



CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

Canberra Goulburn Catholics call for authentic renewal

Tuesday 8 February 2022

Pope Francis is initiating a rethink of the way the Catholic Church operates which should give Australian Catholics fresh hope of seeing desperately needed reforms, and shake up the Australian bishops' resistance to change, Concerned Catholics of Canberra and Goulburn say.

The announcement by Pope Francis of an International Synod of Bishops to examine the topic of Synodality – the journey towards collaboration and discernment by bishops – comes as the Australian Church's Plenary Assembly appears near paralysis on issues such as acceptance of women clergy, full participation of LGBTQI+ people and the rejection of clericalism.

Emeritus Professor John Warhurst, who chairs Concerned Catholics (CCCG) and is a member of the Plenary Council, said the stated themes of the Pope's International Synod, of Communion, Participation and Mission, represented a marked contrast to the obstructive approach by some leading Australian bishops so far to the many calls for fundamental reforms in the church.

'Fake synodality will be the last straw for the Catholic community. A superficial exercise will be a major disappointment. What we want is frank reporting of the views of Australian Catholics. We need to see much more openness and positive leadership from our bishops.

'The church leadership still has much to learn about co-responsibility with lay Catholics. Walking together will only succeed if church structures become much more inclusive, accountable and transparent. Yet passive and active resistance to the incorporation of these principles continues.

'The Official Agenda for the First Assembly of the Plenary Council last October appeared to be consciously designed to avoid open, focussed discussion about the full inclusion of women in church decision-making and ministry. If not deliberate, then this omission revealed a serious blind-spot among officialdom towards the most important issue facing the church today. It must face this issue head on.

'Also, discussion of the introduction of Diocesan Pastoral Councils, a prime synodal mechanism, has been consciously conducted behind closed doors. The historical research commissioned by the bishops in response to *The Light from the Southern Cross* report has not yet been released despite its obvious relevance to a synodal church and Plenary Council discussions.

'The announcement by Pope Francis of the International Synod of Bishops to examine the topic of Synodality, with an emphasis on diocesan, national and regional input, has led to a further invitation for input and comment from ordinary Catholics on the way forward for the church in the 21st century.

'It is clear from the documentation for the Synod on Synodality, that this process is far more insightful and potentially incisive in breadth and depth in which it seeks to deal with realities, discover truth, and ultimately elicit input. Whereas the Plenary Council process seemed intent on confusing and closing off new directions, the intent of the Synod invitation suggests that it really wants to discover and deal with the hinderances and blockages that impede the church's mission in today's world.

'In responding to the Synod invitation, CCCG considers that the points raised in its original Plenary Council submission remain the fundamental issues to be addressed if the Australian Catholic Church and are relevant to the International Synod's deliberations.

'The five central points made by CCCG are that the church should be: Transparent, Accountable, Non-clericalist, Inclusive; and Truly Humble.

'These characteristics are imperatives dictated by the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the theology and ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council as endorsed by Pope Francis and the deeply held faith and good sense of the Australian Catholic community.

'They are also faithful to Gospel values. These provide a compelling agenda that must be addressed honestly for the church in Australia to be relevant and have any coherent sense of what it is offering and to credibly reach out and effectively take its mission of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all Australians,' Professor Warhurst said.

Read the CCCG submission [here](#).

***The International Synod invites submissions from church groups and individuals. Deadline for submissions to <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch> is 27 February 2022.**

Subscribe to Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn to receive notices of coming events, media releases, articles and newsletters. [Subscribe](#)

Contact: Mark Metherell 0417 603 697