

CONCERNED CATHOLICS FORUM

11 September 2018

**Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
Canberra**

Anne Kirwan

CEO, CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn

The Role of the Laity in Church Renewal

Acknowledgement of country

Welcome Bishop Vincent, Sr Clare, and concerned Catholics in the room

My name is Anne Kirwan and I am the CEO of CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn. We are the welfare arm of the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn, and I am pleased to be invited here to participate in this panel tonight.

When I spoke to John Warhurst and asked what I should say, he said to simply speak about my experiences as a lay professional within the Church. However, in doing so, I face the challenge of balancing the thoughts in my head with the wishes of my heart regarding my Church and its future.

My head focuses on the core question - what do we as the Catholic community want? What do I want my Church and community look like in fifty years? And what roles can we as laity play in Church renewal? What can I offer our Archbishop Christopher, Vicar General Tony, and all our priests and religious to be successful in their roles? What am I prepared to do differently? After all, its not just my Church that needs to change, we all need to change how we have been working and interacting together.

Just a few simple questions bouncing around in my head thanks to John! However, my heart is just as confused. When I think of my Church, I am saddened and ashamed about what has occurred within my Church, and at the same time, I feel confident in our potential and in our people. I want to see our Church evolve and grow, embrace the recommendations of the Royal Commission and change... not just how we work, but how we are perceived by community through our work and actions in community.

I want us to bring pride back to the Catholic jersey, so that I can sit at a dinner party and not be the token outed Catholic in the room who bears the brunt of mockery and derision by my friends about my ongoing relationship with the Catholic Church. I want, in a secular society, to feel welcome and accepted. I want my Church to re-focus on its core purpose, to engage community and build community, living the gospel values and caring for the lost and marginalised.

It is an understatement to say this is a difficult time for our Church. But it is also a freeing time for our Church, where we can breathe, we are no longer afraid of the shadows and the rumours, where we can acknowledge and accept what has happened, and look to be different, and to act and work differently as a result. They say the opportune time for change is after a crisis. Well we are facing a crisis – it is not business as usual for our community.

Our Catholic Church has lost credibility and we have broken our public trust. Our leaders have been silenced by the Royal Commission, and no longer held in high regard, instead subject to public

criticism, cynicism and disbelief. Now when I go into meetings with government, one of the first things I am asked is how I am ensuring that CatholicCare is a safe place for clients – and this didn't used to happen. This is because our name is damaged. And as CatholicCare, we are clearly branded as Catholic. So our brand is damaged too.

Every Catholic has experienced sadness and shame about what has occurred. The key question is – how can we help our Church to regain credibility and remain relevant in today's secular society. We must determine what we want our future to look like and help navigate these new waters? It is not just one person's job.

But what role do we, the laity, hold in shaping this future.

Now many of you know, lay leadership within the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn is thriving. The CEO of CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn is a lay female, the CEO of Marymead Child & Family Services (our sister agency) is a lay female, the CEO of Calvary Hospital is a lay female, the Business Manager for the Archdiocese is a lay female, and the CEO of Catholic Education is a lay male. And although it is not a Diocesan agency, we can add in here SVDP are led by a lay male CEO. And our Archbishop has appointed a lay male as our Chancellor (which is unusual).

As such, the key roles of leadership within Catholic welfare, health and education, as well as key leadership roles within the administration of the Archdiocese, are held by laity. All of these entities participate in rigorous compliance and external oversight and meet all related legislation and standards. And if you have been lucky enough to hear Francis Sullivan speak, you will be comforted that he reports that despite all the negativity as a result of abuse within our Church, the Australian public still respects the work being done by Catholic welfare, health and education. So, during challenging times, there are some lights shining through the darkness within our community.

But how do we shine this light across all governance and operational systems in our Church, to aid in improved transparency and improved decision making.

Currently, each of these welfare, health and education entities have Boards made up of laity (and some clergy), and members of both the Catholic and the wider secular community – with a focus on expertise in governance, finance, law, child safety, compliance and risk, and sector expertise like education, mental health, nursing, business, psychology etc. Similar processes are already in place within the Archdiocese with the finance council, investment council, property council and temporal goods council all having laity involved and relying heavily on their expertise and advice. So a solid lay foundation is in existence here.

When reviewing the Bishops response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission - It is worth noting that recommendation 16.7 was accepted in principle = that the Bishops should conduct a review of governance and management structures in dioceses and parishes, including in relation to issues of transparency, accountability, consultation and the participation of lay men and women. This review should draw from the approaches to governance of Catholic health, community services and education agencies.

It is important to note that our Archdiocese has already commenced such a review process with CatholicCare. We will participate and expect to have recommendations made to further enhance our systems, practices, governance structure and decision making processes.

Similar acceptance of recommendations by the Bishops to include laity in external consultation and discussions regarding screening and admission of individuals into religious life, formation, and the provision of ongoing support and supervision for clergy and religious - demonstrate a willingness by

our Bishops to be more inclusive and bring in expertise, recognising the benefit in opening their doors to accept lay input.

These recommendations will also assist the Institute of Professional Standards and Safeguarding – established in this Archdiocese in response to the Royal Commission, and the Catholic Professional Standards Ltd – the company established by the Australian Bishops which operates independently of the Church and is staffed by lay professionals to oversee the Church's response to the Royal Commission and who will audit our compliance with the recommendations and the 10 Child Safe Standards.

I was also heartened when reading the recent announcement of Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the US Catholic Bishops Conference in response to their abuse crisis, whose three recommendations for actions within the US had one criteria that focused on the "substantial involvement of the laity". He stated "lay people bring expertise in areas of investigation, law enforcement, psychology, and other relevant disciplines, and their presence reinforces our commitment to the first criterion of independence".

Such recognition that we as laity have skills to offer that can benefit our Church, its leaders and community is key to our renewal and our future. Experts report that the motivation to change is driven by dissonance, recognition of the need to do something differently and the awareness of and availability of alternative options. It is essential that the alternative options are available to our leaders.

In these examples, it is rewarding to hear Australian and US Church leaders acknowledge the value that can be added to our communities and Church by including laity in its operations and decision-making process.

In Australia, we operate in a socialistic leaning, democratic, secular society. Its fair to say our Church has a complex governance structure – it is not as simple as recommending practices that would work in a business or a large company. We recognise that different rules apply. However, laity are already very active in key roles in this Archdiocese, and this does create real opportunities to provide additional support, insight and bring best practice and key learnings from these existing external systems.

As a community we have suffered a terrible crisis. To move forward and heal, we must demonstrate that we have learned from our past and welcome a different way of working. As such our leaders (and that includes myself) must show courage and embrace this opportunity to change and grow by implementing these recommendations, using all the assets available to rebuild public trust and faith in our Church. This may require some risk taking and a good slice of faith – but as Catholics we should have that in spades already.

I look forward to walking this journey with everyone here, and I am hopeful where we might end up...

Thankyou

Anne Kirwan
11 September 2018