SUBMISSION

Concerned Catholics
Canberra Goulburn

Proposed 2020 Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia

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Contact
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Our Vision
Our vision is for an inclusive church which welcomes all people in the spirit of the Gospels, where the talents, gifts and wisdom of lay Catholics, religious and ordained men and women contribute to all levels of participation and decision making in the Catholic Church in Australia as spelled out in canon law.

"The Christian faithful have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful." (Canon 212.3)

Our Mission
We are committed to ensuring Catholic lay people in the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese have an effective role and voice in the administration and direction of their church.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse has provided the grounds for profound system reform of the Church's administration and of its clerical culture.

Throughout the hearings the lack of transparency and accountability, the absence of competent lay participation and leadership, and a culture of secrecy and non-disclosure was shown to be characteristic of Church administration and governance.

Moving from darkness into light, we seek initiation of significant reforms based on:

- Greater accountability, inclusiveness, and transparency,
- Women's participation in decision-making at all levels of the church,
- Lay leadership, and
- Collaborative working towards a reform agenda in the Archdiocese more broadly.

Our Aim
In a spirit of mutual responsibility for the growth of our local Catholic community in the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese we seek to explore:

- New models of church and more effective lay participation,
- Effective vehicles for the participation of women in key decision-making,
- Establishment of a diocesan pastoral council with a view to establishing lay leadership, and
- Agreement for a work plan based on mutual partnership with our bishop, lay people and our committed priests and religious to achieve a reform agenda.

Our Founding Working Committee
John Warhurst, Chair; Robyn Beetham; Paul Collins; Kym Duggan; Marilyn Hatton; Ann-Mari Jordens; Mark Metherell; Monica Phelan; Rod Page; Susan Page; Kevin Vassarotti; Joan Warhurst
Introduction
This submission, on behalf of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn seeks details and clarification of the objectives and aspirations of the proposed 2020 Synod.

The submission also offers support and positive suggestions for moving the Catholic Church in Australia beyond a call for reform to active participation of all baptised Catholics to achieve long over-due improvements in collaboration between ordained and lay people.

The views in this submission represent those of grass roots Catholics living in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn is committed to ensuring that Catholic lay people have an effective role and voice in the administration and direction of their church.  Our goals, publicly supported by our pastor Archbishop Christopher Prowse are:

- Greater accountability, inclusiveness, and transparency;
- Women’s participation in decision making – at all levels of the church;
- Lay leadership; and
- Collaborative working towards a reform agenda in the Archdiocese more generally.

To date, Concerned Catholics have convened two successful and well-attended public meetings with the support base growing daily.  A third public meeting is scheduled for 22 March 2018.

An inclusive and collaborative process
Archbishop Mark Coleridge has stated on several occasions that the “Plenary Council will play a critical role in shaping the Church’s future”.  This approach to Church reform is long overdue and applauded; but without new, concrete processes and a clear direction on how things will change, there is vagueness and apparent absence of substance to the proposed process.  As concerned Catholics we request as a matter of urgency more information on the proposed way forward and the role that the laity will play in a collaborative process.

The current structural weakness of the Australian Church has most recently been exposed in evidence before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Flaws include a hierarchical church where each bishop is an entity unto himself, answerable only to Rome. The Bishop is an autonomous leader of his own diocese. Each diocese operates quite differently to the next and cultures and structures, often hard won, are at the whim of the incoming bishop. The same applies to parishes within the diocese.

Existing structures and processes provide a barrier to achieving transparent and inclusive consideration of a reform agenda in the lead up to the 2020 Plenary Council

A decision by the November 2017 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to encourage bishops to urgently establish diocesan pastoral councils with a brief to facilitate consideration of the Royal Commission Report on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse would be a practical step in the lead up to the proposed Plenary Council in 2020.
There is also an urgent need for such Councils to reflect a gender balance in their membership and to be tasked with the goal of addressing issues of inclusive liturgy relevant to the needs of all Catholics regardless of age, ethnic background and personal circumstances.

Catholics, disaffected former Catholics and other Australians will dismiss the process, unless there is a sharper, more professional effort to come to terms with the issues for the Church emerging from the Royal Commission’s hearings and acceptance of the past and future harm of a business as usual approach to church governance. At the very least people will continue to leave the church because they are disillusioned and bereft of their baptismal right of pastoral and spiritual care. Those who stay will continue to be deprived of their entitlement to full membership of the Church.

The touchstone of keeping lay people in their place as prayers, payers and those subject to outdated canon law, Church dogma and other changes that have little to do with Gospel values and more to do with maintaining power, is not sustainable in the Australia of the 21st Century. The wider society will rightly continue to lose respect for the Church and its leaders.

**The Plenary Council**
Concerned Catholics understands that the Council is yet to be given status by the Vatican.

It is not unreasonable to request public release of the time line and steps being taken in the approval process.

Australian Catholics have a right to know well in advance the timing of this important event and to have the maximum opportunity to prepare their views in keeping with the gravity of this Council and the opportunity it affords for genuine change.

Furthermore, an urgent decision on timing and arrangements is also critical in view of the forthcoming release of the Royal Commission Report. For the Council to be effective it will require commitment from all bishops to adequately resource consultation and information gathering processes.

The attached document (at Attachment A) outlines Concerned Catholics’ understanding of the plenary council process. The document also highlights some key issues that should be discussed at the Plenary Council.
Canon Law reform
The Royal Commission report is likely to raise issues requiring careful consideration by the Catholic Church concerning its interpretation of canon law in Australia. Existing canon law and how it is being applied presents barriers to real improvements in the Australian Catholic Church.

These issues need to be addressed by the Plenary Council.
Concerned Catholics requests that a root and branch review of existing canon law be included in the reform process.

An eminent group of Australian civil and canon lawyers should be commissioned by the Australian Church to review the relevance of canon law impediments to the full expression of the spiritual and pastoral life of the Catholic Church in Australian society. Draft terms of reference for such a group are outlined at Attachment B.

Improvements in administrative reform can be made well in advance of the plenary council deliberations. This will take commitment, i.e. a change of mindset and recognition that lay people and women in particular need to be included in meaningful ways where the talent pool and commitment of Australian Catholics is given free rein to contribute to the renewal of the Australian Church. Australian contemporary society is already benefitting from these reforms in secular society and its institutions. The Catholic Church in Australia has an opportunity to do the same as a matter of urgency.

Leadership
Pope Francis is calling all of us to be leaders in line with our baptism. The Pope has called on the bishops of the world to take up the mantle of their office as overseers, facilitators and pastors. He wants to give back the “collegiality” rediscovered and redefined by Vatican II.

Respect for the Australian Catholic Church publicly and privately is in sharp decline. Catholics are demanding reform and urgent action by ordained and lay leaders. This is the time for change, otherwise the slide into irrelevance and disillusion with the Catholic Church affecting millions of good people will continue for generations.

Genuine commitment to change and church reform is essential
Put simply our first two public meetings have continued to call for urgent action to address poor Church governance at all levels. People in the Canberra and Goulburn Archdiocese and across the Australian Catholic Church are hurt and angry and are calling out for fair, considered, inclusive leadership. As baptised Catholics, all people have a right to be part of an enlightened and reformed Catholic Church.

The final session of the Concerned Catholics Public Meeting, held in Canberra on 31 August 2017 brought forward a useful series of suggestions for better governance of the Australian Catholic Church.

These suggestions are outlined at Attachment C, and all require serious consideration.
The way forward
Concerned Catholics looks forward to clarification of the issues raised in this submission as it continues to work in collaboration with ordained leaders, lay Catholics and civil authorities towards:

1. A transparent and legal response, reflecting the laws of Australia, to the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse;

2. Urgent improvements in governance particularly in the areas of accountability and transparency. For example, the establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council for the Canberra and Goulburn Catholic Archdiocese and a public call for councils to be established across all dioceses and archdioceses. the Australian Church;

3. Addressing issues of compulsory celibacy for priests;

4. Adopting inclusive liturgy in the Australian Church;

5. A more enlightened approach to access by divorced and remarried Catholics to the sacraments;

6. Continuing action and support for equal participation of women, not just as church employees but as lay leaders, at all levels of the decision-making processes in the Australian Church including through affirmative action policies and strategies;

7. A Catholic summit, possibly in collaboration with the National Council of Priests, during 2018 to review progress with the Catholic Church’s response to the Royal Commission and the possibility of meaningful reform progress being made by the 2020 Plenary Council process;

8. The removal of canon law obstacles to the reform of the Catholic Church in Australia; and

9. Further analysis of opportunities for reform following the public release of the Royal Commission’s final report.

Concerned Catholics will convene the next public meeting in Canberra on 22 March 2018. A response to our request for clarification of the matters raised in this submission would be appreciated well before that meeting.

Prof John Warhurst
Chair
Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn
Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn
Attachment A
Understanding the Synod Process
Concerned Catholics of Canberra and Goulburn Archdiocese understands that the Plenary Council has not yet been given status by the Vatican.

A Plenary Council
This is the canonical name for an assembly of the constituent dioceses of the Australian Province.

Canon 443 lists wide participation extending all the way to male and female religious and the laity of both sexes. This is a Vatican II innovation based on the Council’s ecclesiology of the “Priestly People.”

The main eligibility criterion is to be a Christi fidelis – a faithful Christian by reason of baptism.

The assembly is an exercise of ecclesial “communio” – a technical word for the communion of the churches (dioceses), the bishops and clergy and the laity. This communio – accepts the status of the People of God with their “sensus fidelium” (their sense of the living faith in a contemporary world) as expressed at Vatican II.

The Plenary Council can “legislate” for the Australian Church but only with the final approval of Rome. It is not a parliament but it is more than a talk fest.

How Outcomes Are Achieved
Canon 446 spells out participation should be kept to around 300. All Bishops active and retired have “Deliberative voting” rights. All other attendees have “consultative voting” rights.

In the spirit of communio canon law expects the bishops and the laity to be in harmony and without overriding reason for the bishops to endorse the majority view of the assembly.

This view should be arrived at after extensive preparatory work in committees, with consultation, amendment and as far as practicable finalisation ahead of the actual event.

Who Gets to Go
Canon Law lays out that constituent groups elect their representatives e.g. Rectors of seminaries, rather than being appointed by the bishops.

There is a presumption each of Australia’s 34 dioceses has a duly constituted Diocesan Pastoral Council from which two members would be sent. **Problem is only nine dioceses have them and more problematic, the existence of duly constituted parish councils is rare. So there is no structure for nationwide lay participation in voting for representatives.**
Enlightened Episcopal Leadership the Key
Before going on to make points about the agenda it is critical we understand that the success of this Plenary Council is largely in the hands of Archbishop Coleridge and the bishops. If they foster genuine dialogue with the Australian Church, “business as usual” will indeed be at an end.

Pope Francis has called on the bishops of the world to take up the mantle of their office as overseers, facilitators and pastors. He wants to give back the “collegiality” rediscovered and redefined by Vatican II. He accepts that pastoral needs and realities differ widely around the world. He has invited bishops’ conferences to advise him of these special needs and indeed make strong cases for change.

The Scope of The Plenary Council
This is important for the agenda. Canon 445 states the scope is:
1) To ensure the pastoral needs of the people of God in its territory are provided for.
2) To have power of governance, especially legislative power. (What is decided and ratified applies de jure to all dioceses in the province).
3) To determine what is opportune for an increase of faith, the ordering of common pastoral action, the direction of morality and common discipline.

Bishops have a duty to ensure nothing on the agenda is contrary to Catholic belief or nothing is proposed that is the sole prerogative of the magisterium (Pope). This is problematic in the context of the development of doctrine but there is still wide scope for meaningful reform or at least the beginning of it.

Practical Departure Points – some important issues for consideration

Protocols for child protection should be spelled out and enforced.

Issues like pastoral care for the divorced and remarried and gays should be addressed in the spirit of the healing gospel of love and mercy.

A significant pastoral need for the Church is Australian priests. The Eucharistic community that is the foundational expression of Catholic belief and practice is being sacrificed on the altar of compulsory celibacy.

Once source of priests would be the ordination of mature faithful married men to preside over the Eucharist and other sacraments in their local communities.

The so-called ordination of “viri probati” (men of proven virtue) is urgent and overdue.

Optional celibacy should be the norm for parish clergy.
The Plenary Council should insist on the establishment of Diocesan Pastoral Councils and Parish Councils protected from the arbitrary whims of bishops and parish priests and with representation of men and women.

The plenary council must provide an opportunity for steps towards women’s leadership role in ministry. Fundamental changes in Canon Law would be necessary for some but not all improvements in the modernisation of the Church approach in this critical area.

This then leads to the demand for contemporary governance in terms of transparency and accountability. Also, the need to better utilise the talents of all baptised woman and men in the decision-making processes of the Catholic Church of Australia.
Attachment B
Canon Law Working Group

Draft Terms of Reference

1. Prepare advice on the canon law issues to be addressed in moving the Catholic Church towards greater inclusiveness, transparency and gender balance in governance at the parish, diocesan, national and universal Catholic Church levels.

2. Consult with civil legal authorities on the interaction of civil and canon law with particular reference to potential inconsistency in application of canon Law in resolving the issues identified by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The key and urgent issues to be addressed relate to the weaknesses in culture and governance within the Catholic Church in Australia.

3. Develop legislative proposals for the revision of canon law for consideration at parish, diocesan and 2020 Plenary Council Levels. The goal is to recommend reform and alignment of canon law with the social justice principles of inclusiveness.
Attachment C
Suggestions Re 2020 Plenary Assembly from Concerned Catholics Public Forum on August 31st 2017

- Country representation, including Wagga
- Leadership by women
- Principles (ST Vincent de Paul): poverty, open-ness in preparations, equality, subsidiarity
- Sub-committees for special topics to widen involvement
- Connect with young people and schools
- Aboriginal representation
- Not only paid church employees as they are limited in what they can say
- Information from the ground up
- Involve parishes
- Put 2020 Synod on agenda of parish councils
- Don’t restrict representation just to parishes as some structures are dysfunctional
- Centred in Christ
- Build sense of empowerment among Catholics from bottom up
- Distribute addresses and contact details of all representatives on Working Group [and national Executive Committee] so that they can be contacted directly
- Don’t wait until 2020 as some/many changes can be introduced now
- Special issue of Catholic Voice, including open letters section calling for suggestions, soliciting supportive and critical articles and open debate
- Dedicated new section of archdiocesan website
- Involve or establish special interest groups at parish, deanery or archdiocesan level (as for 2004 Archdiocesan Synod). Examples include Lenten Groups, and groups should not need parish priest approval.
- Inviting Fr Noel Connolly or another member of the 2020 Facilitation Team to the archdiocese to speak or to write for Catholic Voice
- Mass distribution of information Pack (should be available from national level