



concerned Catholics

of the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese

A response to the Royal Commission

MEDIA RELEASE

Canberra Catholics call for reform at watershed meeting of laity

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More than 200 Catholics meeting in Canberra last night strongly supported reforms to give the laity more power in the running of their church.

The standing room only event called on Archbishop Christopher Prowse, who attended but did not address the gathering, to take the reform message to next week's meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

The gathering was convened by the recently formed Concerned Catholics of Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese group to press for changes that propose a big boost to lay representation, including women, in church decision-making, and the establishment of a diocesan pastoral council with significant lay membership.

The chair of the meeting, Professor John Warhurst, said today the large attendance at the meeting and the enthusiasm for change displayed by the overwhelming majority was an emphatic signal for reform.

Professor Warhurst put to the meeting a motion which asked if those attending supported the general goals of greater accountability, inclusiveness, transparency, women's participation in decision-making, lay leadership and collaborative working towards a reform agenda in the Archdiocese and more broadly.

This was passed with an overwhelming majority show of hands.

"This meeting is a watershed for Catholics in the Canberra region. It shows significant numbers want change and believe that without reforms our church's decline in Australia will only continue.

"We are grateful that Archbishop Prowse attended so he could hear the strength of views from active Catholics who seek a stronger more inclusive church.

"We will put to Archbishop Prowse our proposals for change for him to relay to the bishops' conference," Professor Warhurst said.

Francis Sullivan, who heads the church's Truth Justice and Healing Council, told the meeting the heart of the Catholic church has been broken due to the abuse scandal.

He said the lack of interest and involvement by most Catholics in their church was because they felt "beaten down", often hearing from the church a commentary of judgement on their lives rather than being a "support to do life".

Catholic laity must insist on being active participants in the 2020 Plenary Council. "We need to know the 'how' and the 'what' of what will go to the vote."

"Otherwise any consultation will be seen as just ticking boxes", Mr Sullivan said.

Former NSW Premier, Kristina Keneally, told the meeting, Pope Francis had said "God is not afraid of new things" but the Pope had not spelt out how the Church in Australia might bring change to its parishes.

Change might not work perfectly first time "but that does not mean it's not worth trying again", Ms Keneally said.

A longtime advocate for women priests, Marilyn Hatton, told the meeting that the clerical, closed nature of church decision-making meant that many reform issues were never discussed in parishes.

The response from Australia's bishops to calls for change had been dismissive, silent or "God Bless you" replies, Ms Hatton said.

"What is needed is radical, root and branch change," she said.

A copy of Francis Sullivan's Speech is available on the [Truth Justice and Healing Council's website](#).

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