



CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

Catholic reform leader tells Germans of uphill battle in Australia

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Canberra lay Catholic leader, Emeritus Professor John Warhurst, AO has addressed a large conference in Germany on church reform in which he detailed the uphill campaign for reform and synodality in Australia.

Professor Warhurst, one of the few international speakers at the conference, spoke on *The Plenary Council and Synod of Bishops in Australia and Oceania* at the lay conference on Church Reform and Synodality held in Wurzburg, Germany early this month.

‘It was an honour to be invited to speak to the conference held by the German Synodal Way (DSW) in a country where lay people are leading the way internationally on the path to church reform,’ Professor Warhurst said on his return to Australia.

‘The spirit and thinking for reform expressed at the Wurzburg conference was heartening. Just as in Australia, Germany’s lay leaders are facing the resistance of bishops to change, but not to the same extent as the obstacles we encounter in Australia.’

Professor Warhurst, the foundation chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn (CCCG), pointed out that the Australian church contains friends of Germany and of the German Synodal Way. Two Australians, Ms Susan Sullivan, also a foundation member of CCCG, and Bishop Shane Mackinlay, were official observers at the DSW Final Assembly in March.

In his address to the conference, Professor Warhurst said the lay Catholic renewal movement, led by the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform network (ACCCCR), had been calling for church reform for several decades. Its concerns were a revitalisation of the church along Vatican II lines, including equality for women, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, and lay leadership.

Professor Warhurst spoke of the positives and disappointments of the Plenary Council and said the more recent Synod of Bishops on Synodality in Australia and Oceania had offered many attractive features for Australians.

The outcome document positively emphasised inclusiveness and synodality. ‘Our experiences within our continental Church are often the opposite of both. Much of our experience with the Church hierarchy has been the antithesis of synodality...’

In conclusion, Professor Warhurst said there were lessons for the Synod of Bishops to be drawn from the Plenary Council in Australia. 'Translating synodality into practice at the diocesan and local level remains key. The Church moves very slowly.

'Despite official statements to the contrary, most of the Australian Catholic community has disengaged. Maintaining attention... is a test of resilience, especially given PC implementation disappointments. Many reforming Catholics were exhausted by the PC process, but some are pressing on. There is no 'national' church alternative.

'Initial hopes for large-scale church reform in Australia have mostly been dashed. In a fragmented church any reform can only be piecemeal.

'There are greater hopes for the Synod process in the much longer term. But this whole process, perhaps inevitably given the scale, is much further removed from the grass-roots Catholic community experience. It has become much more institutionalised, despite the presence of many excellent people. There is also a growing focus on embedding synodal processes rather than outcomes. Those who emphasise practical outcomes increasingly are being sidelined,' Professor Warhurst said.

Read John Warhurst's paper [here](#)

See media release with link to Susan Sullivan's paper [here](#)

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