) that are practical and appropriate for the diocese.</p> <p>a. That the Bishops Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue – in collaboration with Catholic tertiary institutions and theological associations – provide guidance, advice and resources to dioceses for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and relationships, and formation for those responsible for ecumenical and <b>interreligious</b> relations.</p>	<p>48. That each diocese identifies ways of promoting ecumenical and interfaith relationships (e.g., an Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer) that are practical and appropriate for the diocese. <b>This should involve tasking PPCs to appoint an Ecumenical and interfaith officer to promote ecumenical and interfaith activities at the parish level. A significant number of catholic laity as well as representatives from other faith and none should be represented at the diocesan level supporting this important function of outreach and mission. This should reflect the Church’s recognition that God speaks to all humankind and that, since it is possible that elements of God’s revelation may be found in other faiths, we must engage in such relationships to discover such elements.</b></p> <p>a. That the Bishops Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue – in collaboration with Catholic tertiary institutions and theological associations – provide guidance, advice and resources to dioceses for ecumenical and interfaith</p>

dialogue and relationships, and formation for those responsible for ecumenical and inter-religious relations.

#### **Part 4. Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men**

55. That the Plenary Council **adopt** the above introductory statement of Part 4.

55. That the Plenary Council **note** the above introductory statement of Part 4, and **commit particularly to the equal dignity of all the baptised, especially regarding women’s participation in leadership and governance structures, to be given authentic witness by:**

- a mandating that women are equally represented in decision-making structures of Church governance at all levels - parish, diocese/ eparchy, and national and international - and in Church agencies and organisations;
- b ensuring, through formal policies and intentional practice, that the experiences and perspectives of women are heard and considered;
- c ensuring that dioceses and eparchies value more publicly, recognise and remunerate more justly those women already leading and serving in the Church in various ways;
- d facilitating women engaged in ministry to share their experiences and reflections on ministry with their bishops, and these women reporting to Pope Francis’ reconstituted Study Commission on the Female Diaconate within 12 months;
- e implementing women for ministry as deacon should Pope Francis authorise such ministry in light of the findings of the reconstituted Study Commission on the Female Diaconate;

	<p>f the Plenary Council fully accepting all the people of God in their diversity, particularly acknowledging the vulnerability involved in sexual and gender diversity;</p> <p>g Women no longer experiencing the rejection and abuse through Eucharistic celebrations, scriptural readings or formal Church documents that use patriarchal, sexist or misogynist language; and</p> <p>h. That the Plenary Council resolves that the Holy See be advised that these are matters of great concern in the Australian Church.</p>
<p>56. That each Australian diocese and eparchy <b>foster</b> new opportunities for women to participate in ministries that are stable, publicly recognised, <b>appropriately resourced with</b> theological education and commissioned by the bishop. These ministries <b>should</b> engage with the most important aspects of diocesan and parish life and have a real impact on those communities.</p>	<p>56. That each Australian diocese and eparchy <b>establish</b> pathways for women to participate equally with men in ministries that are stable, publicly recognised, with <b>fully funded accredited</b> theological education and commissioned by the bishop. These ministries <b>must</b> engage with the most important aspects of diocesan and parish governance, leadership and life and have a real <b>and measurable</b> impact on <b>all in</b> those diverse communities. <b>To facilitate this level of equality, this Plenary Council and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference will inform Pope Francis and other relevant authorities that the sense of the faith of the Australian faithful is that women should be admitted to the diaconate and priesthood and the Australian Bishops be mandated to use their best efforts to make that a reality.</b></p>
<p><b>Part 5. Communion in Grace: Sacrament to the World</b></p>	
<p>67. That the Plenary Council <b>adopt</b> the above introductory statement of Part 5.</p>	<p>67. That the Plenary Council <b>note</b> the above introductory statement of Part 5 and affirms:</p> <p>a. a sacramental, multicultural and spiritually rich prayer life that is transformed and transforming and encourages the provision of liturgical and other prayer resources and opportunities for formation reflecting the “new</p>

analyses and syntheses” called for by Vatican II (GS 5) at the national, diocesan and parish levels;

b. that the Eucharist be made available to all who seek it;

c. the unique contributions of families to a healthy society and call for unity and respect among all, particularly between men and women and utterly condemns all forms of domestic violence and violence against women;

d. the continued formation of all, laity and clerics, in a renewed understanding of the centrality of sacramental and parish life, recognising that the way that we worship informs how we believe (*lex orandi, lex credendi*);

e. an outward-facing Church totally committed to justice, peace, family unity, ecumenism and dialogue with other faiths:

- a Church which advocates unequivocally for the rights of the oppressed and disadvantaged whilst tending practically to their needs;
- a Church where we are all equal regardless of sex, gender, race or ability: ‘all one in Christ, with no more distinctions ... between male and female’ (Galatians 3:28);
- a Church whose leaders read well the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel;
- a Church inclusive of the diversity of the People of God (“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12), and;
- a Church that endorses the complementarity of vocations whether lay, ordained or religious.

f. the diversity of the People of God (“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ” (1

	Corinthians 12:12), and the equality of vocations whether lay, ordained or religious.
68. That dioceses promote widespread exercise of the ministries of Lector, Acolyte and Catechist.	68. That dioceses promote widespread exercise of the ministries of Lector, Acolyte and Catechist.
69. That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish provisions and guidelines for lay people to participate in a formal ministry of Preaching, as provided for in canon 766 of the Code of Canon Law.	69. That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish provisions and guidelines for lay people ( <b>women and men</b> ) to participate in a formal ministry of Preaching, as provided for in canon 766 of the Code of Canon Law.
70. That the Plenary Council request an amendment to canon 767 to permit, <b>where appropriate</b> , those entrusted with this ministry of Preaching to preach in the Eucharistic assembly, under the oversight of the local ordinary. While this proposal refers to the liturgy of the Latin Church, the Plenary Council invites members of the Eastern Churches to consider whether similar provisions would be suitable in relation to their liturgies.	70. That the Plenary Council request an amendment to canon 767 to permit those women and men entrusted with this ministry of Preaching to preach in the Eucharistic assembly, under the oversight of the local ordinary. While this proposal refers to the liturgy of the Latin Church, the Plenary Council invites members of the Eastern Churches to consider whether similar provisions would be suitable in relation to their liturgies.
71. That the Bishops Commission for Liturgy institute a sustained program of catechesis of the Sacrament of Penance to promote an understanding and appropriate practice of each of the three forms of the Rite of Penance.	71. That the Bishops Commission for Liturgy: a. institute a sustained program of catechesis of the Sacrament of Penance <b>for priests and penitents</b> to promote an understanding and appropriate practice of each of the three forms of the Rite of Penance.;  b. propose to the Holy See a review of the teaching and ritual of the Sacrament of Penance in the light of contemporary theology and the signs of our times in which the practice of the sacrament has been largely abandoned by the faithful in general, and of the pastoral appropriateness of the continued priority given to the first and second Rites of Penance.
72. That the Plenary Council request that the Pope <b>consider whether</b> the Third Form of the Rite of Penance might have wider use on occasions when it is	72. That the Plenary Council requests that the Pope <b>approve</b> the Third Form of the Rite of Penance might have wider use on occasions when it is particularly appropriate, granted an understanding among the faithful of its



<p>particularly appropriate, granted an understanding among the faithful of its distinctive nature and requirements.</p>	<p>distinctive nature and requirements and in light of the community's enhanced understanding of sin as communal as well as individual.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Part 6. Formation and Leadership for Mission and Ministry</b></p>	
<p>81. That the Plenary Council <b>adopt</b> the above introductory statement of Part 6.</p>	<p>81. That the Plenary Council <b>note</b> the above introductory statement of Part 6 and determines that, the Australian Church will develop national formation programs that ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the diversity of the Catholic community is explicitly recognised;</li> <li>b. the toxic culture of clericalism is eradicated and that progress in this area is reported annually;</li> <li>c. that candidates for Latin Rite priesthood are appropriately formed for a life of celibacy;</li> <li>d. that the appropriateness of celibacy as a requirement for all diocesan priests be referred to the Holy See;</li> <li>e. intercultural competency is encouraged in our multicultural society, especially in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and that progress in this area is reported annually;</li> </ul>

	<p>f. the equal dignity of all the people of God, women and men, including of cultural sexual and gender diversity, is affirmed;</p> <p>g. the concerns, spirituality and modes of communication and connection of young people are taken into account;</p> <p>h. the use of inclusive and non-sexist language in the Eucharistic celebration, the Scriptures and formal church documents of all types is mandated;</p> <p>i. the rich variety of spiritual and devotional traditions of the Church are appreciated and celebrated;</p> <p>j. synodal practices such as encounter, small group formation in parishes, accompaniment, listening and dialogue are fostered and promoted;</p> <p>k. through their living witnesses to the great virtues of faith, hope and love, Christian leaders encourage the ecclesial community in the way of ongoing conversion which, in turn, supports and furthers missionary discipleship; and</p> <p>l. that progress in this area in parishes is reported annually.</p>
<p>82. That each diocese establishes or strengthens strategic policies that identify and support ministry and leadership formation. These will:</p> <p>a. acknowledge the generational, cultural and ethnic diversity of the contemporary Church in Australia;</p>	<p>82. That dioceses work together with appropriate theologians and educators, including lay members, to develop ministry and leadership formation to provide formation for all members of the church. These will:</p> <p>a. acknowledge the equality of all in Baptism and the generational, cultural and ethnic diversity of the contemporary Church in Australia;</p> <p>b. recognise the changing community profile of many parish and faith communities, the need for significant skill development to cover aspects such as communication, listening, discernment, delegation, working with</p>

<p>b. recognise the changing community profile of many parish and faith communities;</p> <p>c. establish broader consultation, dialogue and representation within local Churches' structures and decision-making processes;</p> <p>d. include <b>strategies</b> for ongoing formation and appropriate forms of mentoring and accompaniment (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral); and</p> <p>e. consider avenues for financial support through scholarships, sponsorships and grants.</p>	<p>couples, families and small groups, servant leadership, joint responsibility, governance and bias in discernment and decision-making, as well as working with youth, the alienated and others we have distanced from the church; and that competence in administration, community development and adult education skills are central to all such work;</p> <p>c. establish broader consultation, dialogue and representation within local Churches' structures and decision-making processes;</p> <p>d. Include <b>programs</b> for ongoing formation and appropriate forms of mentoring and accompaniment of individuals, <b>families and small groups</b> (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral), <b>employing contemporary scholarship to enable sound scriptural interpretation to enliven the faith, with particular attention to eradicating habits of, and tendencies toward, clericalism;</b> and</p> <p>e. consider avenues for financial support through scholarships, sponsorships and grants <b>which will be available to all and will be administered transparently.</b></p>
<p>83. That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference commission the Australian Catholic Biblical Association and the Australian Catholic Theological Association to liaise with appropriate Catholic and diocesan agencies, institutions and educational providers in order to enhance cross-institutional engagement and development of resources and formation programs. The design of these resources and programs will carefully consider the needs of</p>	<p>83. That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference commission the Australian Catholic Biblical Association and the Australian Catholic Theological Association to liaise with appropriate Catholic and diocesan agencies, institutions and educational providers in order to enhance cross-institutional engagement and development of resources and formation programs. The design of these resources and programs will carefully consider the needs of</p>

<p>rural and regional areas and creatively assess the use of available technology in order to improve delivery and accessibility.</p>	<p>rural and regional areas and creatively assess the use of available technology in order to improve delivery and accessibility.</p>
<p>84. That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish a working group with expertise in formation to develop national Formation for Leadership strategies and guidelines designed for clergy, religious and lay leaders to address the possibilities and challenges of synodal leadership in parishes and diocesan agencies and support the Church’s work of evangelisation. These strategies and guidelines will:</p> <p>a. have a national scope and be adaptable to local circumstances;</p> <p>b. aim to enhance competencies in and commitment to synodal practices, with a focus on building communities that are welcoming to all, with particular attention to those on the margins of society and the Church; and</p> <p>c. identify and promote models of effective engagement with government and civil society.</p>	<p>84. That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish a working group with expertise in formation to develop national Formation for Leadership strategies and guidelines designed for <b>bishops</b>, clergy, religious and lay leaders <b>to ensure a healthy Christian culture in all relationships and the consequent eradication of clericalism and</b> to address the possibilities and challenges of synodal leadership in parishes and diocesan agencies, and to support the Church’s work of evangelisation. These strategies and guidelines will:</p> <p>a have a national scope and be adaptable to local circumstances;</p> <p><b>b ensure that decisions at every level of Church leadership are accountable, transparent and inclusive;</b></p> <p>c. aim to enhance competencies in and commitment to synodal practices, with a focus on building communities that are welcoming to all, with particular attention to those on the margins of society and <b>within</b> the Church; and</p> <p>d. identify and promote models of effective engagement <b>with other churches and faiths</b>, government and civil society.</p>
<p>85. That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish a working group with expertise in Catholic Social Teaching to develop a national framework for formation in Catholic Social Teaching in order to encourage, support and expand the offering of programs in Catholic Social Teaching. Situated within</p>	<p>85. That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish a working group with expertise in Catholic Social Teaching to develop a national framework for formation in Catholic Social Teaching in order to encourage, support and expand the offering of programs in Catholic Social Teaching. Situated within the broader teaching and mission of the Church, this</p>

<p>the broader teaching and mission of the Church, this framework will emphasise the social dimension of the Church’s mission, with a particular focus on the formation requirements of leaders in Catholic social service, health and aged care organisations, Catholic education and dioceses.</p>	<p>framework will emphasise the social dimension of the Church’s mission, with a particular focus on the formation requirements of leaders in Catholic social service, health and aged care organisations, Catholic education and dioceses.</p>
<p><b>Part 7. At the Service of Communion, Participation, and Mission: Governance</b></p>	
<p>91. That the Plenary Council <b>adopt</b> the above introductory statement of Part 7.</p>	<p>91. That the Plenary Council <b>note</b> the above introductory statement of Part 7 <b>and commits to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. recognising the gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism in the life of the Church for faithfully interpreting and living the Christian Gospel in the diverse circumstances of history and culture – the <i>sensus fidei</i> – upon which the Plenary Council has drawn extensively;</li> <li>b. governance in the Catholic Church being exercised in a transparent and accountable manner. For a diocese, this would involve publishing an annual report and each diocesan bishop publishing a summary of his Quinquennial Report;</li> <li>c. practising synodality in overcoming the ‘culture of clericalism’ that promotes privilege and enables abuse of power;</li> <li>d. ensuring that decision-making is not confined to those who exercise sacramental power.</li> </ul> <p>And this Plenary Council determines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. that governance in the Catholic Church should be exercised in a synodal manner, with the appropriate participation of various bodies:</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for a diocese, this would mainly involve the establishment and active involvement of a Diocesan Pastoral Council (cc 511-514), a Council of Priests, a College of Consultors, the Diocesan Finance Council, and regular Diocesan Synods;</li> <li>• for a parish, this would mainly involve the establishment and participation of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee, with similar provisions for transparency and accountability;</li> </ul> <p>f. that every diocese establishes a Diocesan Pastoral Council;</p> <p>g. that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the National Centre for Pastoral Research will develop guidelines and provide resources for the establishing and flourishing of Diocesan Pastoral Councils and other appropriate synodal structures, to be constituted through ensuring the proper representation of the diverse people of each diocese and to be fully involved in the development of diocesan plans, priorities and key decisions;</p> <p>j. the Church in Australia fostering the discernment and synodal leadership envisaged at Vatican II, called for by Pope Francis; and</p> <p>k. within three years following the closing session of the Plenary Council, each Diocese will conduct a Diocesan Synod and every five years thereafter.</p>
<p>92. That dioceses and eparchies support parishes to establish and strengthen appropriate synodal structures by developing guidelines and providing resources for the flourishing of Parish Pastoral Councils.</p>	<p>92. a. That dioceses and eparchies <b>require and support</b> parishes to establish and strengthen appropriate synodal structures and developing guidelines and providing resources for <b>the establishment, nurturing and flourishing of Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs), Parish Finance Councils (PFC), and a Parish Renewal Team (PRT) to implement the directions by the PC and report on progress annually;</b></p>

	<p>b. That PPCs are mandated in every diocese, are constituted as decision-making, not advisory, bodies and comprise appropriate representation of the diversity of parishioners. That this Council requests an appropriate amendment to Canon 536 #2; and</p> <p>c. That the Holy See be requested to mandate throughout the universal Church that DPCs and PPCs be established in every diocese and parish subject to the provisions of canon 127 and comprising appropriate representation of the diversity of parishioners (as mandated above for Australia by this Plenary Council).</p>
<p>93. That representatives from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial PJPs form a working group to develop and establish a roundtable structure, with the proposed name of the National Catholic Synodal Life Roundtable, to foster and assess the development of synodal leadership across the Church in Australia. The roundtable will bring together representative members of those groups with Diocesan Pastoral Councils and other key national bodies of the Church.</p>	<p>93. That a National Catholic Synodal Life Round-table be established, comprising representatives from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia, the Association of Ministerial PJPs and Diocesan Pastoral Councils and other key national bodies of the Church, to foster and assess the development of synodal leadership across the Church in Australia and to receive reports on the implementation of PC actions annually.</p>
<p>94. That the National Centre for Pastoral Research be commissioned to study the implementation of recommendations from The Light from the Southern Cross which has already happened, to identify examples of effective initiatives that have been taken and thus enable further implementation of those recommendations judged helpful and practicable.</p>	<p>94. That the National Centre for Pastoral Research be commissioned to advise urgently on facilitating the implementation of recommendations from <i>The Light from the Southern Cross</i> report consistent with the decisions of this Plenary Council, and to identify examples of effective initiatives that have been taken, thus enabling further implementation of those recommendations, as well as reporting on those recommendations that have not yet been implemented.</p>
<p><b>Part 8. Integral Ecology and Conversion for the Sake of our Common Home</b></p>	

<p>102. That the Plenary Council <b>adopt</b> the above introductory statement of Part 8.</p>	<p>102. That the Plenary Council <b>note</b> the above introductory statement of Part 8, <b>and commits the Church in Australia to:</b></p> <p>a. responding urgently to our baptismal calling of taking up God’s mission of love for the whole of creation;</p> <p>b. promoting ecological conversion, undertaking ecological education and fostering ecological spirituality always recognising that “systems of life and love are deeply interconnected” and that PPCs be asked to report initiatives in this area annually; and</p> <p>c. ensuring that ecological conversion applies to respect for the validity of all God’s creation regardless of sex, gender, race, or ability.</p>
<p>103. That, witnessing to their communal ecological conversion, by <b>2030</b> each Catholic parish, diocese, eparchy or organisation either develops its own or participates in an established Laudato Si’ Action Plan which includes the following elements:</p> <p>a. a public commitment;</p> <p>b. a governance model, processes and procedures;</p> <p>c. a mechanism for listening to the ecological wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;</p> <p>d. regular reporting on progress towards and accountability for defined goals and objectives; and</p> <p>e. co-construction of those goals and objectives with the people they are meant to</p>	<p>103. That, witnessing to their communal ecological conversion as a priority, <b>by 2025</b> every Catholic parish, diocese, eparchy and organisation either develops its own or participates in an established Laudato Si’ Action Plan which includes the following elements:</p> <p>a. a public commitment;</p> <p>b. a governance model, processes and procedures;</p> <p>c. a mechanism for listening to the ecological wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;</p> <p>d. regular reporting on progress towards and accountability for defined goals and objectives; and</p> <p>e. co-construction of those goals and objectives with the people they are meant to</p>



support and serve.	support and serve.
<b>Motion for the Implementation Phase of the Fifth Plenary Council</b>	
<p>104. That the Plenary Council adopt the following steps for ensuring the effectiveness and accountability of the Implementation phase, to take place after a period of <b>five</b> years:</p> <p>a. the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council will be responsible for establishing terms of review for the Plenary Council’s implementation;</p> <p>b. a roundtable body such as that proposed in the motion at paragraph 93 will be responsible for co-ordinating the review;</p> <p>c. interim reports will be published in 2023 and <b>2025</b>; and</p> <p>d. the final review report will be published <b>five years after the Second Assembly, in 2027.</b></p>	<p>104. Motion: That the Plenary Council <b>commits to implementation by individual bishops of its resolutions expeditiously</b>, and adopt the following steps for ensuring the effectiveness and accountability of the Implementation phase, to take place after a period of <b>no more than three years</b>:</p> <p>a. the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council will be responsible for establishing arrangements for the Plenary Council’s urgent implementation;</p> <p>b. a roundtable body such as that proposed in the motion at paragraph 93 will be responsible for co-ordinating the implementation review;</p> <p>c. an interim reports will be published in 2023 and <b>2024</b>; and</p> <p>d. the final review report will be published in <b>2025.</b></p>
<b>Motion to Resolve the Decrees of the 1937 Plenary Council</b>	
Text to be added later	

## **Part 5: Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) members**

### **Purpose for attachment of this document**

This document describes the membership of the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform. (ACCCR) was, established in 2012 to foster collaboration and support among its member groups and to disseminate messages of hope and opportunity. Some members such as WATAC preceded the formation of the coalition by many years, some 20 years ago and others such as Rainbow Catholics much more recently. Structurally we are a loosely woven coalition of the baptised, like-minded, committed Catholic people, who have worked long and hard as a part of the People of God on their journey in Australia. Some of us rejoiced at the time of Vatican II, only to see the new course set come to a progressively more shuddering halt. However, our mission has continued in spite of this.

### **Our Call**

Jesus inspired his disciples to form a community to proclaim and live the Good News of love, justice, equality, self-giving and hope. The institutional Church has failed to listen to its people thus alienating many through an emphasis on power, hierarchy and discrimination, with a lack of transparency and accountability. Australian Catholics have a responsibility to act now in ways that reflect the values of the Gospel, the vision of Vatican II and the best values of Australian society.

Our Call as disciples is to be a Catholic Church:

- that reflects Jesus' message of love, justice, equality, peace and forgiveness
- Which all people are directed by their conscience and assume their responsibility for the mission of the Church
- Which inspires its people to recapture an experience of the mystical and the spiritual
- Where God-given authority is used wisely and justly to propagate the teachings of Christ, and respects the role of the People of God
- Where all people, men and women, single and married, minister in a spirit of co-responsibility for the Church
- That influences Australian society to be ever more just, compassionate and egalitarian.

### **Our members**

#### **Australian Reforming Catholics**

ARC was formed in the year 2000 to bring attention to the urgent need for Church reform in both its structure and in what it teaches. We consider that unbelievable teaching drives most of the Church's systemic problems. Through seminars, letters and e-mail ARC has built up a membership of hundreds of mostly practising Catholics across Australia, including nuns, brothers, priests and two bishops.

ARC is incorporated and members pay an annual subscription. ARC's focus is on informing and educating Catholics on what and how reform is needed and in the timely use of the general mass media to highlight the need for Church reform. Its printed quarterly newsletter of information and opinion, Arcvoice, goes out to all members and interested parties. A copy is posted to every bishop in Australia with the hope that its physical presence at least shows that the demand for reform is constant.

ARC is managed by an elected Secretariat of eight people who have come to know the general majority viewpoint of members through seminars, questionnaires and dialogue with individuals. The presentation of its public stance on issues is monitored by the Secretariat and communicated through Arcvoice and its one spokesperson. Its credibility and charism in speaking out for others has been confirmed over twenty years through the many complimentary e-mails to the Secretariat, letters to the Arcvoice editor, generous donations, and in the new members gained through Arcvoice readership.

### **'Be The Change' New Zealand**

We are a group of women and men who have adopted the name 'Be the Change' as that is what we aspire to, committed to gender equity in the Catholic Church.

Inspired by the Women's Ordination Movement internationally, we want to become a supportive group for women in New Zealand called to particular ministries currently denied women, or which women find difficult to access, including priesthood, the diaconate, mediating the sacraments, giving homilies etc.

While woman priesthood was the issue we originally gathered around, we are still discerning what this might mean, or how this might happen. We want to continue nurturing the formation of our community, build relationships, and mission our vision, all the while being open to how the Spirit may move among us.

We are motivated by a sense of responsibility to Be the Change. In a safe, supportive, nourishing, hope-filled space we are journeying towards a radical new, inclusive model of RC Church that reflects God's wondrous wholeness and faithfulness to the Gospel message.

Most of us are also connected to other groups of organisations that seek change or work towards a new vision of church in one way or another. These include the St Paul's Rongopai Eucharistic Community (an Auckland based community of more than 3 decades history), Tui Motu Independent Catholic Magazine, Sophia women (a loose movement that functions in various ways throughout the country), and various spiritual groups, including ecumenical groups and more progressive religious communities.

### **Cardijn Community**

Our core policy in Corporate Governance by Episcopacy has been:

Organisation should be based on the core teachings of Christ in the gospels, the epistles of genuine Pauline origin, the Acts of Apostles, Vatican 1 Constitution, Papal document on the Apostleship of Laity, and Pope Francis edict that local churches should adapt to their own situations dictated by pastoral need not doctrine. So the gospel of inclusion embraced their preferential option for the poor in current times where they embrace the equality of all people as defined in Paul as the mystical body of Christ where all members have role to play as a royal priesthood.

We follow our core roles in welfare as defined in Matthew for the hungry, homeless, naked, grieving and prisoners in the broadest meanings of each of those terms as the world has evolved.

These works come out of the prime two love commandments and the Sermon on the Mount which set the value ideals laid out in the Beatitudes and the maximum obedience to spirit of each law not just the legal letter minimums of each rule.

St Stephen's model of governance which made each leader fully accountable to the community for the decisions they took was the antithesis to the Roman Empire model imposed by Constantine which replaced Christ's values of inclusion, equality and solidarity with the contemporary legal and cultural values of a hierarchical society. This Roman model ruled by hierarchy, coercion, economic exploitation and force, rather than dialogue and consent for the common good of society and each individual without discrimination which Jesus explicitly and implicitly opposed.

## **Catholics For Renewal**

Group established in 2011 and incorporated in Victoria. Over 9 years group has had some 20 members, all committed Catholics wanting renewal of their church to make it more Christ centred. Focus for renewal has been on reforms to church governance (accountable, transparent, inclusive, co-responsible, synodal, subsidiarity), eradication of clericalism, greater role for women in ministries (including ordination) and governance, lay role in selection of bishops, just redress for victims of sex-abuse, and 'return to mission'. Strategies for achieving group aims: Open Letters to bishops; submissions to ACBC (to convene plenary council in 2012); submissions to Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry and Royal Commission into child sexual abuse; submission to Freedom of Religion Review; meetings with bishops of several dioceses re renewal, online newsletters; summary papers on key issues for Plenary Council; articles in The Swag and Pearls & Irritations, publication of book Getting Back on Mission: Reforming our Church Together (Garratt Publishing 2019), regularly updated website [www.catholicsforrenewal.org.au](http://www.catholicsforrenewal.org.au)

## **Catholics Moving Forward Shoalhaven**

Our activity is based on:

- Sexual Abuse in Church and responses
  - Acceptance of the Gay Community
  - Women – involvement and being part of the decision-making of the Church
  - Clericalism
  - Plenary 2020 Response
  - Married Priests

We will be using the book “Getting Back on Mission”, produced by Catholics Renewal Inc., and the papers produced for the Coalition Renewal Forum planned for April 2022 for discussions. Some of the avenues that **Catholics Moving Forward Shoalhaven** will look to explore include:

- prayerful and practical support towards our committed clergy
- support towards those who have suffered sexual or other abuse from the church, or otherwise been hurt by the church
- collaborative working toward a reform agenda in the Wollongong Diocese more broadly
- new models of church and more effective lay participation
- effective vehicles for the participation of women in key decision-making
- establishment of a diocesan pastoral council with a view to establishing lay leadership, and
- agreement for a work plan, based on mutual partnership with our bishop, lay people, and our committed priests and religious to achieve a reform agenda.
- Following the Plenary to develop are more inclusive discussion on the church not using structures like Plenary and Synodal.
- Need to involve particularly those who have stopped practicing such as the LGBTQ and Divorced.

ACCCR has recently released a communiqué to the Catholic bishops and religious leaders of Australia (and open to all the People of God) calling for sweeping changes in the Church,

including greater transparency and accountability, and equal participation for women. Recognition of the damage and division caused by clericalism in our church is a call from many contemporary Catholics in Australia. These are some of the 'ground floor' issues that could be of great interest too.

Contact: Kevin Bourke email: [kevinbourke46@outlook.com](mailto:kevinbourke46@outlook.com)

## **Catholics Speak Out**

Catholics Speak Out (CSO) is an organisation of lay Catholics, sisters and priests working for the renewal of the Australian Catholic Church in the spirit of Vatican Council II and following the lead of Pope Francis. It is not a new organisation, but simply a name-change for what was previously Catholics for Ministry. Our emphasis is on speaking out on structural issues that are important for the renewal of Australian Catholicism.

We began in 2003 lead by Paul Collins, Frank Purcell, Anne O'Brien and Marilyn Hatton. We have worked through awareness-building, speaking-out, petitions, research and direct action to realise and strengthen the spirituality and consciousness that Vatican II has brought to the church. We are actively working toward getting full equality for women including in most senior leadership positions in Catholicism, see the [CSO webpage](#)

In October 2013 we joined with several other Catholic renewal organisations in forming an Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal committing ourselves to the ACCCR Call.

We continue to work nationally and internationally for full equality for all and lay leadership in the Catholic Church.

## **Communities of the Way**

OUR MISSION STATEMENT: "As followers of Christ in the Catholic tradition, we seek to build the Kingdom by reading the signs of the times in the light of Vatican II. We seek to live out this vision in small Christian Communities, which focus on life and experience, through study, reflection, prayer, dialogue and action."

OUR STORY: Communities of the Way began in 2008 as a group of around 20 people who had all been involved in a program called "Back to Galilee", presented in the diocese by Fr Paschal Kearney. This program challenged participants to commit to a new way of being Church, centred around the development of small Christian Communities which would enliven the parish and lead to a more collaborative structures and processes. We named our group "Aggiornamento" in recognition of the vision of Vatican II which inspired us to work towards building an "up to date" way of being Church.

Over the years we have run seminars and workshops to engage others in this movement towards establishing this vision, and many Small Christian Communities have grown out of it. What has evolved is the establishment of groups of lay people, sharing their life and faith together, not necessarily members of the same worshipping community, but committed to transforming the Church from the grassroots upward. We have also held educational seminars

to challenge and encourage people to consider the way forward for the Church in challenging times. We decided to change our name to Communities of the Way to make our aim a little clearer, but with the inspiration of Vatican II still firmly in our minds.

For the past two years we have also been involved in aspects of the Plenary Council, preparing submissions, organizing groups to make submissions and much discussion around the process of the Council and the future of the Australian Church. Sadly, the group has lost some of our most valuable members to death in recent years. We have spent many meetings embroiled in discussions about the state of the Church and our

frustration with the slowness of real change, but continue to hope that all things are possible, in we work together faithfully.

### **Concerned Catholics Canberra-Goulburn**

Concerned Catholics Canberra-Goulburn Inc. was created in April 2017. We are a group of lay Catholics in the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn concerned about governance, cultural and structural issues arising from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We seek an effective voice for lay people in the future direction and administration of the church in Australia, and operate at local, archdiocesan and national level. We are governed by a committee of about fifteen, with John Warhurst (chair), Margaret O'Connor (secretary), Kevin Vassarotti (treasurer) and Judith Tokley and Mark Metherell (communications).

We host a website, operate a twitter account, and issue regular newsletters to our mailing list (anyone can sign up online). Contact us at [concerned.catholics.cangbn@gmail.com](mailto:concerned.catholics.cangbn@gmail.com)

We have held numerous public forums and made several submissions to the Plenary Council 2020 (see our website). We engage with our local Archdiocesan Administration and advocate locally for a diverse and open church media, financial accountability, women in church decision-making and a diocesan pastoral council. We also have many writers in our group, who contribute to the Canberra Times, Pearls and Irritations, Eureka Street and The Swag.

We also issue regular media releases, most recently urging a timely release of The Light from the Southern Cross.

Our current interests include linking with other groups, playing an active role in ACCCR, planning for a public Zoom meeting on the six PC Discernment Papers recently released, and other future public meetings, and engaging with our own Archbishop, Christopher Prowse, church administrators and parish representatives on local issues. John Warhurst has been chosen as a PC Delegate by the CG archdiocese and we want to see the PC process through to the very end by keeping church leaders on their toes.

### **Concerned Catholics Tasmania**

A group of around 60 Tasmanian Catholics met in Launceston on the 7th December 2019 to hear the Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra/Goulburn (CCCG), Emeritus Professor John Warhurst, speak about the Vision, Mission and Aims of CCCG. The organisation takes its mandate from the Church's call in Church Canon Law for the 'Christian faithful' to exercise the 'right' and 'duty' they have to make known to their pastors their views on matters that impinge on the 'good of the Church'.

As a result of this meeting the resolution was taken to explore the possibility of initiating 'Concerned Catholics Tasmania' (CCT), with a similar Vision, Mission and Aim, but with a distinctly Tasmanian 'flavour'. From around sixty people who attended, a Steering Committee was formed.

The Steering Committee, chaired by Kim Chen, has refined the purpose and potential structure of CCT. As a group we are committed to collaborating with our Archbishop, our priests and the 'faithful' in working towards important renewal and reforms for the 'good of the Church'. We are empowered by the spirit of 'synodality' that Pope Francis and the 2020 Plenary Council are promoting. We are committed to finding a voice for the laity, sharing our commitment to our Baptismal call and to our Church, in this time and in our state of Tasmania.

The development of a Vision and Mission Statement for Concerned Catholics Tasmania was informed by the work of CCCG, relevant Church documents, and our knowledge of our Tasmanian community.

Some other current areas of attention for CCT are:

- an upcoming meeting of three committee members with Archbishop Porteous (via Zoom);
- consideration of the six Discernment Papers developed from the Plenary Council consultations;
- discussion around The Light from The Southern Cross report on governance and commentaries;
- affiliation with the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR).

Concerned Catholics Tasmania was officially incorporated on 26th May 2020 with an initial official

membership of 18. There are nearly 150 members on the mailing list who, along with others, are now being invited to apply for membership.

### **Concerned Catholics Wagga Wagga**

CCWWD started in October 2019 with a packed meeting in Wagga Wagga with wonderful encouragement and support from CCCG. This was followed by successful meetings in Albury and Leeton with speakers from our management team. An email address and a website were quickly established and about three hundred plus respondents have registered to receive current updates and developments as well as topical articles on our church reform agenda. The organisation is based on the Gospels, is prayerful, is non-aggressive and seeks our church to be transparent, accountable, inclusive and show acceptable standards of good governance.

CCWWD members are frustrated with the silence of the bishops and their failure to acknowledge or address our questions or submissions. Wagga Wagga has been without a bishop for the past four years until the appointment of bishop elect Mark Edwards was announced in late May. CCWWD has welcomed the new bishop and looks forward to having discussions with him about reform issues and governance.

CCWWD values its membership of the Australian Coalition of Catholic Church Reform (ACCCR) seeing it as a catalyst in forming a joint national approach with submissions to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Plenary Council Committee. On a united front, we pray that the bishops will listen to us and take on board the details of our many suggestions on resurrecting our dying church.

– Kerry Carmichael, Chair

### **Concerned Catholics Wollongong**

CC Wollongong's activity will be based on:

- Sexual Abuse in Church and responses
- Acceptance of the Gay Community
- Women – involvement and being part of the decision making of the Church
- Clericalism
- Plenary 2020
- Married Priests

We will be using the book “Getting Back on Mission”, produced by Catholics Renewal Inc., and the papers produced for the Coalition Renewal Forum planned for April for discussions.

Some of the avenues that CC Wollongong would look to explore include:

- prayerful and practical support towards our committed clergy
- support towards those who have suffered sexual or other abuse from the church, or otherwise been hurt by the church
- collaborative working towards a reform agenda in the Wollongong Diocese more broadly
- new models of church and more effective lay participation
- effective vehicles for the participation of women in key decision-making
- establishment of a diocesan pastoral council with a view to establishing lay leadership, and
- agreement for a work plan, based on mutual partnership with our bishop, lay people, and our committed priests and religious to achieve a reform agenda.

ACCCR has recently released a communique to the Catholic bishops and religious leaders of Australia (and open to all the People of God) calling for sweeping changes in the Church, including greater transparency and accountability, and equal participation for women.

Recognition of the damage and division caused by clericalism in our church is a call from many contemporary Catholics in Australia. These are some of the ‘ground floor’ issues that could be of great

interest to Concerned Catholics of Wollongong. (CCWollongong)

## **Cyber Christian Community**

**History.** The Cyber Christian Community (CCC) was initiated in 2006. The catalyst for the group was the scandalous ousting of a retiring parish priest who had long fostered Small Christian Communities, and the marginalising and demonising of liberal-minded social justice-oriented Catholics. The cyber community initially provided a platform to the weekly writings of the retiring priest but soon evolved to include news of socially progressive views and practices.

**Focus.** The aim is CCC is to inform members of contemporary happenings, and encourage a relevant practice of contemplation and action, especially with regards human and environmental justice. (Our readers are now located in the US, UK, Ireland, NZ, Singapore and of course Australia.)

**Charism.** Our gift to Christianity in the Catholic tradition is to bring a contemporary understanding to the message of Jesus. This charism is coupled with resilience and perseverance. The CCC “team” knows that the future of Catholicism resides not in calcified institutionalism but in the journey of the desert and all that entails.

## **For The Innocents**

We are ordinary people who know there are many victims and survivors – “the innocents” - of sexual and other abuse committed by those in the Catholic Church and in other religious communities. It is the suffering of these people and their need for and right to healing that compels us to raise our voice.

We, as ordinary people, can apologise to the innocents, their families and friends for the gross burden of betrayal, hurt, isolation, and unwarranted guilt they may have had to carry as a result of sexual or other abuse by Catholic clergy, religious teachers or workers. Yet there are good priests and bishops who strive to support those in need. One can imagine the anguish they feel as they try to pick up the pieces in a ravaged parish. Moreover, they become unfairly tarred with the opprobrium due to the perpetrators. They need our support for their good work. While we begin with a desire to apologise to the innocents, it is easy to be diverted into the necessary reform of the ‘big’ system with its many elements. With injustice of this magnitude arousing our desire for retribution, many emotions emerge, not the least anger. In that battle for justice and reform, the feelings and needs of victims and survivors can be overlooked.

The group commenced early in 2011. The principal reason arose out of deep concern for the well being of such victims and survivors and their families. The group “For the Innocents” was formed from a group of men who had all studied at the Catholic seminary at Werribee from the 1950s through to the 1970s. An eight-year study program in Philosophy and Theology and related subjects was for those who had the desire to become ordained priests. In that process naturally some of us did not complete the studies. Of those who were ordained, some later left the ministry. Thus the many players involved in this scandal of religious sexual abuse were people known personally through our journey of study and perhaps subsequent living with. We felt that we needed to stand up as ordinary people and make an apology to the innocents and their families for what had happened to them. Indeed, whole communities/parishes have been affected by what has happened.

## **Inclusive Catholics**

Given the clericalism, abuse, discrimination and lack of proper governance within the Catholic Church, in 2011 Fr Greg Reynolds, a priest of the Melbourne Archdiocese for 31 years, set up a new community, called Inclusive Catholics to embrace those disillusioned with institutional churches. In this community all are welcome without question, especially lapsed Catholics as well as survivors of clerical abuse, divorcees, those who support women’s ordination and LGBTIQ+ people. This community strives is a democratic organisation led by an elected Stewardship Team. In 2020 Greg felt the call to return to the official priesthood and has now stepped back from official connection with Inclusive Catholics.

Our members come from a variety of backgrounds, religious beliefs, age groups and denominations, especially Catholic. We generally aim to encourage people in their prayer life, meditation, scripture reading



and social activism.

Inclusive Catholics holds fortnightly Eucharistic celebrations at Glen Iris Road Uniting Church Community Centre. We work with other reform groups in the Catholic Church in Australia and are an active member of the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform. We have a different approach to many other reform groups that seek to work from within the institutional Catholic Church. Instead, we conduct our activities outside the control of the hierarchy while remaining true to our Christian heritage as church was in early Christian days. We are a model of a non-hierarchical church. We represent an alternative model of church reform where we create a model of church as it should be without waiting for official approval by the hierarchy.

We have a close affinity with St Mary's in Exile in Brisbane.

### **Rainbow Catholics Interagency for Ministry**

Rainbow Catholics Inter-Agency for Ministry (RCIA) is a coalition of LGBTIQ affirming Catholic groups, organizations, pastoral leaders and organizers. We work together to support LGBTIQ Catholics, their families, friends and colleagues around Australia. Members comprises both LGBTIQ Catholics and non-LGBTIQ Catholics. The interagency promotes the values of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching.

The purpose of the RCIA is to build partnerships and relationships, to pray, to educate and to advocate for the full equality and justice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer/Questioning (LGBTIQ) Catholics, their family and loved ones in the Catholic church and in our wider community.

We are moving towards the day where all LGBTIQ Catholics are loved as equal members of the Body of Christ of which LGBTIQ experiences, gifts and realities are honoured as part of the Catholic Christian tradition.

We aim to celebrate the gifts, the achievements and the journeys of LGBTIQ members of our Catholic community, affirming their Catholic Christian faith, sexual orientation, gender identity and diverse bodies. We work to end all forms of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, queerphobia, intersex exclusion in our church and in our community and work to eliminate all forms of discrimination and prejudice against our LGBTIQ siblings.

We aim to learn from the lived experience and expertise of LGBTIQ Catholics and their allies, promote human rights and social justice and challenge structural, religious, social, physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, cultural and theological heterosexism and cisgenderism in bringing about peace with justice. We aim to enable member groups and agencies to provide a safe space where resources are shared for the interest of LGBTIQ Catholics and their loved ones.

### **South Australian Catholics for An Evolving Church**

SA Catholics for an evolving church grew out of a loose group meeting as a Newman group that came together to form SACEC in 2019 just before the COVID pandemic started. As such it evolved into working by zoom and meeting less face to face apart from the Reference Group of 12 that holds the group together. There are about 300 on our email contact list who tune into our seminars. Our vision is best described by our Statement of Hope.

#### **Statement of Hope**

We are a diverse group of Adelaide Catholics who share a love, care, concern and hope for our Church in the Archdiocese. We come together, under the heading *SA Catholics for an Evolving Church* to reflect on the world, the Church, the Gospel and the spiritual life of our people. We discern appropriate courses of action.  
Our Vision

We strive to be a Church actively reading the signs of the times, proclaiming Gospel values for contemporary life. Our natural orientation is towards a Church and a broader community that is creating a better world, one where people on the margins are afforded equality in dignity, justice and fairness. Catholic social and environmental teachings are our guides. Jesus is our centre.

We will be a Church where everyone finds a place: Eucharistic communities are open and welcoming; our spirituality is enhanced by opportunities for vibrant liturgical celebrations based on the reality of our lives. Prayer and reflection take on diverse forms, drawing on the rich Christian practices that have enhanced the faith of Catholics throughout history.

We seek to grow a Church that is collaborative and inclusive of our social and cultural diversity, attentive to serving the needs of our world, especially with and alongside those who are in any way living with poverty, a Church in which leadership is shared, creating opportunities for a more dynamic community.

#### Our Purpose

Our purpose is to work together and join with others in providing mutual support as we seek to discern and follow the way of Jesus.

#### Our Aims

To achieve our purpose, we aim to:

- 1 Model the Church we seek to be;
- 2 Give voice to the experience, aspirations and convictions of Catholics seeking renewal;
- 3 Promote the participation of Catholics in the decision-making processes of the Church;
- 4 Encourage and facilitate wide participation in the Plenary Council processes;
- 5 Press for good governance through accountability, transparency and inclusion throughout the Church;
- 6 Identify and promote models of Church that reflect Gospel values and are appropriate for 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia.

**We have this hope as an anchor for the soul. Firm and secure.**

Hebrews 6:19

### **Toowoomba Catholics for Reform**

Toowoomba Catholics for Church Reform was formally established on 26 March 2020. Inaugural members were Father Hal Ranger, Pat Nunan and Damian Carroll. Shortly thereafter TCCR became a member of the Coalition. Presently we have twenty members, seven are women.

To date we have issued two newsletters. We are endeavouring to arrange a Zoom meeting of members and will endeavour to do this during the week commencing 22nd of June.

Pat Nunan and Damian Carroll made a joint submission to the Plenary Council and these were published in the Coalition's April Newsletter.

### **Vocal (Voices Of Australian Catholic Laity)**

VOCAL is a small group (about 20) located in New South Wales in three or four dioceses. We formed about 3 years on the suggestion of Peter Johnstone who was receiving interest from people in NSW. We mainly share information about issues of Faith and Church. We dialogue and have met a few times. We are interested in Church reform. Many (not all) of us feel that our parishes are not sufficiently engaged in Church reform and other issues such as the letters of Pope Francis.

We are our own "field hospital". Our interest is broad.

## **Watac Inc. (Women And The Australian Church)**

WATAC commenced in 1984 as a national project of the Religious women and men of Australia. While WATAC is Catholic by origin, it is ecumenical by membership and is committed to working with other churches and faiths.

The vision: to model new ways of being church, based on a “discipleship of equals”.

Aims

- Engages those searching and longing for an inclusive church
- Nourishes them in diverse ways
- Acts for justice in local and global issues
- Provides healing and hope
- Gives birth to a transformed church
- Gives a national forum where the voice of women can be heard on societal and church

Issues Current Project is a series of conversations using Zoom “WATAC Presents”.

Self-funded through membership subscriptions and donations.

[www.WATAC.net.au](http://www.WATAC.net.au)

## **Wwitch (Women's Wisdom In The Church)**

Purpose: We aim to raise awareness of Women’s wisdom, experience and skills in the Australian Church and to increase the opportunities for Women to demonstrate these in the Church. *Who we are:* We are a group of women with a background in either the Catholic or Anglican faith traditions who initially convened to discuss the reports of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse, and the lack of active reaction from the Australian Catholic Bishops.

As well as commenting on that issue we are also considering the upcoming Plenary Council 2020 and have made submissions as well as joining with other members of the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal to make our voice heard in relation to the need for major change in the church.

*Our main activity in 2019* was organising the visit to Australia of Sr Joan Chittister to conduct meetings and discussions on the topics of Church and personal renewal. This is planned to go ahead as soon as it is safe for her to travel to Australia.

*Our major concern* is the lack of acknowledgement of the wisdom, experience and skills of women in the Church by Church leaders and the consequent lack of opportunities for women in all but supportive roles in Church affairs.

Our other concerns include the lack of acknowledgement by Church leaders of the pain and suffering of the victims of sexual abuse by the members of the Churches, the need to change the underlying clericalism of the Catholic Church, and the inability of the Church leaders to consider the current priestly formation and its negative effects.

## **CONCLUDING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF MEMBER GROUPS OF ACCCR**

### **Our conceptualisation of the meaning of “Synodality”**

Our concept of Synodality is that the People of God, all the baptised lay and ordained, walk together in their search for the establishment of the reign of God in our world. In doing so, our privileges and responsibilities are clear: we need to live the best lives we can and work together using all the gifts we have been given to make this come about. We have the responsibility to walk together in a joint, respectful, meaningful, open,

collaborative journey of reflection, prayer, discernment and deep listening, particularly when we disagree. ACCCR has carried out this privilege and responsibility diligently, sincerely, with great energy and a huge effort to the best of our ability. We advise you of some of the activities by ACCCR and Coalition members, that can readily be found on the internet. In respect of the Plenary Council, we have:

- Prayed for the Council, both as individual members of ACCCR and in an online event before the second session.
- Provided an initial response in respect of the synodal issues as experienced by ACCCR trying to engage with our bishops concerning the PC in our submission to the Synod. We did this firstly through the Australian Bishops and the ACBC in 250 words as directed and also directly to the Secretariat of the Synod in April 2022.
- We advised at that time, that we were preparing a more substantive submission for the Synod on Synodality concerning our involvement in attempting to engage in a synodal manner with the Australian Plenary Council (PC) process. We did this through the PC Commission, the secretariat, facilitation team, the bishops directly and through the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC). This submission is that document.
- We also contacted all members of the PC and *periti* on multiple occasions preparing for and during the assemblies with attempts to engage in synodal dialogue. In this we have been severely constrained by the procedures and rules of the PC.
- We have engaged the Catholic public through webinars, convocations, sponsoring Sr Joan Chittister's visit and through the plenary blogs, podcasts and the Plenary Tracker throughout the Council sessions.

In respect of the Synod on Synodality ACCCR has:

- Organised this and the previous submission to the Synod;
- Conducted a "Lenten study topic on Synodality" in 7 episodes produced by Dr Elissa Roper;
- Urged Australian Catholics to participate in the Synodal process, by developing website materials and mailouts including:
  - modules that could be completed by individuals and/or groups;
  - instructions with a range of suggestions, on how to provide Synod 2023 submissions to all dioceses in Australia, prior to our closing date in April 2022;
  - informing Australian Catholics that direct submissions could also be made to the secretariat.

This was particularly urgent at that time, because there was so very little activity being initiated by any of the Australian bishops.

We see the synodal process as requiring the baptised coming together in good faith, with open hearts and ears to listen deeply; to pray; to discern and to dialogue; study, reflect and speak some more. We have not experienced any such a thing, in spite of the millions of dollars that have been spent on a Plenary Council where the conversation has only been internal to those participating in the Council. It was not until more than 60 members; women and men, clergy and lay, objected to the fact that clearly 18 of 43 bishops simply

had not listened deeply enough to the Catholic women of Australia that dialogue seemed to become possible after that point of the Second Assembly.

Unfortunately, our experience has been the same; we do not feel that the bishops have heard anything of what we have tried to say. Many have not responded or engaged in any meaningful way. With heartfelt pleading we “knock on the doors” of this Synod, so that the anguish about our desire for truly synodal collaboration between the bishops and all the baptised, can be heard by the Synod and that “the doors will be opened” to a deep, realistic discussion so that the Spirit, in concert with the Synod Fathers and Laity, can put aside the barriers that are truly “the work of the evil one”, within the Church today.

It is pleasing that there has been some positive comment internationally about the PC. The initial consultation phase of the PC was truly “Spirit-inspired” where 17,547 submissions from more than 222,000 people were received. The Synod on Synodality has done this very well by encouraging direct submissions to the Synod.

We are aware that the initial *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod on Synodality will be issued in September and time is clearly short for final submissions. We hope that our contribution can assist with your very important work for renewing the Church and enabling the gifts of all the baptised to flourish.

Our ongoing disillusionment and sadness about the opportunities for synodal dialogue that were presented but lost during the PC in Australia, and those anticipated by us for the Synod, are matched by our ongoing encouragement by Pope Francis in “Let us Dream” but even more so, by the words spoken by Jesus as he said goodbye to the disciples: “And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt:28,20).”

We formally submit these reflections for the urgent consideration for the Synod as they have significant implications for synodal processes within the universal Church.

On behalf of the member organisation of the Coalition who have formally endorsed this submission:

Australian Reforming Catholics

Cardijn Community

Catholics Moving Forward Shoalhaven

Catholics Speak Out

Communities of the Way

Concerned Catholics Canberra-Goulburn

Concerned Catholics Tasmania

Concerned Catholics Wagga Wagga

Concerned Catholics Wollongong

Cyber Christian Community

For The Innocents

Rainbow Catholics Interagency for Ministry

South Australian Catholics for An Evolving Church

Toowoomba Catholics for Reform

Vocal (Voices Of Australian Catholic Laity)

Watac Inc. (Women And The Australian Church)

Wwitch (Women's Wisdom In The Church)

Drafted by the members of the Synodal Process Project Group of ACCCR 15<sup>th</sup> August 2022.