

# **CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN**

**SUBMISSION to SYNOD ON SYNODALITY  
FIRST PHASE 2021 - 2022**

**DECEMBER 2021**

## **Contact**

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## **Background**

In February 2019 Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn (CCCG) lodged a submission to the Plenary Council of the Australian Catholic Church, inaugurated by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. That submission responded to the invitation from the bishops and was compiled following extensive consultations with Catholics of the Canberra Goulburn Archdiocese.

Concerned Catholics participated actively in the consultation and discernment processes that followed the initial submission stage and reviewed the various documents produced by the Secretariat leading to the First Assembly of the Council in October 2021.

While the Australian Plenary processes continue to unfold, the announcement by Pope Francis of an international Synod of Bishops to examine the topic of Synodality, with an emphasis on diocesan, national and regional input, has led to a further invitation for input and comment from ordinary Catholics on the way forward for the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In responding to this more recent invitation, CCCG considers that the points raised in its original Plenary Council submission remain the fundamental issues to be addressed if the Australian Catholic Church is to be relevant to the people of this land and this place in the years ahead.

CCCG is also of the view that several additional relevant factors have emerged since the preparation of the original submission that are worthy of inclusion and reference in this submission for the Synod on Synodality. These are addressed below.

## **Key Points from Submission to Plenary Council**

In our submission to the Plenary Council, CCCG made clear that in its current state the Australian Catholic Church is 'not fit for purpose'. To rectify this situation CCCG identified that the Catholic Church, both in Australia and internationally, needed to be and be seen to be:

**Transparent**  
**Accountable**  
**Non-clericalist**  
**Inclusive; and**  
**Truly Humble**

These characteristics were imperatives dictated by the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the theology and ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council as endorsed by Pope Francis and the deeply held faith and good sense of the Australian Catholic community. They are also faithful to Gospel values.

These provide a compelling agenda that must be addressed honestly for the church in Australia to be relevant and have any coherent sense of what it is offering the Australian community.

The CCCG submission (the body of which is Attachment A to this document) went on to examine how each of these 'areas of focus' could be addressed, providing statements of Context, Necessary Actions and Indicative Accountabilities.

CCCG considers the issues raised in the submission remain relevant today, in many cases more so, and provide a realistic 'initial' agenda for rescuing the church in Australia. It was noted at the time that much of the agenda is within the authority of the Australian bishops.

At the time of preparing this further submission, and following the First Assembly of the Plenary Council, CCCG observes with concern, that it is not yet clear whether the issues earnestly raised in its original submission are to be given the attention they require by the Plenary Council.

## Submission to Synod on Synodality

The coincidence of the commencement of the process for the international Synod on Synodality with the Australian Plenary Council process is both confusing and potentially confounding.

However, it is clear from the documentation circulated to facilitate submissions for the Synod on Synodality, that this process is far more insightful and potentially incisive in breadth and depth in which it seeks to deal with realities, discover truth, and ultimately elicit input.

Further comment on these characteristics is offered at a later part of this submission. Suffice it to say at this stage, that whereas the Plenary Council process seemed intent on confusing and closing off new directions, the intent of the Synod invitation suggests that it really wants to discover and deal with the hinderances and blockages that impede the church's mission in today's world.

### Context

The three headings - ***Communion, Participation and Mission*** - emerge and give dimension to the realities of the church today and its challenges. They derive clearly from a baptismal theology of the journeying People of God – a *community* with baptism as our shared birthright and touchstone. They seek a *participation* in the life of the church that builds a muscular vigour and strength to that baptismal authenticity, by seeking synodality at all levels of the church. Finally, they seek to sculpt a *mission* for the church, built on shared responsibility and leadership, that is able to engage meaningfully with society and other Christian churches.

The invitation for submissions references the Word of God, the living Tradition of the Church and being “grounded in the *sensus fidei* (sense of faith) that we share”. The CCCG Statement of Engagement (Mission Statement) recognises “*the authentic place we have within this Tradition, as we participate in the life of the Church and strive to give authentic witness to our faith. The Catholic Tradition has evolved and developed over two millennia, from a movement animated by Pentecost into a highly structured, complex yet ever-changing institution. It has grown and adapted down through the ages, and at all stages of history it has responded to the intellectual, social and cultural insights and advancements of its times.*

*As we in this 21st century seek to connect our experience of life, relationships, being human, building community and being Church within a complex and challenging world, we look to the Tradition as our inspiration, lens and guide. We depth it's 'treasures old and new'. In doing so we seek a renewed expression of that Tradition to genuinely respond to the intellectual, social and cultural milieu of the contemporary world we inhabit.”* The full Statement of Engagement at Appendix B.

In pursuing such an approach, it is important to distinguish between core faith and the many canons of outdated and time-locked patriarchal teachings over the years. Authentic Catholics willingly assert the core message of Jesus Christ, the gospel of Love for humankind and all of creation and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, drawing us into a greater life with the Creator God.

There are however many institutional constructs, having evolved and changed through the years, that fail to resonate with people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

These relate to views of governance, ethics, sexuality and ministry, among other matters. But at this time in the church's history, seared by the scandals of patriarchal abuse and clerical self-obsession, the People of God insist on substantial and meaningful reform, so that the mission of the church can be pursued effectively in these times.

This requires that the church face up to the hindrances and handicaps that continue to undermine the effectiveness of its efforts to spread the Good News to generations of people in today's world.

In the Australian context no group knows this better than parents of younger Catholics. In this new epoch, to which Pope Francis calls us to respond, the reality is that the message of Christ's love for humanity cannot be effectively communicated in language that is, or is perceived to be, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, monarchical and paternalistic. In the name of Christ, therefore, these challenges must be squarely faced and overcome.

It is in this overall context that the Synod emphasis on three areas, *Communion, Participation and Mission*, complement and creatively fit together with the five areas of focus identified in the CCCG submission to the Plenary Council: *transparent, accountable, non-clericalist, inclusive and humble*. The table on the following page presents a summary of these linkages.

Synod Areas of emphasis	CCCG Focus Areas
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Communion</b></p> <p>Companions on the journey</p> <p>Listening</p> <p>Speaking out</p> <p>Celebration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive (reports on women in the church that have been ignored for 20 years)</li> <li>• Humble</li> <li>• Transparent &amp; Accountable (Governance)</li> <li>• Non-clericalist (advice of the people ignored collectively by Australia’s bishops over decades)</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Participation</b></p> <p>Authority &amp; Participation</p> <p>Discerning and Deciding</p> <p>Forming ourselves in Synodality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive- essential that role of women is addressed in ministry and decision making.</li> <li>• Non-clericalist (advice sought from lay experts seemingly ignored, most recently the Report of the Light from the Southern Cross); bishops lack skill sets to operate effectively in a properly synodal church; current formation of priests is based on a model of church counter to a synodal church – seminary reform and other re-education in inter-personal skills, behaviours and cultural attitudes are needed.</li> <li>• Humble – Discernment as practised in the Plenary Council has often been deceptive and contrived</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mission</b></p> <p>Sharing responsibility for our common mission</p> <p>Dialogue in church and society</p> <p>Ecumenism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive: mission of church needs to be pursued in ways that are not framed as sexist, misogynist, homophobic, patriarchal, or monarchist.</li> <li>• Transparent &amp; Accountable (Governance)</li> <li>•</li> <li>• Non-clericalist: Advice of competent lay people sought then not acted upon (Report of Light from the Southern Cross and Report - Woman and Man); little leadership from the Australian bishops on Ecumenism in past 20 years.</li> </ul>

In preparing this submission CCCG considers that several more recent developments within the international and the Australian church contexts, have direct relevance to calls for meaningful reform of the church.

Each of the items below either underscores the significance and importance of the original five-point agenda raised by CCCG, or highlights that perceived obstacles to the reforms are misjudged.

a. **Increased emphasis and exploration of Synodality by Pope Francis**

It is notable that the CCCG submission to the Plenary Council process made no mention of the terms “synodal” or “synodality”. This is not surprising as the emphasis on a synodal church is something that Pope Francis has given particular emphasis to in quite recent times. However, he has consistently called for the church to reconnect with the theology and teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

“Synodality” was not terminology used in the documents of Vatican II. Rather the emphasis and terminology of Vatican II was in relation to Synod (as a noun) and the “collegiality” of bishops drawn from experience of the very early church and expressing the unity of all the faithful.

Francis however directly links “synodality” to the ecclesiology of Vatican II, based on the shared gifts and responsibilities of Baptism and the role of all the baptised in a pilgrim People of God.

Pope Francis speaks of synodality as encompassing the journey of pilgrims who share a common baptismal right and move together as a group, caring for each other and learning from each other, conversing, and listening on the journey. It is a concept of church that is not hierarchical, but draws its authority from a shared faith, the reality of which is discovered more fully along the way. Francis sees this method of being church as essential in the third millennium. It is rooted in baptismal theology and expressed in a respect and dignity for all.

The more recent articulation of Synodality by Pope Francis and his repeated linking of it to the theological thrust of Vatican II confirms a more fertile basis on which to proceed with re-fashioning the church to be relevant to women and men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This is as true for Australia as it is elsewhere. Synodality is the mechanism that Francis is inviting us to use to reconnect with the theology of Vatican II and a characteristic that must distinguish the way the church functions. It is through synodality that we strive to apply the ‘refreshment’ that the Second Vatican Council seeks for the church.

Synodality is therefore a mechanism for functioning as church that contains its own seeds for reform, as it moves us out of the prevailing monarchical model of leadership and into a richness of baptismal theology. It is therefore strongly aligned to the five key concepts of a relevant church as outlined in the original CCCG submission.

A truly synodal church would be one that is unquestionably transparent, accountable, non-clericalist, inclusive and humble. It should be noted, however, that a truly synodal church requires attitudes and skill sets radically different to those displayed by many current episcopal leaders, such as the ability to work constructively with ambiguity, genuine exploring of issues collaboratively and building trust in groups that enables authentic solutions to emerge from within the group.

**b. Increasing awareness of need to end Clericalism**

Another area of particular focus by Pope Francis in the time since the Plenary submissions were invited is the undeniable need to put an end to clericalism. The Pope has made many references to clericalism as an “evil” and repeatedly in recent years we see reports on the sexual abuse scandals emerging from many countries, referencing clericalism as a major cultural and structural factor, as was so clearly spelt out in the Australian Royal Commission report.

If the church is to move past this scandal with any integrity it must deal with this issue ‘root and branch’. However, there is a tendency in documents of the Australian church and the Plenary Council to minimise this issue, suggesting that it ‘has been dealt with’ and not wanting to confront the real depth of the cultural challenge required. This has been evident in the sanitised definitions of clericalism that have been used in official documents and Plenary Council papers.

To truly address this need will require a total change in mindset, attitudes and behaviours by clerics and lay people. There is no easy solution, only the hard realisation that the church can no longer operate and think of itself in the way that it has in the past. We all have to learn a new culture. Whatever the changes necessary in theological and ecclesiological perspectives and applied theology, this is a matter that calls for culture change management on a scale that dwarfs almost any other organisational setting. There is no short cut. It must be done.

**c. Learnings from the Amazon Synod**

In October of 2019, the bishops of South America, along with the Pope, met in Rome as a Synod on the Amazon. This was initiated to examine the state of the church in that area and the specific needs it may have to be relevant to its people and place. It was clearly used as a case study by the Pope as to how synodality can and should function. The Pope then formally responded to the recommendations of the synod, in his document Querida Amazonia.

In the context of considering input from Australian Catholics to the forthcoming Synod on Synodality, what is highly significant is that Pope Francis earnestly wants the church to be relevant in its local context. He consistently urges the bishops to think openly realistically and creatively and bring forward ideas and initiatives that would ensure that for the people of Amazonia, the church is able to engage effectively in their lives and be relevant. It is clear he wants bishops to really think hard about such challenges and not be afraid to bring forward fresh thinking and bold ideas.

A similar aspiration is shared by Concerned Catholics and many in the Australian Catholic community. The evidence tendered in the submissions to the Plenary Council made clear the challenges and asked earnestly that the bishops hear those pleas and have the courage to meet the challenges so that the church can engage effectively in the lives of Australians in our context and times and have a relevance that draws them into on-going participation.

So the learnings from the Amazonian Synod are highly relevant to the current exercise and underscore what was and continues to be a major concern for ordinary Catholics, namely the timidity of Australia’s bishops in responding to the reality that for many Catholics and Australian’s generally, the church is of fading importance, socially, culturally and spiritually.



We the People of God in Australia must respond to Pope Francis' challenges and do so in ways that do justice to the culture and temper of the Australian mentality.

Again, this highlights the importance of honest recognition of the parlous state of the church in Australia and courageous identification of an agenda for real change relevant to our circumstances. It is worth observing in this respect that the one Australian bishop in recent times who was brave enough to recognise and respond to such challenges, Bill Morris the former Bishop of Toowoomba, was disgracefully abandoned by his brother bishops when pursued by Vatican officials, representing a form of church that Pope Francis is clearly wanting to expunge.

Australia's Catholic bishops have work to do to have credibility with their people that they are up to the challenges Pope Francis is putting before them.

d. **Appointment of women to senior Vatican positions**

In its Plenary submission when addressing the need for an Inclusive church, CCCG identified several "bold initiatives that can and should be taken within existing canon law and other statutes. Examples are:

- inclusion of lay women and men in deliberative decision-making;
- re-instatement of women to the ordained diaconate;
- appointment of women as cardinals; and
- the appointment of women to head Vatican dicasteries and to be part of the Pope's C9 consultative group.

The CCCG submission went on to say that "each of these initiatives would be a profound statement of goodwill and intent to proceed with meaningful reforms. The episcopal leaders of Australia should urge the Pope to take such decisive actions." There is no published evidence that Australian bishops urged the Pope to implement such suggestions, however, the reality is that Pope Francis has appointed several women to senior Vatican positions, including as dicastery head.

This is worth highlighting as it points to the reality that the church needs drastically to deal with its archaic attitudes and treatment of half of humanity. Christ did not come just to save 50% of people but that is the implication today's world reads into current church attitudes and practices in this area.

There has to be the will to change this, and Pope Francis is indicating an openness to dealing with this issue. It would be perverse and dishonest, if the disposition of the great bulk of Australian Catholics to dealing with this matter is not reflected in the advice that is fed back to the Vatican as part of the input to the Synod on Synodality.

e. **Report of the Light from the Southern Cross**

It is now almost 18 months since the *Light from the Southern Cross Report* was presented to the Australian bishops. This report was commissioned by the bishops, in compliance with a recommendation of the Royal Commission that the church review its governance arrangements. The report is a thorough, considered, theologically grounded and realistically framed document that provides a practical roadmap for the Australian church to implement. It has been recognised as providing direction and pathfinding for the church internationally.

There is much in the report that is within the existing remit of Australian bishops and does not need direction or clarification from Rome or endorsement by the Plenary Council. It is notable that several dioceses have begun moves to implement the report, using it as the basis for governance reform, however there is evidence the report has been received with little enthusiasm by the Australian Bishops Conference. In addition, there has been a clear resistance to the report being considered 'front and centre' as an agenda item for the Plenary Council.

This is despite the report being referenced frequently in the First Assembly as constructive and the obvious basis for reform. Overall, the picture that emerges is that the reception of the LSC report is polite but political, suggesting that the careful and deliberate path outlined in the report is too much of a leap for some, perhaps even many, of the bishops.

In the face of any alternate and plausible explanation, the Australian bishops are at risk of being seen to want to quietly bury a major reform initiative recommended by the Royal Commission. This is an untenable position for the Australian church which puts at serious risk the already tenuous respect that the Australian community, Catholics included, has for its Catholic bishops.

A report demanded by a Royal Commission and crucial to the rectification of a major deficiency in the functioning of the Australian church and the sexual abuse scandal, must not be left to wither in the wilderness or be an optional choice. For the church to be transparent and accountable the report must not only be implemented fully, but the manner of its handling must also reflect both those attributes.

**f. Calls for a review of the church's position on Human Sexuality**

Another key focus of the pontificate of Pope Francis is the requirement that the church work with and be relevant to the lives of those on the margins.

This is central to the Pope's challenge for the Church to pursue a 'missionary impulse'. Similarly, Yves Congar said that reform begins with proper appreciation of the 'pastoral reality'. A recognition of what alienates, discriminates and isolates. In CCCG's submission to the Plenary Council we made the point that "the church needs to be humble such that it does not itself define those who are marginalised, but listens and responds, in non-judging ways, to those whose own perception of marginalisation is their own reality."

This applies to LGBTQI+ people, among others. The journey of integration and inclusion for the 'rainbow people' has been marked by a conditional acceptance that restricts their participation and opportunities for employment.

In the period since submissions were prepared for the Plenary process, there have been growing calls for a new view of sexuality, as current church attitudes and culture derive from an outdated understanding of personhood.

In other words, the understanding of Christian anthropology has not kept pace with the insights of the human sciences and contemporary understandings of personal development, including around gender and its diversity. This in part highlights why there is such a disconnect with the Church in the western world. This is relevant to young people as they explore their place in the world and to bridging the chasm with LGBTQI+ people and their full participation in the life of the Church.

Increasingly world-wide, there is growing recognition by bishops and lay people of the need for a more nuanced understanding of personhood to better inform the church's pastoral practice, make missionary outreach far more effective and help resolve the issue of access to the reception of the Eucharist for the divorced and remarried. As CCCG member, Francis Sullivan, has written, "whether consciously or not, Church culture posits real power with men and clerics. It dismisses the insidious effects of denying human sexuality and its repression. It scapegoats the influences of homosexuality and pays lip service to the equality of women at all levels".

Moral theologians have identified that the pastoral Tradition opens avenues through which committed same sex couples can receive the Eucharist. The dispensing of this pastoral gesture should not be left to ad hoc opportunity but rather be a universal expression of the dignity and worth of LGBTQI+ people.

A new approach to understanding human sexuality, based on modern scholarship and knowledge of human anthropology and sexuality is essential for a church seeking to engage meaningfully with people in Christianity's 3rd millennium.

**g. Experience and observations from the Plenary Council Listening and Consultation stages and the First Assembly**

As previously stated, Pope Francis is calling for true synodality to characterise the way Catholics 'do church'. Listening to all with respect is to be a key feature. In this context, the recent first stage of the Australian Plenary Council process could not be said to live up to this standard.

Persistently throughout the listening and discerning stages there were attempts, often crudely disguised, to render input from reform-minded Catholics and those emphasising the need for meaningful change, as not legitimate or worthy of serious consideration. It must be said also that some parts of the discernment papers seemed to be deliberately misleading and deceptive.

The most honest document of the whole Plenary Council process so far, was the initial report on the 17,000+ submissions from ordinary Catholics. Only in that document was the intensity and wide-spread nature of the criticisms of current church operations and processes openly stated.

From that point on repeated efforts were made to minimise key issues, such as clericalism and the role of women in decision making and ministry, that were so prominently reported as being expressed in the submissions.

The attempts to confuse and obfuscate, as evident in the Instrumentum Laboris, were indicative of an opaque and remote process. Indeed, it is revealing to contrast the sets of questions identified for the First Assembly discussions with the questions circulated as prompts for input to the Synod on Synodality, which is the purpose of this document.

The questions for the Assembly were clearly not written to facilitate discussion of real issues but rather seemed designed to confuse or confound. But the questions for this Synod input process are insightful, designed to tease out thinking and ideas and much more open to fresh thinking. It seems odd that questions framed in the Vatican, for use across the universal church are far more in touch with the challenges of the Australian church than the PC questions prepared in Australia. This raises serious questions regarding the integrity of the Plenary process.

It is clear therefore that the Plenary Council process to date is a long way short of best practice synodality. Efforts should not be made to pass it off as something it is not. This remains the case even at the stage where the 'outcomes' from the First Assembly remain ill-defined and the process for translating them into resolutions for Assembly Two remains opaque and mysterious, even to Members of the Council.

The conclusion from this experience is that ordinary Australian Catholics cannot have an instinctive confidence, which should be the case in an authentically synodal process, that their views are being accurately understood, faithfully interpreted and fairly represented in overall considerations. This must not be allowed to occur in relation to compiling any overall advice that goes forward to the Synod claiming to reflect the views of Catholics in the Canberra Goulburn Archdiocese.

### **Conclusion**

The points made in the CCCG submission to the Plenary Council remain relevant, in need of urgent attention and appropriate as input to the Synod on Synodality process. It is critical that the church in Australia and elsewhere transform itself so that it becomes, and is recognised as, a church that is Transparent, Accountable, Non-Clericalist, Inclusive and Humble. In conjunction with these initiatives there are several other factors requiring resolution and reform, as identified in this submission.

It is the sum total of these views that are put forward by CCCG as legitimate and conscientious input to the Diocesan process and ultimately for the consideration of the bishops attending the Synod on Synodality. Only a concerted effort across all of these areas will enable the Catholic Church in Australia to credibly reach out and effectively take its mission of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all Australians.

# CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN

## SUBMISSION 2020 PLENARY COUNCIL

**21 February 2019**

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**A Question #1 of Plenary Council submission format:  
*What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?***

**Introduction and Executive Summary**

The findings of the Royal Commission revealed a Catholic Church in Australia that has been functioning for years in ways that are incompatible with Christ's teachings. Catholics are rightfully ashamed and disgusted by the behaviours revealed and the systematic efforts of church leaders to deny truth and protect offenders. The wider Australian community is also appalled and expects prompt remedial action and the removal of systemic and endemic factors.

For many Catholics the causal factors leading to this disaster have been apparent for some time in the clericalist, exclusivist and introverted ecclesiology that the church has overlaid on the open reform agenda that emerged from Vatican II. Instead of pursuing reforms in the spirit of the Council to make the church relevant in the modern world, the church has become increasingly judgemental, intolerant, exclusive and, sadly, irrelevant to contemporary women and men. In Australia the church has become a self-absorbed and fearful church – resorting to reassuring itself and finding comfort internally in the formulations of habit and history, unable to deal with the world around it as it is.

Against this background, Australian Catholics are compelled to be 'active and assertive', as indeed they have been encouraged by Pope Francis. In simple terms many of the Australian church's hierarchy have failed themselves, their people and the church. They have trashed the trust that people once had in them. In this situation it is essential that the People of God in Australia assert themselves and make clear to the Australian bishops they no longer tolerate such failures of leadership. This is what 'God is asking of us in Australia at this time'. It is in this spirit that a large group of Concerned Catholics in Canberra has prayed, informed themselves, reflected, discussed and discerned a series of questions which the Australian church must address comprehensively and respond to urgently.

The questions which must be addressed and answered are:

How does the Catholic Church in Australia become and continue to be:

- a *transparent* church?
- an *accountable* church?
- a *non-clericalist* church?
- a properly *inclusive* church?
- a truly *humble* church?

In its current status the Australian Catholic Church is 'not fit for purpose'. The characteristics of **transparency, accountability, non-clericalism, inclusiveness and humility** are imperatives dictated by the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the theology and ecclesiology of Pope Francis and the deeply held faith and good sense of the Australian Catholic community. They are also faithful to Gospel values. They provide a compelling agenda that must be addressed honestly for the church in Australia to be relevant and have any coherent sense of what it is offering the Australian community.

The attached document addresses each of these questions and provides a considered and realistic 'initial' agenda for rescuing the church in Australia. Much of this agenda is within the authority of the Australian bishops. Other elements will require determined and creative advocacy with Rome. Ongoing adaptation, including reform, has always been an essential part of the church's mission. In the current circumstances the status quo is not an option.

**B Question #2 of Plenary Council submission format:**

***What questions do you have about the future of the Church for the Plenary Council to consider in 2020?***

1. How does the Catholic Church in Australia become and continue to be a **transparent** church?
2. How does the Catholic Church in Australia become and continue to be an **accountable** church?
3. How does the Catholic Church in Australia become and continue to be a **non-clericalist** church?
4. How does the Catholic Church in Australia become and continue to be a properly **inclusive** church?
5. How does the Catholic Church in Australia become and continue to be a truly **humble** church?

All five questions intersect, and the attached program of initiatives reinforce each other. It is critical that the bishops and the Plenary Council acknowledge and respond to the fact that neither the Catholic community, nor the wider Australian community, will tolerate any of these issues being fudged or responded to in half measures. It is for this reason that the attached document identifies a series of accountabilities that are seen by the Catholic community and the wider Australian community as indicators of good faith.

The cost of not being sensitive to and meeting these measures will be extremely damaging and destructive to the church in Australia. It would also continue to prevent true engagement with those people who most need the support and assistance that the church is called upon to offer.

***C Please share a story of your experiences of your faith or the church to give context to your responses to Q1 and Q2:***

This submission and its attached program of initiatives is an expression of the deep concern and determination of the Catholic Community to address the learnings from the sexual abuse crisis and to start a reform process within the church that enables it to be relevant to Australia and the world in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

As the bishops have proposed a Plenary Council to consider the future of the church in Australia, that Council must be the vehicle for widespread and meaningful engagement of Australian Catholics. Pope Francis has exhorted the People of God to be active and assertive and fully engaged with local bishops in addressing matters arising from the sexual abuse crisis and in ridding the church of the scourge of clericalism.

While the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn embarked on a process of consultation with the Catholic community, a widespread view emerged that the process was deficient and the outcomes did not do justice to the wisdom of the People of God of the Canberra-Goulburn region. Constructive comment and offers of help were ignored. Requests were made to the Concerned Catholics organisation that a more professional process be undertaken. In responding, Concerned Catholics reached out to the expertise and professional skills of members and others who could contribute insight and assistance.

As a first step Concerned Catholics commissioned a series of six short background papers to provide an informed context in which group discussions could proceed.

The background papers addressed the following:

1. Demographics of the Australian Catholic Church [pdf](#);
2. Canon Law Issues [pdf](#);
3. Understanding Vatican II [pdf](#);
4. Recommendations of the Royal Commission relating to the Catholic Church [pdf](#);
5. Changing church culture and perspectives of Pope Francis [pdf](#); and
6. Women, leadership and church [pdf](#).

These papers were posted on the Concerned Catholics website. Interested Catholics were urged to read the papers in advance of a public meeting on 29 November 2018. More than 100 people attended this meeting. Its purpose was to establish a *Meaningful Context for a form of Perceptive Discernment*, through group discussions.

This meeting was opened with a hymn invoking the Holy Spirit's guidance and was accompanied by regular pause points at which Sister Clare Condon drew the meeting back to the original objective of the process, namely listening to others and their thoughts on what the church needs for it to be effective in its mission in today's Australia. We captured and distilled insights from that process to fashion this submission.

This output, therefore, is a verified expression of the views of many Catholics in the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese, drawn together in prayerful reflection and discernment. It is true to the yearnings of many Catholics and it is an earnest statement on their behalf.



## ***Significant Area of Focus # 1*** **A Transparent Church**

### ***Context***

The sexual abuse scandal has highlighted the church's appalling lack of open and transparent governance, administration and structures – a situation worsened by persistent attempts of church leaders to cloak procedures and issues management in obscurity and secrecy.

The Royal Commission made a clear recommendation that governance and management arrangements across all aspects of the church be reviewed to make them open and transparent. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has already accepted this recommendation in principle, but so far little implementation progress is evident.

Addressing this issue fully and thoroughly is critical to the credibility of the church in the Australian community and the confidence of its adherents in the leadership and sincerity of the bishops.

### ***Necessary Action***

Consistent with the principle of subsidiarity, the church needs to become a responsible and mature entity that is committed to and promptly implements:

- the development of open, participative processes and structures that recognise the wealth of skills and expertise in the Catholic community (women and men as representative of the broader Australian community); and
- effectively harnesses the contributions lay participants can make to properly functioning church structures and shared mission approaches.

There must be genuine transparency of both processes and structures.

A range of initiatives can be implemented immediately, such as mandating that each diocese and parish has a broadly representative Pastoral Council. Others will require the reform of canon law and necessary cultural change (see items below), however these are not a reason for delaying action.

Early and on-going progress on such reforms is critical as the Catholic community has an understandable expectation of reform in this area, and it is seen as an early indicator of the good faith of the bishops and their capacity to respond appropriately to the church's recent sad history.

The need for transparency applies across the board, including the appointment of bishops and parish priests. The Catholic community is well educated and committed. As Australians we participate keenly in the management of our civic affairs at all levels of government and see no reasons why that approach cannot apply to the governance of our church.

Any church seriously seeking to engage its people in its mission would welcome such approaches and provide suitable ways for diocesan and parish representatives to be consulted meaningfully in the appointment of bishops and priests to their communities.

### ***Indicative Accountabilities***

1. A key indicator of good faith in this respect will be provided by the arrangements determined for the Plenary Council itself and the way they are determined. The need for open consultation and transparency is immediate. It cannot be fobbed off or fudged. Procedural arrangements must be clearly stated, applied and reviewed to achieve on-going improvement and compliance. There must be lay women's and men's representation as Co-Chairs of the Plenary Council overall and its committees.
2. The review of church-wide structures and management, arising from the Royal Commission recommendations, must be conducted openly and independently, with opportunities for lay Catholic input and engagement. The outcomes of the review should be implemented and followed-up in truly consultative ways that make it clear to the Catholic community that they are being genuinely welcomed into the governance processes of the church without lingering resistance or suspicion from the hierarchy or parish officials.

## ***Significant Area of Focus # 2*** **An accountable church**

### ***Context***

The Royal Commission revealed the real failure of the church to be responsible and accountable, both to God and 'to Caesar'. The failure of the leadership of the Australian church and its purported structures and processes appalled and offended Australian Catholics. In many respects the church was revealed as an organisation 'not fit for purpose' in modern Australia. It is imperative that the church reform itself in this area. Australian Catholics carry a dual burden to ensure that their church addresses these issues and can once again be respected in the Australian community.

### ***Necessary Action***

Responsibility and accountability are linked concepts in 21<sup>st</sup> century best practice governance. So also are the established principles of the 'separation of powers' and the need for appropriate 'checks and balances'. There is a clear need for a thorough reform of church governance to simplify, update and amend structures and procedures so that they are acceptable to the expectations of its membership and civil society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The task ranges from reforms that are within the existing authority of bishops and parish priests to a comprehensive reform and updating of canon law.

Canon law reform would involve changes that respond to failings identified by the Royal Commission and also initiatives that should be taken out of respect for the laity of the church, the educated skills they can contribute and, most importantly, the removal of gender exclusion and clerical exclusivity that permeates many of the canon law statutes. A large number of canons (including Canons: 375, 391, 460, 461, 463, 468, 469, 470, 473, 474, 492, 494, 495, 511ff, 515, 517, 519, 532, 536, 537, 230, 129, and 1024 [relating to exclusion of women]), are in urgent need of reform. Other canons also require fundamental reform, including those pertaining to recommendations of the Royal Commission relating to the 'pontifical secret', the statute of limitations for canonical trials for child sexual abuse, the 'imputability' test of Canon 1321, and the absence of a real zero tolerance approach in Canons 1341 and 697.

It is critical that the Australian bishops pursue these legislative reforms actively with Vatican authorities. The Australian church has the opportunity, learning from the forensic work of the Royal Commission, to take a leading role in a universal church reform process. Australian Catholics, on behalf of the Australian people, expect nothing less.

### ***Indicative Accountabilities***

1. The Australian bishops have stated that such reforms of canon law have been 'referred to Rome'. However, this is inadequate and suggests there is little sense of commitment or ownership of such reform proposals. For the Australian church to have any credibility with its own people and the wider community, it must pursue these matters assiduously and be seen to be doing so.
2. Australian Catholics expect there to be regular reports to the Catholic community and the wider community on progress with those matters relating to accountability reforms that are within the current powers of the Australian hierarchy and church authorities and on the steps being taken to prosecute the wider reform of canon law with the Vatican.

### ***Significant Area of Focus # 3*** **A non-clericalist church**

#### ***Context***

The Royal Commission shone a searing independent searchlight on the church and revealed that clericalism was a major contributing factor in the sexual abuse scandal. Clericalism is a perversion of priestly mission and humility, into priestly and hierarchical power and exclusiveness. It is a toxic mix of attitudes, dispositions, behaviours and judgements that have come to characterise an entrenched male, celibate priestly class, distracted by perceived status rather than driven by real service. Clericalism has become a prevailing characteristic of church culture and it is often the attitudes of lay groups that encourage and sustain it.

Pope Francis has called for “all forms of clericalism” to be removed from the church. For many Australian Catholics it has been evident for some time that clericalism is a corrosive force, preventing the church from engaging meaningfully with people in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Removing clericalism from the structure and culture of the church must be a key agenda item for the Plenary Council. Clericalism needs to be rebutted at structural, functional and cultural levels across the church.

#### ***Necessary Action***

All of the baptised share in the priesthood of Christ. The full meaning of that statement needs to be explored in an honest and sincere manner. We need to ‘break open’ the priesthood. This does not just involve distributing more widely roles that have come to be amalgamated into just one persona. It goes beyond that to a more fundamental review, that looks for enablers rather than being focussed on limitations and exclusions. The church in Australia needs priests, rooted in their communities, servants of the wider People of God and representatives of local communities of faith. New models of priesthood would involve optional celibacy, married men and women, respected community members to preach and celebrate Eucharist, and engagements for priesthood that are for specific time-limited periods.

The church needs to empower the many vocations that are in the Catholic community, but presently prevented by restrictive rules and exclusions. Instead of ‘poaching’ priests from overseas, the Australian church should revise its selfish and misguided missionary focus, and instead work creatively with those believers in its own communities who are prepared to serve and best understand Australian communities.

The current training and education of priests, particularly diocesan priests, is inadequate but also oriented towards emphasising separateness and exclusiveness. Pope Francis wants priests with the ‘smell of the sheep’. The Australian Catholic community wants priests who live the meaning and wonder of the Incarnation in today’s world, a first requirement of which is that the persons themselves understand and can relate to realities of life in that world. There is an urgent need to support and provide on-going professional development for the current cadre of diocesan priests, whose welfare has been neglected and are often left feeling under-valued and abused by the church itself.

The cultural effort required to re-educate and prepare both laity and priests (including bishops) for the removal of clericalism is vast and will take time. However, key ‘lighthouse’ statements of commitment and initiatives must be made to demonstrate to those in the church and the wider community that the intent is firm and irrevocable. In many cases reform will require changes to canon law, but there are practical steps that can be taken at the local diocese and parish levels, within the current ecclesial statutes.

### ***Indicative Accountabilities***

1. Bishops will need to engage openly and constructively with the clergy and lay communities in their diocese to develop reform agendas and determine the nature of development and re-learning that is required to achieve serious cultural change. They should ensure that removing clericalism is a standing item on the agenda of every Catholic organisation, administrative unit and functional committee.
  
2. Australian bishops must state clearly and unequivocally their acceptance of the Pope's agenda in this area and their commitment to implement the relevant recommendations of the Royal Commission. Updated statements of progress should be made openly and accountably on a six-monthly basis. This will include the effort and progress made to prosecute the reform agenda in Rome and the dicasteries of the Curia.
  
3. Australian bishops should initiate an independent review of seminary administration and training, to ensure that Australian priests possess the skills, empathy and spirituality to minister effectively to the Australian community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such a review would have a good cross-section of lay involvement that ensures the People of God are intimately involved in the formation of those who will minister to them.

## **Significant Area of Focus # 4**

### **An Inclusive Church**

#### **Context**

To be an inclusive church is to be a church that is relevant in the modern world. For too long the church has progressively focussed on its 'rules' for salvation. In effect those 'rules' have judged and defined lots of people, members of the church and others, into categories of the marginalised – effectively excluded from participation in the church and made unwelcomed by it. But the Gospels teach that it is for God to judge and the church to minister. The learnings from the Royal Commission highlight the cost of the church's failure to effectively recognise and use the talents and faith contributions of women, who comprise more than 50% of its congregations.

The attitudes of exclusion and exclusivity are therefore wrong as an ecclesial principle and radically out of step with enlightened contemporary governance and social values. The church and all involved with it, need to embrace diversity, to manifest their own Incarnation by meeting humankind as and where they are in their lives and faith journeys. In this there is an obvious fusion between true Gospel values and the need to be relevant to all contemporary women, men and children.

#### **Necessary Action**

Within the church there is an overwhelming need to address urgently its relationship with women. Our theology is a theology of equality. There can be no justice in a church that does not treat all its members as equal. Saint Paul says: "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Galatians 3.28*). This will require bold measures by the Pope and the bishops, flowing on through all aspect of the church's mission and its faith and organisational structures. This will need to be reinforced and supplemented by significant cultural change throughout the Vatican, dioceses and parishes. Resistance to such initiatives is to be expected, however it is important that Australian (and other) bishops realise that Plenary Council consideration of this question must be transparent, robust and constructive.

With plans for the Plenary Council well advanced, the Australian church is uniquely placed to influence episcopal leaders of other national churches and indeed the Pope, when attending the special meeting of national church leaders in Rome in February 2019. There are bold initiatives that can and should be taken within existing canon law and other statutes. Examples are:

- inclusion of lay women and men in deliberative decision-making;
- re-instatement of women to the ordained diaconate;
- appointment of women as cardinals; and
- the appointment of women to head Vatican dicasteries and to be part of the Pope's C9 consultative group.

Each of these initiatives would be a profound statement of goodwill and intent to proceed with meaningful reforms. The episcopal leaders of Australia should urge the Pope to take such decisive actions.

Not only should the church listen to the concerns of the marginalised, it must welcome them as full members of the church community, whose contributions are valued and sought. The Australian church needs to model an approach that 'takes the church to the marginalised'. This goes beyond traditional 'outreach' to embrace a form of meeting the marginalised where they are in social, geographic and faith terms. Such a mission approach links directly to the initiatives outlined earlier in relation to the sense of profound and radical service that is both the appeal and the power of an incarnational priesthood.

There is a strong reservoir of spirituality in the Australian nation, one tributary of which is the deeply spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the longest surviving continuous culture on the earth, and their profound connection with the land. It is incongruous and unacceptable on many levels that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain the most

marginalised of all in Australia. There is scope for the church to build a theology that draws on both indigenous and Catholic beliefs, that would have great power and meaning for all Australians. This will require the church to walk humbly with our God and with our indigenous people.

Such an approach is necessary with all groups who feel excluded and marginalised by the church. This includes those whose marriages have failed, the divorced and LGBTIQ people. The church needs to be humble such that it does not itself define those who are marginalised, but listens and responds, in non-judging ways, to those whose own perception of marginalisation is their own reality.

### ***Indicative Accountabilities***

1. A clear statement of intent and an agenda of reform are needed from the Australian bishops in relation to the church's attitudes to and treatment of women. This would need to include functional and cultural initiatives, as well as commitments to pursue the removal of canon law and other limitations and exclusions on the roles of women in the church.
2. The Australian people, Catholics especially, are looking to the bishops to respond definitively and remove the structural limitations and cultural prejudices against women and other marginalised groups. This is an area that touches a deep wellspring of national identity – the 'fair-go' and egalitarian emphasis in our national life. For that reason, it is a touchstone for assessing the relevance of the church in the broader community and the perceived goodwill (or otherwise) of church leadership in rectifying behaviours and attitudes that are broadly offensive to our national mores. Action in this area of reform also offers the potential for the church and its leadership to regain a measure of respect and recognition in the broader Australian community. All that is required is that the church do the right thing and the Australian thing.

## ***Significant Area of Focus # 5***

### **A Humble Church**

#### ***Context***

In the midst of all that confronts the church at these times, an assured approach is to go back to what is its essential and basic task: to bring to the world the good news of Jesus Christ, our God made incarnate as the carpenter of Nazareth.

This must transcend all the accretions and trappings of status, power and privilege that the church has acquired over the years. They simply detract from the basic message, its relevance in today's world and the capacity of ordinary people to receive that message.

The church needs to look at itself and ask if much of its life, its structures and missionary approach have become inhibitors rather than enablers. Things that inhibit the church from taking its message of God's love to the people, need to be cast aside and replaced by those that enable and empower the meeting of God and humankind.

The church doesn't have to have an answer for everything. Our mission is faith and that involves living creatively with uncertainty and doubt, of reaching out and longing. It is not about finding a protected cocoon where we wrap ourselves in certainty.

Humanity is life lived searching. As a church we need to be and be seen to "walk humbly with our God".

#### ***Necessary Action***

The Catholic church in Australia needs to be relevant and respected in its time and place. We have lost much of that respect in recent years, and perhaps we need to grow towards a more mature sense of what respect is based on. In its rituals, liturgy and general functioning, the church needs to dispense with the trappings of mediaeval times, in terms of language, robing and attitudes.

Our national culture is inherently suspicious and cynical of such affectations. This links very much with initiatives outlined above regarding removing clericalism and being inclusive.

In reviewing the many aspects of its activities and mission, the church needs to ask itself, at every turn: Is what we are doing and the way we are doing it, enabling us to spread the Gospel of Jesus? This needs to apply to the Curia, to the hierarchy, to reviews of canon law, and right through to planning done by local parish pastoral councils.

A more humble, searching and questioning church will present a more mature and open, and less judgemental offering to adult Catholics and those outside of the church who are embarking on their own faith journeys.

Young people, who are largely turned off the church in response to such negativities, will similarly be more likely to consider the church's message.



### ***Indicative Accountabilities***

1. The Australian Catholic Church should undertake independent in-depth research of the reasons for the decline in its members, noting that we are now into the third generation of 'raised Catholics' who have chosen to walk away from the church. A willingness to explore the real reasons and a preparedness to hear the message and respond with appropriate actions, will be a critical indicator to not only the largely disillusioned Catholic community but the wider Australian community.
2. A church that truly does "walk humbly with our God" and is searching and non-judgemental will win respect and support from not just the marginalised and aggrieved but also mainstream Catholics. It will be a tangible indicator that the church has again 'discovered' the wonder of the Incarnation.

## Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn: Statement of Engagement

As members of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn, we acknowledge the centrality of our relationship with God who reveals, communicates and sustains divine life and inspiration through Scripture and the Catholic Tradition. We recognise the authentic place we have within this Tradition, as we participate in the life of the Church and strive to give authentic witness to our faith.

The Catholic Tradition has evolved and developed over two millennia, from a movement animated by Pentecost into a highly structured, complex yet ever-changing institution. It has grown and adapted down through the ages, and at all stages of history it has responded to the intellectual, social and cultural insights and advancements of its times.

As we in this 21st century seek to connect our experience of life, relationships, being human, building community and being Church within a complex and challenging world, we look to the Tradition as our inspiration, lens and guide. We depth it's "treasures old and new". In doing so we seek a renewed expression of that Tradition to genuinely respond to the intellectual, social and cultural milieu of the contemporary world we inhabit.

In doing so we stand firmly within the dynamics of a Tradition that must always be carried forward through responding to a two-fold challenge: maintaining its central beliefs and values, while expressing these in a way that speaks to the challenges and concerns of the day. This is the heart of being Catholic: responding to "the signs of the times" by staying true to the essence of our Catholic identity while ensuring its relevance for new generations; enabling its voice to be heard to inspire and guide anew.

The essence of the Catholic tradition is the Gospel message of liberation, inclusion, love and hope communicated in the person of Jesus. This essence finds new meaning and expression in every age. Our key task is to be clear about continuity with the core of the Gospel message, while recognising the elements of the Tradition that no longer adequately reflect that essence, and so need to be reviewed and renewed. This is the same dynamic that was exercised by Vatican 2, and by church councils in previous centuries.

The Catholic Church is a broad home for people with different instincts about the balance between conserving and adapting the Tradition. However, the central dynamics of reflection, discernment, review and renewal, so necessary to moving the tradition forward into new contexts to ensure its continuing meaning, clarity and existential purpose, IS authentic Catholicism. We need to be clear and confident in standing on this authentic path and join with other seekers in discerning the shape of a vibrant future church.

As we do so, we recognise that renewal of structures must be accompanied by 'renewal of the heart'. This means supporting ways to awaken for people their appreciation of and access to the spiritual wisdom and resources of the Catholic Tradition. It is this encounter with the living, energising Spirit of God that calls us into new life and ways of being Church.

*At the same time, today's vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness.*

*The deposit of faith is one thing... the way it is expressed is another".*

Pope Francis, 'Evangelii Gaudium' (n 41)

*Tradition is a living story which is being told and retold in the light of past memories and new life-Spirit experiences."*

Dr Kevin Treston, *Who Do You say I Am?*, Morning Star Publishing, 2016