

SPEECH

BOOK LAUNCH

A Church for All: A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond

7:00pm Thursday 9 September 2021

Zoom

Reply on Behalf of Authors

Professor Emeritus John Warhurst AO

Chair Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn

Speaking on behalf of all the authors – Sister Joan Chittister, Debra Zanella, Robert Fitzgerald and ACCCCR itself – I would first like to say that we are all greatly honoured by the remarks by Claire Victory and Francis Sullivan. Personally, I can say, as an author, that it is an absolute privilege for me to be included in such distinguished company. Sister Joan and Robert are listening tonight.

I am still digesting and savouring the strong and poetic words of Claire and Francis. I want to thank Claire for her vision of a church which is welcoming, inclusive and representative; a church with an emphasis on living and working with the poor. I thank Francis for his insights into the methodologies and format of the Plenary Council and for his hope for a church which is humble, vibrant and relevant.

The Preparation of the book has been something of a miracle

We are also greatly indebted to the Garratt Publishing team, led by Karen Tayleur, for producing such a beautiful book in such remarkably quick time. I have never ever been involved in such an amazing production. Thank you to Karen, David Hughan and everyone concerned at Garratts for such a magnificent effort. Your dedication to the cause of church reform, backed up by professionalism of the highest order, is exemplary. We can all learn from this combination of professionalism and urgency. Grace under pressure.

I also want to pay tribute to all those within the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform – 19 reform groups spread across Australia and New Zealand – many of whom have been devoted to church reform for a decade. There would have been no book without the imagination and courage of ACCCR in setting out on the journey to hold a series of Convocations of Catholics during 2021.

Within ACCCR I want to pay tribute to the Convocations Project team led by Kevin Liston and South Australian Catholics for an Evolving Church, especially his colleague, Kathy McEvoy, and also to Andrea Dean, our facilitator this evening, who also facilitated the Convocations and helped plan them. Within that team Kevin worked with Eleanor Flynn and Peter Johnstone, co-conveners of ACCCR, to bring together in record time the ACCCR Response to the PC Agenda Questions, which forms the final chapter in ***A Church for All***. Getting agreement from 19 member groups on the precise formulation of policy positions and concrete suggestions in a short space of time is never easy but they managed it. Again, grace under pressure.

The urgency came not just because the church is in crisis because we were working to a critical deadline determined by the date of the first Assembly of the Plenary Council in the first week of October. To engage in a timely fashion with the Catholic community of Australia, especially the 300 members of the PC, meant the book had to be ready for wider distribution by the beginning of September. Words and ideas take time to sink in.

The book now stands as a light to guide the Plenary Council. The first part of the mission has been accomplished.

The Next Task

The next task, of which this launch is a part, is to spread the word as widely as possible. We need **A Church for All** in the hands, hearts and thoughts of all the almost 300 PC members, as well as their own circles of friends and colleagues, as they continue their discernment. Remember that PC members are not isolated individuals.

This is a key point. To have reasoned arguments for change in such a beautifully produced book is one thing; but to make them part of the discernment about the **Future of the Church in Australia** is another. It is an even harder and more urgent task.

To do that all Catholics must understand the special, quite unique, dynamics of the PC Assembly. In particular, the Spiritual Conversations/Deep Listening/Ignatian Discernment methodologies. They are not widely known or appreciated but we all must learn them. The pace may be slow.

We must also fight against the status quo, obfuscation and delay and tackle head on the crisis in the church. This means spreading these words.

And Beyond

The final two words of the title of the book are “and Beyond”. They are very important words because they make the point that while the Plenary Council First Assembly is an opportunity for reform to begin it is just one opportunity.

The words “and Beyond” can refer firstly to the next nine months until and including the second PC Assembly in July 2022. These months will be ones of intense activity.

But realistically they refer to many years, perhaps many decades, during which the discernment and implementation of church reform must take place in parishes, religious communities and dioceses right across Australia. Reformers must be steeled for this large task. **A Church for All** is a guide for that longer journey not just for the next few weeks.

In Sister Joan Chittister’s words in the cover. “Stand Up! Speak Up! I would add “Keep Standing Up! Keep Speaking Out! Lean in and engage with the Plenary Council.

ENDS

10 September 2021

As Delivered

886 words