



CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

Catholic Plenary Assembly a first small step to much needed change

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The first Assembly of the Catholic Plenary Council which ended today has opened the way towards a more inclusive church relevant to modern Australia but it is only the start to the changes needed, said Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn.

Real world issues including the role of women, governance and transparency must be given more focus in developing the agenda for the Second Assembly of the Plenary Council next July, the chairperson of Concerned Catholics, Emeritus Professor John Warhurst, who attended the assembly as a council member, said.

He said this was not to downgrade the importance and achievements of the first assembly last week which did much to open the dialogue among 280 people of differing views and diverse cultures, and to hear the views of the laity, including women.

‘And we can take some heart from the words of the President of the Plenary Council, Archbishop Tim Costelloe, who said on Saturday that over the next nine months and beyond as we move forward we will have “to discern carefully in what ways and to what extent we can and must walk together holding in creative tension many different and contrasting voices, and where it might be that God is pointing us in a particular direction and we are all called to follow, together”.

‘The important process between now and July has to be much more transparent and inclusive than the closed doors process which produced the agenda for the first Assembly,’ Professor Warhurst said.

‘If the process is not more open the second time around neither the Plenary Council members nor the wider Catholic community will put up with it because they now feel more empowered.

‘Last week's assembly showed that the much-needed thrust for change had come through in important ways even if the agenda itself was not structured to support the reforms necessary.

‘This was particularly true for the voices of the women members. Even though they were in a minority and there was no formal recognition of the need to discuss a greater role for women, their voices were very noticeable.

‘Another missing issue was the acceptance of LGBTQI+ people whom the church routinely fails to acknowledge.

Another leading member of Concerned Catholics, Francis Sullivan said: 'The next Assembly must be focused on resolutions that address the tin tacks for a more relevant and relatable church.

'The lack of transparency is a problem if we are trying to foster a sense of enthusiasm in an increasingly uninterested church.

'The passion that drove many of the 17,500 submissions for the Plenary Council during the consultation period two years ago had been left to wane for too long.

'The members of the Plenary Council had to pretty much start all over again to come up with their own ideas.

'The Council had to be kickstarted all over again because of the lack of reference to the previous submissions," Mr Sullivan said.

Professor Warhurst said that the President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, had expressed the hope that like childbirth, the plenary process after a slow and messy process would end with a fruitful and joyful outcome.

'I hope we are learning from the messy process so far. The People of God, including the members, were excluded from the process at times when they should have been included.

'The consequence was that chances to make the process better were lost. We need to remedy that before the second assembly in July,' Professor Warhurst said.

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