



CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

Official report signals Australia's Catholics are pressing for reforms – forum next month

Tuesday 3 March 2020

Australian Catholics have conveyed an overwhelming mood for reform in their church, according to a fresh assessment of a church report into nationwide consultations last year.

The new findings will be a focus of a public forum of the reform group, Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn, being held on 2 April. The forum will hear expert views and discuss the Pope's recent response on the Amazon Synod in the context of preparation for the Australian Plenary Council process.

The official report of the 17,000 submissions responding to the church's "listening" sessions indicates that permitting married priests and women priests has broad support of active Australian Catholics.

This is the conclusion of Canberra author and reform advocate, Terry Fewtrell, who has analysed the report which assessed submissions made as part of preparations for the Australian Catholic summit, the Plenary Council, in October.

Mr Fewtrell says the 300-page report produced by the Catholic National Centre for Pastoral Research conveys "a multitude of calls for change and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the major thrust of those calls is in a reformist direction".

While the report does not give numbers supporting any particular reform, Mr Fewtrell says that based on the language used in the report it would be reasonable to identify major or key issues, including:

- celibacy, which the report states is one of the most 'frequently raised themes', with broad support for married priests;
- the ordination of women which the report said received "considerable support from a large group of participants";
- clericalism, a theme "most widely discussed by participants";
- lack of leadership from the Australian bishops;
- a "significant number" stated it was imperative for the church to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse of Children; and
- "radical change to the structure and model of leadership described as 'inverting the pyramid' was seen to be of critical importance.

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Mr Fewtrell says: “Despite a sense in some parts that the report appears to advance a traditionalist view, on reflection this could be seen as a form of rear-guard action in the face of what is an overwhelming call for reform and change and an apparent acceptance by the people that there must be significant and meaningful change.

“In other words, the people of the Australian church are ready for change, if not yearning for it,” he said.

Ordinary Catholics are investing great hope in the Plenary Council, and Mr Fewtrell says it would be a curious outcome, damaging to all, if the bishops failed to heed the cry of Australia’s Catholics, putting themselves at odds with the clearly expressed views of Pope Francis and offside with their flock.

Mr Fewtrell says he based his overview on the five key topics on which Concerned Catholics has based its submission: the need for the church to be **transparent, accountable, non-clericalist, inclusive and humble.**

The Concerned Catholics forum on 2 April, titled *Amazon Synod – Learnings for Australian Catholics and the Australian Plenary Council*, will hear from four speakers, three of whom will share their insights about the Amazon Synod.

They are **Brother Mark O’Connor**, Vicar for Communications at Parramatta diocese, who was an official observer at the Synod late last year; **Paul Nicoll**, a Canberra Catholic with experience and insight into the Brazilian/Amazon church; and Associate Professor **Agnes Dodds**, recently of Melbourne University and member of Women’s Wisdom in the Church (WWITCH).

Mr Fewtrell who was the lead author of Confirmed Catholics submission to the Plenary Council will discuss Plenary Council processes and next steps and post-Amazon Synod considerations for the church reform agenda leading into the Plenary Council.

Terry Fewtrell’s report is available on the CCCG website [here](#)

Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn Submission to the Plenary Council is available [here](#).

PUBLIC FORUM

Amazon Synod – Learnings for Australian Catholics and the Australian Plenary Council is a public meeting.

7:30pm-9:30pm

Thursday 2 April

**Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
15 Blackall Street, Barton, ACT**

All are welcome. Supper provided.

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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