

The great revelations from the lodgement of Synod submissions – Most support Concerned Catholics’ calls for reform

Response by Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn to the Canberra Goulburn Archdiocese’s report on submissions regarding the Synod of Bishops – Synod on Synodality

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Recent documents reveal that the majority of submissions from Catholics in the Canberra Goulburn Archdiocese to the Synod, called by Pope Francis, support the key areas for reform identified by CCCG. This is evident from the official report on submissions received and from the draft official synthesis document to go forward in the formal Synod process.

The February CCCG Newsletter reported that the group’s submission to the Synod on Synodality had been lodged and included a link to the [full statement](#) on CCCG’s website.

A recent document on the Catholic Voice website summarised the input to the Synod process received from Catholics in the archdiocese and included reference to our full submission. It also reproduced in-full, a second ‘Summary’ submission we were required to lodge. <https://www.catholicvoice.org.au/2023-bishops-synod-submissions-from-our-archdiocese/> page 13.

Whereas the full submission, built on our Plenary Council (PC) submission dealt seriously with issues being in the order of 9 000 words, the summary was required to be no more than 250 words! It seemed at first that these technicalities might devalue the main points of our submission, however the draft synthesis has allayed some of those fears. Terry Fewtrell provides some further background:

- The initiative of Pope Francis to convene an international Synod of Bishops on Synodality and the Church, is further evidence of his commitment to drawing the church back to the teachings of Vatican II as a way of framing its future. The process is designed to start with an opportunity for input from Catholics globally and then moves on to national and world regional meetings of bishops, culminating in a final Synod in Rome in 2023.
- For the Australian Church the start of this world-wide process has brought some challenges and complications, as it comes on top of the PC which still has a way to run and has involved great input and effort by Australian Catholics generally. What has been noticeable, however, is that the questions and suggested topics for discussion that were circulated by Rome to ‘kick-start’ the Synod process, reveal a remarkable openness when compared with the tightly controlled exercise of the Australian Plenary.
- This raised hopes around the Synod and tends to confirm current fears about the authenticity of the Plenary as a true expression of the Australian Catholic mind and heart. Playing into this mix has been the disconcertingly controlled process for Australian Catholics to put forward their views to the Synod process.

- Concerned Catholics first encountered this problem when we attempted to lodge our submission to the Synod process. With no prior warning or advice, we learned at that late stage that only submissions of 250 words or less could be lodged via the on-line portal. Given the breadth and depth of our submission, such a requirement rendered the substance of the submission effectively meaningless.
- In the end a way around this obstacle was found and we were encouraged to lodge our 250 word 'summary' through the portal and then send the full document to a designated Diocesan representative for Synod matters. We also took the opportunity to express our concerns with the Australian process, via email to Cardinal Grech in Rome who has overall responsibility for the Synod, attaching a copy of our full submission.
- A reasonable interpretation of this limitation was that local authorities were not wanting to encourage submissions and certainly not serious in-depth contributions. To some extent the document summarising Canberra Goulburn submissions seems to indicate that both those objectives were probably achieved. Only 35 individual submissions were received from Catholics in the Archdiocese and only 6 from groups or families. This is despite a further extension of the lodgement deadline.
- Overall, the dominant theme to emerge from the submissions was a deep yearning that the calls from the People of the God in Australia be heard and addressed by real change. And that bishops actually listen and have the courage to press for meaningful change. This applies at both a personal and institutional level, as the church is rapidly becoming less relevant in the eyes of the Australian people and future generations.
- It is encouraging that the draft synthesis document on archdiocesan submissions reflects the strong call for real reform and identifies four key areas where reform is necessary. The document lists these as:
 - Addressing clericalism and the rule for celibate priests.
 - Increasing and enhancing the role of the laity, particularly women.
 - Formation for the laity and particularly ongoing formation for clergy, seminarians and those involved in ministries.
 - Need for a humble, servant Church. A Church that is inclusive, accountable, transparent.
- These are the key areas of reform focus that CCCG has been advocating for since its initial submission to the PC process. Although other issues raised in the CCCG Synod submission have not been identified, it is reassuring that this synthesis document summarises the key issues for Catholics in the archdiocese as those advocated by CCCG.
- The final Canberra Goulburn synthesis document is being prepared by a committee consisting of Patrick McGrath, Cathy Moffitt, and Fr Richard Thompson. Archbishop Prowse is required to present the report to a meeting of the Australian Bishops Conference in early May 2022.

- There is growing evidence and concern that the Australian Bishops are intending to pass off the outcomes of the Plenary Council as the appropriate Australian input to the Synod process. Apart from those outcomes being as yet unknown, given the documented inadequacies and questionable integrity of the PC process to date, such a course would be cause for great concern across the Australian church.

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