

1 August 2020

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President
Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council

cc: Archbishop Mark Coleridge
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Archbishop Christopher Prowse

Archbishop of Canberra-Goulburn

Re: A Transparent Working Document

Dear Archbishop Costelloe,

As the Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn, I write in response to your media release of July 30th 2020 about the working document-or *instrumentum laboris*- for the Plenary Council.

In your media release you outline the work which has begun recently on the development of the working document, including the membership of the writing team. You note that this document will be finalized in October this year for consideration at the bishops' November meetings. You say that it will then be sent to the Holy See, while local work continues within Australia on the development of the agenda for the first PC assembly in October 2021.

It is striking that nowhere in the media release do you mention any participation by the wider Catholic community in the preparation of this working document. There is not even any indication that you and the bishops will take the Catholic community into its confidence before or after the working document is presented to the ACBC. This secrecy is a breach of faith with the many thousands of Catholics who have invested heavily in time and effort, through discussion, meetings, submissions and prayerful discernment in the Plenary Council process so far.

In fact, the Catholic community has invested more than this – it has invested hope, indeed a somewhat fragile hope. Many remain unconvinced that the issues they so earnestly raised in submissions will receive the proper consideration they deserve and is essential for the Plenary Council process to be realistic and relevant. This is a pastoral reality which the bishops, and you especially as President of the Plenary Council process, are urged to genuinely recognize and accommodate.

It is essential for the integrity of the Plenary Council that a draft of the Working Document be published and made widely available prior to its consideration by the ACBC in November and certainly before it is sent in its final form to the Holy See. Such transparency should be a hallmark of the Plenary Council, yet in many ways, including the failure to publish the 17,500 submissions and the secrecy surrounding the choice of diocesan delegates, it has not been.

The preparation of the Working Document offers one last chance for the bishops to demonstrate openness and accountability to the Catholic community. This opportunity is so important that the success of the whole Plenary Council may depend upon it. Certainly, the publication of a draft working Document, and offering the possibility of feedback, will build up much needed trust in the process within the Catholic community, many of whom remain to be convinced.

I urge you to take this opportunity and I remain willing to discuss the contents of this letter further with you.

Yours sincerely

John Warhurst
Chair
Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn