

MEDIA RELEASE

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CATHOLIC LAY GROUPS HARNESS ENERGY FOR NATIONAL REFORM

Catholics from reform groups across Australia and New Zealand met via Zoom late last week to support the growing movement for reform of the Catholic Church.

Participants representing 17 reform groups and other invitees joined the forum of the Australian Coalition for Catholic Church Reform to discuss the way ahead for Church decision making, especially in the lead up to the Plenary Council now scheduled for October 2021.

The 80 participants represent many thousands of Catholics who share deep concern about the state of the Church in Australia.

At the forefront of those concerns are issues of good governance and the culture of clericalism in the church, particularly the need for inclusion and gender equality.

Speaking shortly after the forum, ACCCR Convener, Peter Johnstone, said that the coalition is increasingly harnessing the energy for renewal Australia-wide.

‘Catholics want a Church that lives and models the teachings of Jesus.

‘We believe that this is the most representative meeting of Catholic reform groups ever held in Australia.

‘We were pleased to also have New Zealand Catholics share their views.

‘Catholics are insisting that the now deferred Plenary Council, when it does meet, addresses the real issues of a debilitated Church and failed Church leadership.

‘We are determined to press for reform and to challenge the Church leadership to hear and respond to the spiritual and community needs of the faithful,’ Mr Johnstone said.

Presentations at the meeting included several overviews of the Plenary Council process to date, reviews of the six official discernment papers meant to shape the Plenary Council agenda, and the Implementation Advisory Group’s recent governance report, *The Light from the Southern Cross*.

John Warhurst, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn, was co-Chair of the Coalition’s forum.

‘We trust in the sense of faith of the faithful that has emerged from the submissions, but we are deeply concerned that the papers which have been written for the Plenary Council fail to marshal reform ideas into a relevant framework for a meaningful Council agenda,’ Professor Warhurst said.

‘The most prominent theme emerging from the 17,500 submissions is greater Inclusion for all, especially women and minority groups. But the issue appears to have been sidelined in the discernment papers,’ he said.

Concerning the recently leaked governance document, it was noted that far from being an ‘interim report’ as subsequently described in an official response to the leak, this Governance Report was the final contribution of eminent national and international experts who delivered 86 recommendations, many of which could be enacted in parishes and dioceses across the country immediately.

Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

Andrea Dean, President of Women and the Australian Church and also co-Chair of the forum, said the Governance Report is a progressive, wide-ranging report with implications which reach well beyond the remit of the Plenary Council.

‘That is one forum for consideration, but its recommendations are universal,’ Ms Dean said.

‘The reform movement can respond to the report by seeking to influence how bishops conduct their consultation, seeking to have the recommendations implemented in parishes and dioceses immediately and engaging in discussion about issues not included in the report,’ she said.

Peter Johnstone said that the attempt to keep the governance report secret is clear evidence of the Church’s lack of transparency and reinforces the Royal Commission’s condemnation of the Church’s governance and culture.

‘As the culture wars rage, it is imperative that all parties are driven by a commitment to Christ’s mission.

‘The ACCCR will draw on these discussions for the next meeting in July which will come up with local and national action plans.

‘The Catholic reform movement is harnessing the momentum for renewal by gathering the wisdom of the faithful in setting a path that truly reflects the gospel,’ Mr Johnstone said.

ACCCR Zoom Forum

Thursday 18 June 2020

The following groups were represented at the forum:

- Australian Reforming Catholics
- Cardijn Community
- Catholics For Renewal
- Catholics Speak Out
- Communities of the Way
- Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn
- Concerned Catholics Tasmania
- Concerned Catholics Wagga Wagga
- Concerned Catholics Wollongong
- Cyber Christian Community
- For the Innocents
- Inclusive Catholics
- Rainbow Catholics Australia
- Toowoomba Catholics for Church Reform
- VOCAL (Voices of Catholic Australian Laity)
- WATAC (Women and the Australian Church) (Canberra)
- WWITCH (Women’s Wisdom in the Church) (Melbourne)

Other unaffiliated groups and individuals from Australia and New Zealand

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