Changing Catholic Church like elephant mud-wrestling

19 March 2018

A public forum in Canberra this week, hosted by Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn, will hear an update on the Catholic Church’s response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse.

Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Church’s Truth Justice and Healing Council, in one of his final public appearances in the position, will detail some of the issues emerging for the Church from the Royal Commission’s final report.

Concerned Catholics Chair, Professor John Warhurst, will chair Thursday night’s forum.

Speaking ahead of Thursday’s forum, Professor Warhurst said many Catholics are devastated by what has emerged from the Royal Commission.

“They say that their faith has been shredded, not only by the revelations, but by the Church’s inertia as it attempts to respond,” Professor Warhurst said.

“Many say they no longer attend their local Church after a lifetime of commitment.

“We have also heard from young people who want real engagement with the Church at this significant time in its history.

“But it’s not only the sex abuse scandal.

“There has been a campaign against the hard-won reforms of the Second Vatican Council for 30 or 40 years. That’s at least one generation, if not more, left with a Church that’s stuck in the past.

"Trying to renew the Church is like mud-wrestling with an elephant. There are many moves which might be made, but the elephant is hard to grip, difficult to move, and hard to keep moving," Professor Warhurst said.

"Despite the horrific evidence from the Royal Commission, there is a fear that large parts of the Australian Church leadership remain locked in a clerical culture, determined to maintain the status quo and fight change," Professor Warhurst said.

"Communication within the church remains tightly controlled.

“At the local level we welcome the fact that our Archbishop, Christopher Prowse, has opened some channels of communication with us, as have many parish priests.
"But the Archdiocesan newspaper, Catholic Voice, despite giving us some publicity, remains strictly censored and does not print letters to the editor. There is also the bigger problem that, despite some fine words, there is a general lack of urgency from the Church leadership about actually doing something.

“It is just not good enough to say that church renewal will be dealt with in the 2020 Plenary Council.

"We appreciate that Archbishop Prowse has supported some of our broad goals, but so far there has not been enough action.

“Recently, on International Women’s Day, he repeated his intention to reinstate the Archdiocesan Commission for Women. We remain willing to work with him to ensure that this happens quickly.

"Concerned Catholics in the short period of its existence has sought to promote its calls for change wherever possible. There are many ways to approach this task – through the local parish or diocese, through the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and through other national and international pathways. Each approach has its advocates and its difficulties. While focused on the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn, Concerned Catholics is advocating and engaging with official channels wherever possible.

"Concerned Catholics is on the Archbishop’s Working Party on preparations for the 2020 Plenary Council and has made an extensive submission to the team planning the 2020 Plenary Council,” Professor Warhurst said.

Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn is a group in the Archdiocese concerned about governance, cultural and structural issues arising from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We seek an effective voice for lay people in the administration and direction of our church.

Its goals for the church are:

* Great 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

The Concerned Catholics public forum details:

DATE: Thursday 22 March 2018
TIME: 7:00pm for 7:30pm-9:30pm
VENUE: Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
Cnr Kings Avenue and Blackall Street
BARTON
All are welcome.
Media are invited.

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