

# Toward a transparent, inclusive and humble church

John Warhurst AO, Chair, Concerned Catholics Canberra - Goulburn

## Plenary INSIGHT

A Daily Blog



Second Assembly

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### TODAY FLOURISHED UNDER SENSIBLE STRONG LEADERSHIP

#### No 17

The Second Assembly completed its fourth full day today. Members are increasingly practised in the ways of the Assembly as we work our way through the agenda. These include the easy use of the technology, comfortably finding your way around the building, and understanding the rhythm of the day. Each table now knows each other well enough so that the day's work becomes more rewarding as we joke around with each other. There is even a lovely 'competitive edge' emerging between the tables. Table 5, which includes several well-known church figures, leads the healthy self-promotion stakes in my part of the meeting room. Luckily for my table they are generous with their bountiful supply of chocolates and lollies.

Members are, however, also increasingly feeling weary from early mornings, long days, and late nights. The various 'wins' and 'losses' are also taking their emotional toll on those who hold aspirations close to their hearts. Discernment doesn't ever remove the human element during our proceedings, and it would be faking it to suggest otherwise. Critical media coverage is well under way, putting many participants and their causes under the spotlight.

Last night I joined Western Australian Dominican Sister Mary Ryan and Dr Jodi Steele, a lay woman from Wollongong, on the official [Plenary Podcast](#) to discuss a wide range of contentious church issues with former SBS journalist, Michael Kenny. It was an important opportunity for us to reflect under pointed questioning on the bigger themes, while removed from the hurly burly of daily Assembly business. I learnt much from Dr Steele's energy and great optimism about the likely future trajectory of church rights and processes for women since Wednesday's events; and from my good friend Mary Ryan about the common sense and wisdom of so many senior religious women who have done the hard yards in the church and can't be intimidated anymore by clericalism.

My own conclusion was that the success or otherwise of this Plenary Council will be judged against Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge's early measuring stick that, recognising that the church is in crisis, returning to business as usual will not do. Any hint of that will not wash with the Australian Catholic community. The post-Plenary Council Church must be seen as more humble, transparent, and inclusive.

Long after some specific outcomes are forgotten, yesterday will be remembered as the occasion when a large group of women members and their supporters said enough is enough and stood in silent protest at the rejection by more than a third of the bishops of their hopes and aspirations for equal dignity and rights within their church. Whatever you want to call it -stand-off, protest, insurgency- this remarkable event produced immediate consequences for the operations of this Assembly, offered potential longer-term advancement for women in the church, and reverberated more widely.

Today's conduct of the Assembly developed out of yesterday's eruption in ways that benefitted just about everyone. It became more open and participative than it had previously been and flourished under sensible and strong leadership which made the Assembly focus more on outcomes. This increased the possibility of greater harmony on controversial issues between the collaborative and deliberative votes. The proof will still be in the pudding, however, as I commented in yesterday's blog.

The consequences for the hopes for women embodied in Part 4 of the council document are still to be resolved. However, they seemed on track for resolution as of the close of business tonight. Members were each presented with the revised version of "Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men" as the meeting closed at 5.30pm. I will take advice on the content from the many women members I rely upon. My own bottom line is that it cannot in any way be a dilution of the first version. Then it will be up to the consultative and deliberative voters to find their way to two-thirds majorities in their respective votes. There will be a prior test of the fault-lines within the Assembly during the consideration of the related issue of lay women and men preaching, which is contained in Motions 5.3 and 5.4, to be resolved earlier in the order of business tomorrow morning.

The Catholic world will take notice too because this is just another example of global tensions within the church. Christopher Lamb, editor of English church magazine [The Tablet](#), reported in his article [Tensions flare in Australian council over role of women in Catholic Church](#) that the Plenary Council in Australia "is considered one of the leading examples of a move towards a synodal Church in the English speaking world." Failure to progress here on such a central issue as the equality and rights of women, would have some international repercussions for synodality.

**JOHN WARHURST AO**

Plenary Council Member

Chair Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn

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