



concerned Catholics

of the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese

A response to the Royal Commission

MEDIA RELEASE

Canberra Catholics work on blueprint for Church reform

Media release Monday 10 December 2018

A group of Canberra Catholics is developing plans for radical reform of the Church -- including ordination of women and married priests --- amid concerns that Australia's bishops are reverting to a 'business as usual' attitude.

More than 100 people who participated in a recent workshop convened by Concerned Catholics of Canberra and Goulburn expressed strong sentiments for change including an end to male priestly celibacy, dismantling clericalism and the autocratic powers of bishops, and infusing greater transparency into church administration and decision-making.

Six background papers produced to inform the workshop conveyed deep evidence of a church in decay, of steadily declining and ageing priests and parishioners, subject to archaic governance practices and holding to an approach to women contrasting with 1,000 years ago when women played a more prominent role in the church.

Of particular concern has been the failure of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to respond positively and actively to central reform recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse.

The chair of Concerned Catholics, Emeritus Professor John Warhurst, said the advice prepared for the workshop found that there appeared to be a lack of will and urgency by bishops to review the "business as usual" approach on governance of dioceses and parishes and on transparency, as recommended by the royal commission.

While the controversy over the bishops' refusal to exempt child abuse cases from the seal of the confession dominated media reaction to the bishop's response to the commission's recommendations, there were other important elements including the bishops' failure to request the Holy See to 'consider' voluntary celibacy. The bishops had instead 'informed' the Holy See of that request.

"The Royal Commission and then the church's own Truth Justice and Healing Council handed Australia's bishops unprecedented and powerful arguments for moving the church's culture and architecture to a more contemporary and meaningful expression of Christ's example," Professor Warhurst said.

“While the bishops have instituted a process for reform to be considered at the 2020 Plenary Council, the lack of vigor and advocacy for much needed changes is disturbing.

“Their lethargy contrasts with the passion that more than 100 lay people displayed at the Concerned Catholics workshop.

“The campaign for change comes from faithful churchgoers. Rather than despair at the absence of half of humanity in the clergy and disappearance of their adult children from the church pews, the participants are seeking to turn the old church around.

“Many people who had previously attended the listening sessions conducted by the Archdiocese, felt this further workshop process of discernment and consultation would add depth to the 2020 Plenary Council’s deliberations not yet captured in the Archdiocese.”

A writing team will deliver a draft submission in February next year for further consultation and a final submission will be lodged with the Plenary Council in March 2019. Both will be available on the Concerned Catholics website.

The Concerned Catholics workshop was led by experienced facilitators Terry Fewtrell and Di Van Meegan. Sister Clare Condon called on participants to pause and consider the spirit in which they might respond to the discussion.

Mr Fewtrell said that through the workshop process “we want to channel our feelings and thoughts, whatever they may be, into honest, constructive and creative thinking”.

Background papers, Concerned Catholics’ initial submission to the Plenary Council and the Archdiocese’s draft submission following the listening sessions are available on our website at <https://www.concernedcatholicscanberra.org/>

Subscribe to the distribution list on the CC website to be sure to get updates on this process.

Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn is a group in the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese concerned about a number of governance, cultural and structural issues arising from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We seek an effective voice for lay people in the administration and direction of our church.

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