

CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN

Embracing the Gifts

The Story of the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn

CONTEXT PAPER

In Preparation for the CCCG Public Forum 28 November 2019

The purpose of this brief paper is to engender discussion of Church governance. We will do so by referencing significant events in our archdiocese, namely, the Goulburn Catholic Schools Strike of 1962 and the Archdiocesan Synods of 1989 and 2004. The call of the Second Vatican Council for the People of God by virtue of their baptism to 'holiness, ministry and community' is pivotal. Where is the Spirit calling with respect to the basis and style of Church governance in our day?

In July 1962, three months before the commencement of the Second Vatican Council, parents of students in Goulburn Catholic schools marched their children to local Government schools for enrolment. They did so as the lack of Government funding saw them unable to comply with the requirement for additional toilet facilities.

Archbishop, Eris O'Brien acquiesced to the will of the people to go on 'strike'. The Auxiliary Bishop of the time, John Cullinane declared that 'in the long run the protest was a victory'¹. To be clear: this symbolic action of local and national significance in the fight for 'State Aid' was initiated and led by the parents in the Goulburn community, a 'vibrant lay group'.²

The '*sensus fidei*', the Holy Spirit speaking through all the faithful, continues to be alive within the community though not always acknowledged. The retrieval of this fundamental understanding of Christianity in the Catholic tradition is critical at this point in the story of the Australian Church and within our Archdiocese. As in 1962, our living of God's mission in the world is dependent on it.

The **Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)** sought to renew the Church (*aggiornamento*³). It did not proclaim new doctrine but it did renew the way we 'saw' and 'did' Church. It drew on scholarship owing much to the human sciences which both enlightened the message of revelation and helped to identify accretions which were not constitutive of the living tradition. It affirmed the scriptural understanding of the Church as the pilgrim 'People of God'. It also affirmed the call of all the baptised to holiness and to share in the mission of the Church.

¹ Bishop J.N. Cullinane, *Goulburn School Strike: The Inside Story* (Canberra, n.d.) 75. Originally published in the Australasian Catholic Record during 1984-86.

² Recalling the 'Goulburn Strike': An interview with Brian Keating Author: Luttrell, John Source: Australasian Catholic Record, The, Vol. 89, No. 3, Jul 2012: 349-359

³ *Aggiornamento* - the term entered common Catholic usage under Pope John XXIII and it has two quite distinct meanings. It means internal spiritual renewal, and external adaptation of the Church's laws and institutions to the times (<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=31708>)

The ordained – priests and bishops – were affirmed as servant leaders, with bishops being leaders of local churches other than in those matters restricted to the Holy See. The result was a self-understanding of the Church as a ‘hierarchical communion’.

All are equal by dignity of baptism, but differed in function by virtue of whether one was ordained or not. The clergy were seen to have responsibility for the internal workings of the Church whereas the faithful were called to further the mission of the Church in the secular realm. More particularly, as the clergy have responsibility for the threefold offices of Prophet (teaching), Priest (sanctifying) and King (governing), lay faithful in the revised Code of Canon Law⁴ (‘the last document of Vatican II’) were able to assist or co-operate with them as their competencies and character were considered suitable.

It was by concession that the lay faithful were engaged. More particularly, the role of women was circumscribed by the ecclesial notion of ‘complementarity’, rather than the cultural norm of equality. The result was that lay faithful at best have had a consultative but not a deliberative vote in ecclesial decision making, to say nothing of women’s exclusion from ordination.

Nonetheless, and more so following the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, there has been a growing call for our mode of governance to reflect the equality of all arising from baptism and the concomitant call to share in the mission of the Church. Thus, it is timely to recall the recent story of this Archdiocese.

The leadership of Archbishop Francis Carroll (1983-2006) was not only significant to this diocese but across Australia. In 1989 ours was the first diocese to hold a Synod following the Second Vatican Council. A second Synod was convened in 2004. The tenor and theological underpinnings of the **1989 Synod (‘Coming Home in Christ’)** might be summarised as a commitment to ‘embracing the gifts of the baptised’. Archbishop Francis declared that:

2.3 Each parish (and ethnic community with resident chaplain) shall have a Parish Pastoral Council. This provision has the force of a Diocesan Decree⁵.

Further key decisions of that initial Synod included:

2.1 A Pastoral Planning Committee is established to assist the Bishop in:

- *Preparing a mission statement for our local Church*
- *Facilitating and reviewing the implementation of Synod decisions*
- *Giving further consideration to pastoral matters raised but not resolved by the Synod*
- *Deciding goals and advising on strategies to be implemented within the Archdiocese*
- *Planning priorities and the equitable distribution of resources.*

⁴ Revised Code of Canon Law 1983

⁵ Diocesan Decree – Canon 466 (Revised Code of Canon Law 1983).

The Pastoral Planning Committee is appointed initially for one year, at the end of which time, it will be reviewed.

The Synod process was open to all Catholics of the Archdiocese. This openness should be reflected in the post-synodal period. Therefore:

2.2 A Diocesan Assembly will be held in 1992, and subsequently as required, to evaluate and encourage the implementation of Synod decisions.⁶

The summary of proceedings and commitments include:

- *Training and development of lay people*
2.4.1 The Archdiocese commits itself to develop responsible leadership through training and development of lay people to undertake increasing responsibilities for parish management, administration, pastoral, liturgical and social development of all the People of God
- *Equality of women and men*
2.4.2 Give recognition to the equality of women and men and enable them to contribute their talents as fully as possible in a spirit of partnership in responsibility and leadership.
2.4.3 Subject to provisions of Canon Law and Liturgical Law, ensure that this recognition of equality is reflected in parish liturgical celebrations. Representations will be made to the Holy See to allow for equal participation by the lay faithful in all ministries not reserved to the ordained clergy⁷

In the ensuing years various Assemblies were convened and the Diocesan Pastoral Council was established. Then in **2004, the second Diocesan Synod 'Called to be One in Christ Jesus'**⁸ was held as the culmination of preceding months of prayer and conversations across the Archdiocese. Over 41 recommendations were discussed and decided. The following are relevant to this paper:

In the section: *Put Out into the Deep* there was almost unanimous support (just 1 uncertain) for the first recommendation:

1.1 That the Archdiocese prepare, promulgates and implements a Pastoral Plan that accepts the following Vision Statement as its basis for enabling an effective collaboration of all the baptised – 'So that we become 'One in Christ Jesus' for the good of the individual, for the good of the Church and for the service of the world, we, the baptised of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, affirm the giftedness of all and, in response to our baptismal call, embrace Partnership in Ministry'.

⁶ Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn Diocesan Synod 1989 - *Coming Home in Christ* (26 November 1989) pp.13-15

⁷ Op cit. p. 14

⁸ Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn Diocesan Synod 2004 'Called to be One in Christ Jesus' – *a Church committed to healing, life giving relationships*'. August 2004.

The section 'Promoting Contemporary Liturgy' enfolded ways of being partners in ministry and respecting the dignity of all⁹ in promoting 'full, conscious and active participation' of the lay faithful. In his concluding remarks, Archbishop Carroll acknowledged the limitations of the Synod, especially in implementing the vision, but the theme of '*One in Christ Jesus*' saw dissenting voices being engaged with respectfully.

Currently, it would seem that most parishes across the Archdiocese still have **Parish Pastoral Councils** in accord with the Decree of the 1989 Synod.

However, the formation, processes and opportunities for parishioners to contribute varies depending on both the understanding of and commitment of the parish priest to 'co-responsibility'¹⁰ emanating from the theology of baptism of the Second Vatican Council.

A number of parishes have Liturgical Committees and other groups such as Social Justice Committees with canon law requiring all parishes to have a Finance Council.¹¹

At Diocesan level there is no longer a Diocesan Pastoral Council or a Liturgical Commission to cite just two possible bodies which would enable inclusive, participatory and synodal processes which would embrace the 'variety and unity of gifts' (*1Cor: 12:4-7*).

The decision-making around opportunities for formation would seem to be predetermined without participative processes for enabling the 'voice' of the broader diocesan church to discern and contribute.

To quote Pope Emeritus Benedict from 2009, '*we must renew our efforts for a formation which is more attentive and focused on the vision of the Church and this should be both on the part of priests as well as of religious and lay people to understand even better what this Church is, this People of God in the Body of Christ. At the same time, it is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective role of the consecrated and lay people. This demands a change of mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as 'collaborators' of the clergy but truly recognised as 'co-responsible', for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.*'¹²

While the call for co-responsibility is commendable, it must also be acknowledged that the Church has never claimed to be a democracy. Moreover, the fullness of the offices of teaching, sanctifying and governing are seen to reside with the clergy by virtue of their being

⁹ Op cit. pp. 23 - 32

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the Theme: "Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility", Basilica of St John Lateran 26 May 2009.

¹¹ Canon 537. Revised Code of Canon Law 1983

¹² Pope Benedict XVI (2009). Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the Theme 'Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility'. Basilica of St John Lateran, May 26, 2009

identified with 'the head' of the Body of Christ. Yet as we have noted, it does not need to be either, or. On the contrary we have posited local instances where laity, religious and clergy have very much discerned with 'one mind and heart'.

Conversely and sadly, some bishops and priests have only called forth the gifts of all the faithful as it suits their needs, reflective of a narrow and self-serving view of ecclesial governance, to say nothing of the thwarting of gifts and frustrations arising.

The stated aspirations for our Plenary Council give founded hope for a more mature and creative response to these vexed issues.

The preference of Pope Francis for a synodal style of governance and the recent canonisation of Cardinal John Henry Newman bode well for believing that the Spirit is moving anew. In this regard, we should also be mindful of other ecclesial traditions and the Spirit's movement in wider society's structures which bar only those seeking to undermine the common good from deliberative decision making.

At the least, should we not expect Plenary Council decrees to implement structures reflective of the vision of the Council and the provisions of canon law arising which seek to harness the gifts of all the faithful? Perhaps our Plenary Council and other such gatherings will be the impetus for Vatican III?

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