

MEDIA RELEASE

20 July 2020

Catholic bishops urged to get serious and appoint a woman as co-chair of Plenary summit

Australia's Catholic bishops must appoint a woman as co-chairperson of the church Plenary Council if they wish the summit meeting to be taken seriously, the Australian Catholic Coalition on Church Reform has declared.

After a Zoom meeting attended by over 100 church reform advocates representing thousands of Catholics from around Australia and New Zealand on 16 July, co-chairs Andrea Dean and John Warhurst said there was overwhelming support for recognition of women's leadership in the church. This is fundamental to the reform of church governance.

'Women play a leading role in the day-to-day support of Catholic Church liturgies and in running its health, education and social services, but are excluded by church law from executive governance. For there not to be a woman chair of the Plenary and for women not to have equal representation in the preparation of discussion documents for the Plenary would expose the Plenary as an anachronism with compromised credibility and relevance for the Australian community,' Ms Dean and Professor Warhurst said.

'A woman co-chair is a matter of justice. If the bishops were to reject this move, then it would be incumbent upon them to explain clearly why more than half of the active faithful should be excluded from leadership of the Plenary. Exclusion of women in this way would be a powerful symbol of business as usual.

'This issue is a matter of urgency given the bishops intend to submit the *'Instrumentum Laboris'*, the key document that will determine the Plenary agenda, to the Vatican for approval this September. Why are they rushing this? The Plenary has been deferred for 12 months. When would this have been done if the PC had not been deferred from this October?

'There also needs to be clarity in the agenda concerning priority for other necessary reforms including the establishment of Diocesan Pastoral Councils and Assemblies before the Plenary. Even though the Plenary has been postponed until October 2021, we wish to give the Vatican, through our bishops, plenty of notice of the reforms we seek.

'The planning committee developing advice to the Vatican on the Plenary Council requires an equal representation of women.

'Bishops throughout Australia must listen to the people, at least respecting the existing provisions of Church law for diocesan pastoral councils and diocesan assemblies truly representative of the faithful.

Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

‘The Plenary Council will be judged on whether it ensures future accountability and integrity and listening in the Church’s decision making - that can’t occur without accepting the equality of women and introducing effective accountability in Church governance,’ Ms Dean and Professor Warhurst said.

‘A woman co-chair for the Plenary Council is essential.’

ACCCR Zoom Forum

Thursday 16 July 2020

The following groups were represented at the forum:

- Australian Reforming Catholics
- *‘Be the Change’*, New Zealand
- 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 InterAgency for Ministry
- Toowoomba Catholics for Church Reform
- VOCAL (Voices of Catholic Australian Laity)
- WATAC (Women and the Australian Church)
- WWITCH (Women’s Wisdom in the Church)

Other unaffiliated groups and individuals from Australia and New Zealand also attended.

MEDIA CONTACT: Mark Metherell 0417 603 697