



CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

A voice for lay Catholics in Canberra Goulburn diocese wins strong support

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A public forum has strongly supported the establishment of a diocesan pastoral council in the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn to enable stronger governance and engagement between clergy and laity.

More than 100 delegates joined the forum via Zoom to hear from theologian and reform advocate, Fr Richard Lennan, currently based in Boston USA; and education practitioner and advocate for women in the church in Australia, Andrea Dean.

Fr Lennan said there was no situation in which a diocese should not have a diocesan pastoral council and that such a body was an essential forum for listening and discernment.

‘The bishops must show they are able and willing to listen,’ he said.

‘Through dialogue and discernment the unexpected becomes possible and trust can be re-established,’ he said.

But, he warned, being listened to did not equal being agreed with.

‘Nobody gets the church they design for themselves because it’s full of other people, and none of us gets to remake the church from scratch. We need a theology that enables us to keep moving. We are inheritors of the past, but we must keep moving forward.

Fr Lennan said trust was a major issue for the life of the church – particularly for ordained leaders.

‘You can’t demand trust. Trust has to be given... The bishops must show they are able and willing to listen, only then can trust begin to be restored,’ he said.

Andrea Dean said collaboration was always transformative. A diocesan pastoral council was not an end in itself, that it was not the cherry on the cake but more like salt that can flavour and change a diocese.

‘You have to make a start and continually reflect on how it is going. How does it continue to renew?’

In a discussion paper prepared ahead of the forum, author and commentator Terry Fewtrell noted the Archdiocese has had a DPC for 37 of the past 55 years. The periods where there has been no DPC have been during the terms of Archbishops Cahill (1967-1978) and the current Archbishop Christopher Prowse who was appointed in 2013.

The paper notes that during the term of Archbishop Carroll (1983-2006), the structure and work of the DPC was large and ambitious – its output significant in terms of relevance and quality. There was enthusiastic and supportive engagement by the Catholic community.

During the forum discussion the Archbishop's representatives said that the creation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council was under active consideration. Archbishop Prowse was open to the idea and to other developments such as Synod, and was currently investigating options in the context of the Plenary Council.

Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn was established four years ago this month and has been calling on the Archbishop to establish a Diocesan Pastoral council since its first meeting in April 2017.

Concerned Catholics Chair, Professor John Warhurst AO has welcomed the engagement of the Archbishop on the pastoral council issue and the attendance of his representatives at the forum.

Professor Warhurst said he would seek a meeting with the Archbishop and clergy to take forward the case for greater involvement of the laity in church governance.

A copy and recording of the presentations and background paper is available [here](#).

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