

PLENARY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

BY DAMIAN CARROLL

This Plenary Council should be an opportunity for all Australian Catholics to not only have their say about the present and future direction of the Church, but also to be able to share in its decision making. Canon 443 is skewered heavily in favour of Bishops and other high ranking church officials being the decision makers at the expense of priests, the laity and retired bishops. This canon should be repealed and rewritten to embrace the principle of shared decision making.

It is now fairly clear that in Australia there is an ever widening gap between Church and the laity with respect to the following: -

- The requirement that the priesthood be limited to celibate males.
- Steadfast refusal to ordain women and to allow women to share decision making at the highest level.
- The Church's rejection of gay marriage.
- The Church's prejudice towards LGBTQ people.
- The laity's rejection of *Humanae Vitae*.
- The failure of the Church to genuinely engage in shared decision making.
- The requirement for religious observance.
- Accountability and transparency in decision making.
- Bishops being out of touch with the laity's views on multiple issues.
- Unnecessary response from bishops and priests to Recommendation 7.4 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Sex Abuse that laws concerning mandatory reporting to Child Protection Authorities should not exempt priests from being required to report knowledge or suspicion formed on the basis of information provided in a religious confession.

Like all Christians, Catholics are called to obey two basic commandments of God. They are "love God" and "love one another as I love you."

The Catholic Church in Australia at large does a good job in providing sacramental services and through its works in education, health, aged care, refugee and indigenous welfare, spirituality and chaplaincy services. However, in a number of respects the institutional Catholic Church in Australia is in a state of serious decline. There may be a number of reasons for this.

CHANGE IN PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

As a child growing up in the 1950's and 60's, when religious observance was generally of a high order, considerable emphasis was placed on sacramental life. We were told that regular attendance at the sacraments "enriched our spiritual life" thus glorifying God and ensuring our eternal salvation. The clear impression we got from priests, brothers and nuns was that while eternal salvation is the ultimate goal, people who did not "go to church/ attend on the sacraments regularly etc" ie lapsed Catholics and non-Catholics, "really had a hard time getting to heaven".

For those of us who are slow learners, (the smarter ones caught on much earlier), it was not until we grew into adulthood that we realized that many many non-Catholics and non-practicing Catholics lived exemplary lives and there was no good reason why they should not get to heaven. Why then was it necessary to regularly attend the sacraments and engage in pious practices?

According to the Spring 2018 edition of Australian Catholics, in 2016 only about 11% of Catholics attended weekly mass. This was a drop of about a quarter of a million people in 25 years. Even fewer go to confession. Most are of the view that they don't need to engage in pious practices / attend the sacraments regularly, if at all. This is not to suggest that they are arrogant or lacking in faith in God. They take a logical rather than a "observance based" approach to their relationship with God and to their salvation. Provided they are respectful of themselves and one another, "are honest and just in their dealings with their neighbor" they don't see a need to engage in regular religious observance.

Although this writer does not have a good understanding of current catholic educational practices, it would appear that with the reduction in the number of priests and religious there is much less emphasis on attending religious practices in schools now than there was in the fifties and sixties.

SIGNIFICANT BREAKDOWN IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LAITY AND THE CLERGY/HIERACHY/INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH.

The church has lost considerable moral authority as a result of the revelations made to the sexual abuse Royal Commission. Priests, and bishops in particular, no longer enjoy the unqualified trust and respect of not only the laity but also of the community at large. However the disconnect between the hierarchy and the laity goes much deeper than and is wider than that.

Whereas 40 to 50 years ago the Church placed significant emphasis on religious observance, namely performance of pious practices and attendance on the sacraments, ie "to love God", the laity today attach more importance on values of reason, accountability, transparency in decision-making, fairness and justice, ie "love one another as I love you". Moreover, the days of unquestioned acceptance of Church/ papal authority are finished. Many Church leaders cannot accept this.

The laity cannot see any reason, in the interests of logic and justice, why women and married men should not be ordained to the priesthood and why ordained priests cannot marry. How can the Catholic Church maintain its rejection of female ordination without being offensive to women? The current generation of bishops and priests have laboured under centuries of ignorance, prejudice and varying degrees of homophobia and misogyny. An exclusive celibate male priesthood not only breeds clericalism but is also insensitive to and out of touch with the issues that are faced by the laity, especially women. The pope is right to condemn clericalism but wrong to emphatically reject female ordination, deny women and other members of the laity and religious orders the opportunity to engage in decision making at the highest level and gay marriage.

Up until relatively recently the laity has expressed their commitment to Catholic social justice by, inter alia, working with the St Vincent de Paul Society and advancing the causes of refugees and aboriginal people. More recently they have been focused on lack of accountability in decision making, abuse of episcopal power and authority, failure to engage in shared decision making and the prejudice and discrimination exhibited by the hierarchy towards the laity, women, a married priesthood, LBGQT people and gay marriage. The latter explains the emphatic rejection of the homophobic position taken by the Church in the recent gay marriage debate. These values also reflect the agitation for married and female priests and shared decision making.

The division between the Church hierarchy and the laity is also evident in the abortion debate as demonstrated by the recent referendum in Ireland. Although this writer and many Catholics accept that abortion is, of itself, objectively wrong, the moral culpability therefor should not be

determined in accordance with the Church's traditional "black and white" approach to what for some is a difficult moral dilemma. Recent legislative changes in Queensland and Victoria make legal abortion far more accessible now than in the past. The Church should articulate a message which reconciles these positions as many women who have had an abortion, and their partners, feel rejected and unwanted by the Church when their circumstances call for a compassionate rather than a punitive response.

Likewise, the Church's position on divorcees remarrying causes many to feel unwanted and rejected. However Cardinal Kevin Farrell remarked recently in an interview reported in the edition of the Tablet of 24 January 2019, words to the effect, "...Are these people outside the Church forever?...There is no redemption whatsoever? None? ..." These words suggest a change in the position of the Church on this issue which, if true, is long overdue.

Church doctrine as outlined in *Humanae Vitae* is largely ignored by the laity. Many take the view that men who live a life of enforced celibacy, who don't have to be concerned with job / financial security and providing for a family, simply don't understand the dynamics of a married or intimate relationship.

CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Members of the laity have to be accountable in their daily lives whether this is in the context of a family, work or neighbourly relationships. On the other hand, they see the Church, especially among the bishops, cardinals and the pope, as being largely unaccountable for their actions with many decisions made in secret, without adequate explanation, and/or with little or no opportunity for input from the non-ordained.

The process adopted by Pope Benedict XVI in dismissing Bishop Bill Morris is a classic example of an abuse of authority and power and a contemptuous disregard for the rules of natural justice.

The model of Church governance by decree is wholly alien to the laity's understanding of good and fair government. The laity see itself as largely ignored by an autocratic hierarchy which is out of touch with the people it governs and is supposed to serve.

SHARED DECISION MAKING

In the edition of the Tablet magazine of 6 October 2018, its Editorial noted, inter alia, that the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops began that week in Rome. It went on, "...in the past, women have not been able to vote in the Synod of Bishops because, in line 'with the tradition of the Church,' this was restricted to ordained men. This year, the new rules allow for religious brothers to participate as voting members of the synod, at the discretion of the Pope. But no women- not even religious sisters. In other words, while synodality- a word that carries with it the hope that the 'inversion of the pyramid' Pope Francis speaks of might translate itself into a significant structural change- is agile enough to embrace the possibility of including non-ordained men as partners with the bishops in their decision-making, it cannot be stretched to include women."

In the same edition of the Tablet, its Rome correspondent, Christopher Lamb, noted that there were 340 participants at the Synod, 32 of whom were women, but they had no voting rights. Do priests and bishops really appreciate how women feel about being excluded from the decision making process? While always respectful of women, some priests and particularly bishops are extremely insensitive to their feelings of being ignored in this process.

The reality is that real decision making in the Church is exclusively in the hands of the ordained. Appointing women and non-ordained men to so called “important” decision making positions is little more than tokenism.

Decisions on Church policy should not be left to Bishops alone. Priests, Religious and laity, especially married and single men and women, should share equally in decision making. A suggested prayer of the faithful, “Lord, we pray that the Catholic bishops of Australia, inspired by the Holy Spirit, will acknowledge the giftedness of the religious and laity, but particularly women, and include all these people in decision making at the highest level. Lord hear our prayer.”

ABOLITION OF THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOP’S CONFERENCE “ACBC” AS THE ULTIMATE CATHOLIC DECISION MAKING BODY IN AUSTRALIA.

The ACBC lacks leadership and the confidence and respect of the great majority of the laity. For the reasons outlined herein it is wholly unrepresentative of and out of touch with the mainstream of the Catholic Church in Australia. It is an unsatisfactory model of Church governance. It’s values, including exclusiveness, lack of accountability, it’s punitive approach to people in gay and lesbian relationships and divorcees who have remarried, lack of humility and its emphatic refusal to recognize the giftedness of the laity in general, but women in particular, are wholly repugnant to the concept of “giving a fair go to all” and to the Catholic Church being a Church of the people of God.

The ACBC should be replaced by a more representative body to speak to and on behalf of all Australian Catholics. Based on the principle of EQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP, it should comprise not fewer than 50% women, whether religious, married or single. The balance should comprise a mixture of some bishops, priests, religious, single and married laymen. Its processes should be both open and accountable.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

While all people should be able to practice the faith of their choice without interference it does not follow that religious bodies should be able to use such freedoms to engage in discriminatory practices which are offensive or hurtful. Much has been said and written lately about faith schools to have “the right to employ staff who support the ethos of the school”. It is said that while schools would not discriminate against LBGTQ students they should be free to discriminate against LBGTQ teachers and people in gay relationships/ marriages and defacto relationships.

Rather than addressing religious freedoms per se, should not the churches be looking at the religious values/ethos they seek to protect?

Pope Francis recently signed a joint statement with a senior Muslim cleric, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, in which they wrote, inter alia, that “...pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in his wisdom through which he created human beings.” (Tablet 14 February 2019). If “sex”, and one assumes they mean “gender”, are willed by God, how can the Church oppose gay marriage?

The Catholic Church’s position on gay marriage as outlined in “Don’t mess with marriage” and statements by various bishops were homophobic, offensive to gay and homosexual people and punitive.

The Church knows that its position hurts these people.

Why does it want to inflict this hurt on them? What wrong have they done? According to Pope Francis, one's sex, ie gender, is willed by God.

Should the right to articulate these offensive, hurtful and homophobic values be protected by legislation?

Are these values consistent with the command to "love one another as I loved you"? Not surprisingly, they were emphatically rejected by 62% of Australian voters in the gay marriage plebiscite in 2017. Gay marriage has been legalized in many other jurisdictions around the world. Is it not time for the Church to reconsider its position?

The irony is that secular and non-Christian governments around the world, often the butt of criticism from the Catholic Church, are giving leadership to the churches on the virtues of tolerance, understanding and Christian compassion.

Murder, rape and robbery are universally acknowledged as serious sins. The Church also teaches that sexual intercourse outside marriage is a serious sin. Refer to the gospel of Mark, 7:14-23. What is seriously sinful or evil about two unmarried people living in a loving, committed, monogamous relationship? Likewise, what is seriously wrong or evil about two same gender people living in a similar relationship? The Church assumes wrongly, that people in gay/homosexual and or defacto relationships are not committed to loving, committed monogamous relationships and, in the case of gay/homosexual people, the quality of their love for one another is something lesser than the love that married couples have for one another. In other words, it prioritises form, ie a marriage certificate, over substance, ie love and commitment to a loving, monogamous relationship. Again, is it not about time that it reconsidered its position in light of the fact that there is overwhelming evidence that contradicts its position and that the latter is the product of ignorance and prejudice?

THE BISHOPS ARE OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE LAITY.

A classic example of this is the following statement in DON'T MESS WITH MARRIAGE. "Christians believe that all people including those with same-sex attraction are called by God to live chastely and that, by God's grace and the support of friends, they can and should grow in fulfilling God's plan.."

Arguing that LGBTQ people should not be allowed to marry, the bishops go further and say that they, unlike heterosexual people, should never, ie never, be permitted to engage in a sexually intimate relationship.

How many non-ordained, non-religious Catholics do they say share that belief?

Are the bishops sensitive to how gay and homosexual people, especially young ones, would react to such a statement?

The Church's punitive attitude towards LGBTQ people is not shared by the great majority of Catholic Australians.

MANDATORY REPORTING OF KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD ABUSE ACQUIRED DURING THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION.

The bishops and priests reacted to this recommendation with claims that it was an assault on the inviolability of the seal of confession and that they would go to jail rather than divulge the contents of a confession.

Reference below to the "Report" is a reference to The Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Volume 16, Book 2, pages 849-872, footnotes omitted.

At page 850, the Report noted that, "The sacrament of reconciliation is made up of four elements: three actions on the part of the penitent (the person confessing) and the final action carried out by the priest. These are:

Contrition: sorrow for one's sin and the resolution not to sin again

Confession: the oral disclosure to the confessor of one's sin Satisfaction (also called penance): acts imposed by the confessor on the penitent to 'repair the harm' and 'make amends' for the sin...

Absolution: the confessor pronounces God's forgiveness of the penitent's sin."

At Page 851 Bishop Terence Curtain, Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne and Chair of the ACBC Commission for Doctrine and Morals, was noted to have told the Commission that "absolution would be withheld where in the priest- confessor's judgement something is lacking in any one of the first three essential parts of the sacrament..."

At Page 853 the Report noted that, "We received submissions to the effect that perpetrators of child sex abuse are unlikely to attend confession. We also heard evidence from clergy that they had never heard a confession in which the penitent confessed to sexually abusing a child..."

At the same page the Report noted that, "We also received evidence from two psychologists who have worked with clergy perpetrators of child sexual abuse, Dr Marie Keenan and Dr Geraldine Robinson, clinical psychologist and former Clinical Director of Encompass Australasia. Eight of the nine clergy who were the subject of Dr Keenan's study of the Irish Catholic Church clergy offenders disclosed their acts of child sexual abuse in religious confession. Based on her research, Dr Keenan found that: "The anonymity of the confessional became an important avenue for disclosure of sexual and emotional distress and ultimately for disclosure of sexual offending."

At Page 854, the Report noted, "... Dr Robinson is a psychologist who treated 60 to 70 Catholic clergy perpetrators of child sexual abuse, as well as clergy who had committed sexual offenses against adults at Encompass Australasia. She said she thought that the proportion of clerical perpetrators she had seen who had disclosed sexual abuse of children in religious confession 'probably would be substantial ...'

She said that she had 'most definitely' seen the pattern that Dr Keenan described, particularly in older clergy, where 'an offender would offend against a child victim, go to confession and feel absolved, and do exactly the same thing again."

At page 859 one of Dr. Keenan's subject stated, "After each abusive occurrence I felt full of guilt and at the earliest opportunity I sought to confess and receive absolution...it effected a degree of relief and a feeling of a new beginning. There was always a resolution that it would not occur again.... There were times of guilt, shame and fear that I would get caught but I used confession to clean the slate... it seemed to ease my conscience that I was truly making an effort to change and stop."

At page 866 it is noted that Professor Waters gave evidence.... that, under cannon law, priests always have the possibility of deferring the granting of absolution or indeed refusing it. He gave evidence that a priest can defer granting absolution until the act of satisfaction, for example reporting to police, has been carried out.

Dr Leahy basically agreed.

At page 867 it is noted that Archbishops Wilson and Costelloe said that the priest should therefore require the person confessing to child sexual abuse to report themselves to civil authorities and provide evidence that they had done so, before the priest would grant absolution.

At the same page it is noted that Archbishops Hart and Coleridge gave evidence that they would be willing to withhold absolution from a person who disclosed that they had abused a child. Archbishop Fisher disagreed.

The Bishops and experts have given the lead here. Where a penitent tells a confessor that he or she has sexually abused a child the priest simply refuses to give absolution until the penitent has provided satisfactory evidence, ie a signed confession acknowledged by the police, that he/she has reported the matter to the appropriate authorities.

If the penitent provides full disclosure/ confession to the police, it is most unlikely they would want to pursue the confessors.

In the light of the evidence given to the Royal Commission by the archbishops, bishops and experts, the claim by the clergy that they would go to jail rather than violate the seal was unnecessary. They should simply have determined to follow the process outlined above. Priests might further reduce the risk of criminal prosecution by only hearing confessions behind a screen.

Governments must legislate for the peace and good order of all persons within their jurisdictions. In the light of the revelations at the Royal Commission, governments who do not act in accordance with the Recommendation would be seen to be protecting paedophiles and priests at the expense of vulnerable children. The community will simply not tolerate this.

THE PLENARY COUNCIL

While this Council is welcome, the same or similar process at a diocesan level should be held every five years but only after canon 443 is replaced with a canon reflecting the value of shared decision making.

Damian Carroll
21 February 2019

SUPPLEMENTARY PLENARY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

BY PATRICK NUNAN

I have read and completely adopt the written submissions of Damian Carroll set out above (Damian's submissions). In addition to Damian's submissions, I specifically want to highlight two recent instances where the Church has demonstrated a culture of "those who have the power have a god given right to rule". It reminds me of the English and European monarchies of the 10th centuries onwards to the general acceptance and adoption of democracy in the 18th century. The failure by the Curia to embrace the collaborative sharing of ideas especially with the laity and to embrace a governance model that is inclusive instead of exclusive has caused many to leave the Church sickened by a blatant display of arrogance, narcissism and ontological superiority. The hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the Church is anathema

to modern day governance structures and models but is still defended by those who benefit namely the bishops, cardinals and popes.

The first such example is the disastrous adoption of the *Vox Clara* version of the English liturgy. We all know that in 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship decided to start with a new version of the English liturgy again ignoring a new translation completed in the late 1990s by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). The ICEL had spent years refining the initial pre Vatican 2 English liturgy version and consulted widely and had reached consensus on an appropriate English version. This was then discarded, and the *Vox Clara* version imposed without the priests and the laity being consulted. This heavy-handed, regal decree approach resulted in an English version that is, as Paul Collins says "pseudo mid-Victorian English that a minor 19th century romantic novelist might have used on a bad day.'

Father Ian McGinnity, the then chairman of the National Priests Council said in 2011 when the *Vox Clara* version was introduced that when the church moved from Latin to English 40 years ago, the Vatican accommodated those who refused to change, and suggests the same should happen this time. At least, there should be a time of transition for people to adapt. "The liturgy is the place we interface with the people and with God - it's a pre-eminent area. It's about meeting around the table of the Lord, and it's sad that it could be the cause of disunity. We would not like to see the Eucharist be a source of division or an exercise in control and power by a particular ideological position within the church".

Many within the Church and those who left the Church because the heavy-handed non-consultative approach see the *Vox Clara* version as tainted, haughty and substandard.

As reported in the Tablet on 9 September 2017, Pope Francis has now issued a new order "*Magnum Principium*" that amends canon law (canon 838.3) that bishops now have the power to complete translations of the Mass from Latin to local languages.

The Tablet article says the (bishops)

"are required to "faithfully" prepare and "approve" translations which are then confirmed by Rome. The words "faithfully" and "approve" are both new. This throws open the possibility that the 2011 English Roman Missal - which became mired in disagreement with claims that the Vatican had overly controlled the process - could be changed. The onus will now be on local bishops to take the initiative. Francis' law also reverses moves by his predecessors to centralise the translation process, which saw Vatican officials editing, and re-writing the work of bishops' conferences. The foundation stone to his new law, Francis explained, is the "great principle" of Vatican II which stressed that "liturgical prayer be accommodated to the comprehension of the people so that it might be understood." This task, he pointed out, had originally been entrusted to the bishops in countries across the world. His law comes soon after a landmark speech to Italian liturgists where he declared (sic) that reforms to Catholic worship instituted after the 1962-65 council are "irreversible", something he declared with "magisterial authority."

Accordingly, there is nothing stopping the ACBC to immediately promulgate the change from the *Vox Clara* version to the 2001 ICEL version and have it implemented.

The second matter that I want to raise is the dismissal of Bishop William Morris DD as the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba. This tragic saga involving a regional Australia bishop much loved and revered by not only the Catholic community of his diocese by also the wider community well outside his diocese was riddled with spurious, unsubstantiated claims, a complete denial of natural justice and procedural fairness, a lack of fortitudinal gumption by a majority of the then serving Australian Catholic bishops, a cohort of vindictive and secretive prelates whose only desire was to crush and destroy for the sake of blind adherence to custom

and more tragically (for the Church) the loss of an example of a bishop with “field hospital” experience.

Added to the personal devastation this decision brought to many Catholics was also the realisation of the frailty, even the glaring inefficiencies of canon law to meet the common lay standards of the right to justice now accepted as standard in all modern democracies and most totalitarian regimes for the protection of basic human rights. Where there was a remedy and/or statutory requirement in canon law such as canons 219 and 220, the Roman prelates as is the want with those who exercise unfettered power over (in their eyes) lesser beings, these provisions were totally ignored as were the very basic Christian beliefs and standards.

The unfortunate corollary of the lack of fortitudinal gumption by a majority of the then serving Australian Catholic bishops was exemplified with the cover-up of the child sexual abuse as was disclosed in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse of many Australian Catholic Bishops. Once again, the systemic failure by the bishops in both the child sexual abuse disaster and the Bishop Morris dismissal can be sheeted home to a failure of good governance principles and culture. Much like the unethical and immoral practices of many in the banking sector as exposed by the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry, the current malaise within the Australian Catholic Church can be primarily laid at the feet of the current leaders of the church, the bishops. As Commissioner Hayne said:

“Because it is the entities, their boards and senior executives who bear primary responsibility for what has happened, close attention must be given to their culture, their governance and their remuneration practices.”

Whilst the “remuneration practices” do or did not apply to the bishops, the perks and prestige of office do apply.

The bishops during the dismissal of Bishop Morris saga lived in a secular society and as (collectively) Australia’s largest employers, would have been well aware of the legal procedures required when dealing with the diocesan employees being teachers, health professionals, administration staff *et al.* Being the final juridical person within the diocese, the bishop is and was required to dismiss employees and to abide by the due process of natural justice and procedural fairness when doing so. The due processes of natural justice and procedural fairness have been evolving for centuries and in Australia under its common law principles that finds as one of its founding champions St Thomas Aquinas. I have heard bishops bleakly try to argue that as Bishop Morris was not an employee he was not entitled to the tenants of natural justice and procedural fairness. In hearing such attempted arguments, one can only despair at the moral deficiencies of such individuals!

Again, canon law, was and is found to be sadly ineffectual as was the whole process of Bishop Morris’ dismissal. Above all, the whole process was conducted in secret. There was no openness even with the accused. There was no transparency even to the bishops’ fraternity of clerical brothers let alone the laity of the diocese. If one were to compare the dismissal process with a modern time equivalent, one could easily equate it to the summarial arrest and detention of dissidents within the Peoples Republic of China.

Unfortunately for Bishop Morris there was little support from his fellow Australian bishops that can only be described as upsetting at best. In fact, two senior Australian archbishops came out to belittle Bishop Morris one even saying he was “not a team player” a criticism that was later leveled by another Australian bishop at the same archbishop a few years later. Bishop Morris can, however, take comfort in the positive comments by Commissioner Peter McClellan during the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and his (Bishop Morris’) handling of a child abuse incident at a Toowoomba Catholic school. I can remember the embarrassing retreat by Australian bishops from Rome after their *ad limina*

visits in October 2011 after meeting with two dicastery prefects and the totally unsatisfactory joint statement released on 21 October 2011 that only said one thing being that our (the Australian bishops') positions of privilege and power are all too important to us and we must not buck Rome.

The joint statement ended with:

"We return to Australia determined to do whatever we can to heal any wounds of division, to extend our fraternal care to Bishop Morris, and to strengthen the bonds of charity in the Church in Australia".

The "wounds of division" have never healed in fact, have festered and remain untreated. Likewise, the "bonds of charity" exist not because of the bishops but the priests, nuns and laity who carry out the work of the church on a daily basis in schools, hospitals, refuges, prisons, rehabilitation centers and street vans.

In many respects, what happened to Bishop Morris and his treatment by the Vatican and his fellow bishops was the "cannery in the coal mine" as post 2011 events have panned out.

There needs to be a concerted effort to remove the lack of transparency and secrecy from all Catholic Church activities whether it be in Rome, ACBC or at local diocesan level. A start needs to be made with the process of election of local (Australian) bishops with a new transparent process that has limited involvement of the Apostolic Nuncio in the process (a bit like what is currently happening in the Peoples Republic of China).

A further start would be to go back to "grass roots" with each diocese holding a diocesan council as distinct from a diocesan synod. Canon law does provide for a diocesan synod where discussions on diocesan issues between the laity and the bishop might take place. A diocesan synod is restricted as to representation and voting rights. The highly restrictive nature of Canons 460-468 which govern how a synod is conducted would need to be suspended "for the good of the diocesan community" as Canon 460 suggests. The formal nature of a diocesan synod would militate against cross flow of possible solutions to the current difficulties faced by the Catholic Church at a national level and at a diocesan level.

The first item on the list would be the council structure where the representative nature and voting priorities are discussed i.e. all who participate have an equal vote; a meeting of minds so that each of the parties could speak their mind openly but also that a final vote at the end of the dialogue might have some parity and perhaps be seen as based on consensus, collaboration and collegiality. The very nature of structure and representative prerogatives should be open to input from all levels as once that process is undertaken and seen to be inclusive rather than exclusive with an agenda that is not top-down but bottom-up then the chance of a free flow of ideas and solutions will flow in the spirit of communion and resolution of joint problems. After all, the greatest asset of the Catholic Church is its lay members!

Patrick Nunan
22 February 2019