

Review of Discernment Papers

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of the Discernment reports is, seemingly, to inform the development of an agenda for the formal sessions of the Plenary Council (PC). The documents are therefore important in determining the success or otherwise of the PC. However, the six papers fail to bring together a coherent picture of the real issues confronting the Australian church and provide little confidence that an incisive and meaningful agenda will emerge.
2. The Papers acknowledge the great desire of Australian Catholics for major reform of the church, but either through timidity or intent, fail to translate or marshal those reform ideas into initiatives and frameworks that the Plenary Council could consider. They bring forward a collection of ideas that could be categorised as 'slightly different business as usual'.
3. They lack the courage to break open key issues to enable honest consideration of meaningful reform ideas. They lack imagination, relevance, urgency and cohesion.
4. The only positive exception is a strong recognition and support for governance reforms, summarised by calls for Transparency and Accountability and appropriate support frameworks. The report, *The Light from the Southern Cross* should reinforce this momentum and provide a vehicle to drive these reforms.
5. In other major reform areas, the papers are less than supportive and unlikely to facilitate a meaningful agenda that would ensure relevant discussion and productive outcomes. They fail significantly in relation to Women, Clericalism, Opening of Priesthood to married men and women and Seminary Reform. In some cases, there are blatant attempts to park issues to the side.
6. On other cultural related issues, such as Humble, and Servant Leadership, there is scant evidence of interest to seriously address these topics.
7. The Papers reveal a failure to imagine a church that is faithful to its origins and relevant to its time and place. The People can but the bishops can't. It seems this is the stage at which the nuggets of real value offered by the People are ground down and milled out of the process. A meaningful agenda is unlikely to result.
8. Reform advocates need to consider how best to respond to this situation. In overall terms we need to call out the bishops on this process, highlight the contrast with the rich lode of thinking offered by the People and alert the broader catholic community to the risks of what is obvious manipulation and a rejection, in bad faith, of the earnest expectations of the People.

Background

The Plenary Council process began with a general invitation to all Australian Catholics and other interested people, to provide input by way of submissions based on a formula that requested answers to the question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* More than 17,000 submissions were received. These focussed overwhelmingly on the challenges the church in Australia faces currently and, in the years ahead and the approaches and changes that need to be taken in response.

Despite earlier commitments to openness, the submissions were not released for public scrutiny. A report was prepared by the National Centre for Pastoral Research and claims to provide a faithful representation of the overall content and tone of the submissions. This report 'Listen to what the Spirit is saying – Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue', formed the key input to six theme or Discernment writing groups as part of the Discernment phase.

Composition of Discernment Groups

The groups were tasked with reviewing the input from the earlier submission stage and reflecting on it to provide reports on particular aspects and topics. Six such groups were established with the following titles and areas of focus:

- # 1 Missionary and Evangelising**
- # 2 Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal**
- # 3 Prayerful and Eucharistic**
- # 4 Humble, Healing and Merciful**
- # 5 Joyful, Hope-filled and Servant community**
- # 6 Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform**

There is no clear explanation as to how these groups came to be framed as they are or the logic of the association of items relative to the content of the submissions. There is certainly no clear line of logic or emphasis linking the submission content and the focus of the six Discernment topics. It is understood that the number and association of topics for the groups were determined by the bishops. References in this paper to the reports of the various groups will, for ease of use, be made in numerical terms, such as Paper # 1 or Group # 2.

Catholics from around the nation were invited to express interest in being involved in the work of the groups. Each group comprised appointees nominated by the bishops and a selection of those who expressed interest. The selection process was controlled by the Plenary Council secretariat. While there had been no advice provided earlier to applicants that the bishops themselves would also participate in the groups, it was announced late in the establishment process that each group would have two bishops as members. This was in addition to the representatives nominated earlier by the bishops, who included a good number of clerics.

Most of those selected for the groups were actual employees of the church in various capacities. This raised the unfortunate perception that some/many could be perceived to have a conflict of interest in that they may have been constrained from expressing certain views in case their employment was in some way jeopardised. This was clearly a complication that did not need to arise, but it did because appointees could have been chosen, in part, because they were 'known

quantities' or able to be influenced. The overall composition of the Discernment Groups was, on any reasonable analysis, skewed towards a particular bias. In addition it could reasonably be asked why the bishops, who hold ultimate authority and power in terms of the composition, management and decision making of the Plenary Council needed to be involved with such intensity at this stage of the process. A full listing of group membership is at [Attachment A](#).

Role of Discernment Process and Papers

It has been understood that the principal role of the Discernment papers is to discern from and distil the input from the earlier stage (submissions) so as to present a considered perspective on particular topics and put forward issues/perspectives/proposals to be brought forward for discussion and consideration by the full plenary sessions of the Council. In short therefore the papers are a critical step in framing the agenda for the formal sessions of the Council. In this context, their role is crucial to ensuring the proceedings of the Plenary Council are relevant, constructive and meaningful.

Outputs of Discernment Papers directly relevant to key points of CCCG submission

The submission lodged on behalf of Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn was the product of intensive and informed input from interested Catholics in the Canberra region. Within the constraints of the submission process, the CCCG submission identified five areas of focus which must be considered thoroughly and comprehensively by the Council. These were expressed as questions as outlined below:

How does the Catholic Church in Australia become and continue to be:

- a *transparent* church?
- an *accountable* church?
- a *non-clericalist* church?
- a properly *inclusive* church?
- a truly *humble* church?

This review of the Discernment papers considers the way that each of these areas of focus is addressed in the papers. It is recognised that there are many other areas of legitimate and necessary focus in any serious attempt to review and set right the church's position in contemporary Australia. Some of these other issues are also addressed below or are the subject of a separate document. It should be noted however that the report on the submissions revealed that the views and areas of focus identified by the CCCG submission are shared strongly across the Australian catholic community. That report made clear that there was an overwhelmingly strong call by Australian Catholics for significant reform, based on the theology and reform agenda and directions of the Second Vatican Council. It is therefore reasonable to see the conclusions and assessments arising from the Discernment papers, in relation to the CCCG agenda, as indicative of the overall tone and direction of the process that is feeding through to the formal agenda phase of the process.

Transparent and Accountable: Governance

While these items were addressed separately in the CCCG submission, it is reasonable for the purposes of this review to treat them as part of a broader topic under the generic heading of Governance. These issues had been front and centre of the sexual abuse scandal, but their relevance and application runs more broadly and their import springs from a failure to live out Vatican II's

vision of the church as the People of God, which is essentially rooted in authentic Baptismal theology. Transparency and accountability are behavioural and cultural attributes that, if applied conscientiously, would radically change the way the church operates.

All the Discernment papers recognised the strong demand from across the Catholic community for a more transparent and accountable church. This reflected the overwhelming nature of the input at the submission stage. In a number of cases however the terms ‘transparent’ and ‘accountable’ are used in ways that seems to suggest they are being ticked off as items that, of course, should be applied in the church, without acknowledging their significance or the measure of the task involved in changing many deeply and culturally-engrained operating habits that have and continue to prevent them being realised across all aspects of the church.

Various papers make statements such as “God is calling the church in Australia to transform its culture and governance...” (# 2) and “The future will require ecclesial reform, but...”, while acknowledging the church’s damaged credibility such that “for many Australians, the voice of the church has no relevance” (# 1). These statements acknowledge that more significant change is required but then demur from embarking on such a path. This is a pattern that becomes more evident throughout the analysis.

Paper # 4 asks the question: *How can our leaders at all levels wholeheartedly commit themselves to Vatican II’s vision of transparency, collegiality, and accountability?* This is in some senses a curious statement because the reality is that Vatican II had little, per se, to say about transparency and accountability. However, those attributes are implied in some aspects of the vision of church which the council proclaimed. Nonetheless one is left with the sense that transparency and accountability are things the authors feel they have to ‘tick off’, leaving the reader to wonder as to the real level of commitment to the concepts.

Some limited linkage is made between governance reform and addressing clericalism. Paper # 5 acknowledges that “clergy are seen to exercise power without accountability or transparency”. Paper # 2 makes the point that “there is a pressing need for significant changes to be made to church governance and address the ‘culture of clericalism’..”. What is disappointing in this apparent commitment is the lack of stronger proposals, with the best # 2 can muster being to “strongly encourage the establishment of Diocesan Pastoral Councils’. That report later makes the somewhat disingenuous disclaimer that all of its “proposals are suggestive rather than prescriptive, because in a synodal process it is better for there to be broader discussion...”. (See further comment on this statement under comments on **Inclusive**).

It is helpful that Group # 5 when proposing initiatives to build community highlights the importance of co-leadership at parish and diocese levels and specifically calls for each bishop to be required to “demonstrate their commitment to shared leadership by modelling the process of Pastoral Councils within his diocese”. This is one of the few occasions where suggestions are made that bishops should be held accountable for their stewardship.

The strongest endorsement of governance reform and specifically the need for transparency and accountability comes from Group # 6. It lists governance and leadership as its number 1 priority and goes on to propose mandating proper open forms of governance “at all levels” in the church. This report also makes specific reference to then anticipated (now released) Governance report commissioned by the bishops, saying “it is anticipated that the Plenary Council will give significant consideration to the report”. The report ‘From the light of the Southern Cross’, which provides a

roadmap for the future, should certainly add ballast to the focus on these topics at the formal sessions (although there is no reason why decisions on a number of issues in the report can't be taken in advance of formal PC sessions).

Overall, it can be concluded that there is sufficient 'push' coming out of the six reports which, combined with the Governance report, ought to ensure that these issues are properly ventilated at the formal PC sessions.

Non-clericalist

The call for a non-clericalist church made in the CCCG submission was based on the cultural, attitudinal and behavioural evidence that the church in Australia and elsewhere has become arrogant and elitist built on misguided perceptions of the superiority of the priested class and a triumphalist church persona. It calls for a 'breaking open' of the notion of priesthood and the acceptance and respect for all on the basis of their Baptismal rights. The evil of clericalism has also been called out by Pope Francis in very clear terms and identified as an area of top priority for reform.

Treatment of this topic lacks clarity and definition. On the one hand all groups refer to clericalism as something that was referred to strongly in the submissions phase – so it is seen as an issue – but almost universally no group or their report dares to address the issue head-on and attempt to unpack what it means in the Australian church or how it might be addressed. There is little acknowledgment that Pope Francis has strongly identified clericalism as an 'evil' in the church that must be eradicated. This is not surprising in some ways as the Australian hierarchy virtually ignored Pope Francis' 2018 Letter to the People of God, in which he specifically sought the assistance of ordinary Catholics in ridding the church of this 'evil'. So, it is unsurprising that at no point is there an attempt to seriously define the term 'clericalism'. A definition of clericalism was offered in the report on the submission stage, but that definition is quite anodyne and understates the full impact and nature of what is largely a perversion of priesthood and servant leadership. Further detail on this point is set out in Attachment B.

The only attempt in the papers to clarify the nature of clericalism is in report # 4. "Clericalism is described as elitism, power structures, control, egoism and a lack of real-life understanding by the clergy." It goes on immediately to state that: "Some clergy and laity are to blame...", creating the impression that it is a seemingly peripheral issue, not mainstream and evidently not structural or cultural or something that permeates and debases the church. In fact, the paper's use of language is curious and perhaps revealing. It introduces the topic thus: "In trying to understand the sexual abuse crisis, the *problem named as clericalism* (sic) comes to the fore". It is hard to avoid concluding that such 'at a distance' language suggests the issue is raised with a degree of detachment and a lack of commitment.

It seems that in relation to clericalism the Discernment documents are generally keen to give Pope Francis a sidestep. This is characteristic of much of the reports, with an obvious difference in the responses to what the Pope says in relation to environmental issues and Laudato Si and what he has said, very firmly, about clericalism. The conclusion to be drawn is that when it comes to serious introspection, the bishops and the discernment groups simply do not want to go there.

Report # 2 seems to suggest that "the culture of clericalism" is the obverse side of the "absence of full lay participation in parish and diocesan governance". Certainly, it identifies clericalism as one of

the major pastoral concerns (they list it last), which they then go on to deal with under a heading Priorities and Proposals. Curiously, lay participation is dealt with but there is no further reference to clericalism. It seems that it sits on the lay side of the ledger – in other words, if we had more lay people involved at all levels then, by implication, clericalism wouldn't be an issue!

This general attitude raises genuine questions as to how serious the Australian church currently is about defining, owning and dealing with clericalism in the local church. The call for firm action to root out clericalism was a major emphasis communicated by Australian Catholics at the submission stage of the Plenary process. For that message to be effectively fudged and ignored is a serious matter.

Paper # 6 makes a clear link between “the call for change expressed in the national consultation” and the need for a change of heart based on being “called by our Baptism”. It goes on to state that “only with this attitudinal and cultural change will any organisational change be truly effective or sustainable”. While this group doesn't specifically mention clericalism in its final prioritised proposals, it is clearly evident that the type of church they are advocating, “enriched by the skills and faith commitment of all the baptised” is one that would be consistent with a non-clericalist church.

Several mentions are made of the need for improved training for clergy, specifically for Group # 4 in relation to a leadership approach that is collaborative and consultative. Group # 3 calls for “clergy and laity... to be formed together” as a way of achieving “a more collaborative model of ordained and lay sacramental ministry”. This group is conscious of the “challenge of addressing the needs of the many areas across our country where celebrations of the Eucharist are diminished due to factors including the decline in the numbers of celibate male ordained priests”. It then reflects on the recent Amazon Synod: “Australia now has the opportunity to discern new expressions of ministry and liturgy that are appropriate to our needs and responsive to the Spirit”. They conclude “we need to be open to new positions and ecclesial services that both men and women, married and unmarried, can undertake...”.

Overall, there is nothing brave about the approach to the matter of clericalism, despite it being recognised as a key challenge. Nor, sadly, can it be said that there is anything honest about the way this issue is dealt with. It is as if it is ‘not for us’ and certainly not something that would require the hierarchy and clergy generally to do a stocktake on or seriously look at their own attitudes and behaviours. So the real consideration of this matter is yet to be had, but it follows from the papers that there is little momentum or imperative emerging from the papers, to ensure that it is discussed and dealt with honestly, as Pope Francis would certainly expect.

Inclusive

The CCCG submission on this topic was seeking an earnest acknowledgment that the church's attitude and treatment of many in the Australian community was judgemental, disrespectful, out of keeping with the times and counterproductive. We urged the church to sow rather than reap, to minister rather than judge. This applied to many groups in the community, particularly women, but many others. The appeal was pastoral but also essential to the church's credibility and relevance. The submission urged that action be taken at all levels of the church.

For the purposes of this analysis the primary focus on inclusion will be in relation to the role and acceptance of women in the church. Again, it is a case of all papers recognising the overwhelming input from the Catholic community at the submission stage calling for bold, sensible, and mature

consideration of this issue. This was referred to as “restlessness regarding the role of women in church life and ministry” by # 6 and the need to “recognise the unique gifts of women...” by # 2. All seemed to acknowledge the challenge, but few were up for it.

Group # 1 were content with just a checklist type rundown of things that might make some marginal differences – tinkering. Group # 3 went so far as to identify a “need to be open to new positions and ecclesial services that both men and women, married and unmarried can undertake...”, but then offered a modest “collaborative model that draws forth the gifts of all the baptised”.

Group # 4 were even more bold. They proposed “a genuine review and concerted effort to embrace the gift of women in all areas of church life is prioritised; to provide adequate opportunities for women in leadership; and create a culture where women are truly part of the consultative process and decision-making at all levels of leadership in the church”. What stands out in this proposition is the word ‘*genuine*’, suggesting that efforts up to this point have been less than genuine? A somewhat similar approach was proposed by Group # 6 which settled on “a decade of vocational discernment to respond prayerfully to calls to broaden the eligibility for ordination... and vocations of lay women and men in roles of pastoral ministry...”.

Group # 5 were more adventurous, proposing to “initiate and resource a robust dialogue about the role of women in formal leadership... and explore their exclusion (Note: not inclusion) from ordained ministry and many liturgical roles”. They urged a revisiting of the 1999 report - Women and Man: One in Christ Jesus, in the context that “new ecclesial ministries for women (be) explored, and the dialogue in Rome on women deacons be engaged with”.

There should be no doubt that this whole question must be discussed in full at the plenary sessions. These and many more views must be heard, otherwise the Plenary Council will be seen, fairly, as a whitewash. That view however is not shared by Group # 2, which despite acknowledging that the contribution and role of women was a significant component of the report on the submissions input, proposes in its report, virtually in terms akin to a motion, that the issue be effectively taken off the main assembly agenda. Its effective draft resolution states, inter alia, that “where the universal church is already investigating these matters, and where the Plenary Council has limited powers, including discussion among the faithful on allowing women to be lectors and acolytes and the inclusion of women to the permanent diaconate and priesthood, it is proposed that the Council notes these local concerns and an eager interest of the progress of the church’s investigations”.

This amounts to an arrogant and brutal attempt to hobble legitimate discussion on this matter on the floor of the Plenary assembly. It has been discussed in the private environs of one discernment group, so no further discussion is necessary – an objectionable and unsupportable proposition. It is worth noting that the group that made this proposal, elsewhere claims that all their draft resolutions are ‘suggestive’. This is cynicism on top of hypocrisy.

As can be seen there was an inability in the groups to deal openly and directly with the substance of this issue. Implicit in most of the reports was a recognition that this matter has been going around and around now for many years with little to no progress and clearly diminishing goodwill. As was acknowledged by most groups it is an issue that eats away at the relevance and credibility of the church. It is clear the matter must be resolved at a very senior level of the church but that in no way means it should not be discussed at a local church level and progress made on a number of fronts. What is important is that the honest and overwhelming views of Australian Catholics are part of the decision-making considerations of the universal church. The CCCG submission stressed that

Australian bishops must conscientiously convey those views to Rome at every opportunity. That remains critical.

Humble

The focus of the CCCG submission on this topic was to point out that for the church to re-establish itself in the eyes of its members and the wider community, it needs to seriously look at itself and ask the question of everything it does and how it does it: Does this enable or inhibit engaging with people and pursuing its mission? We suggested the church needs to put aside its trappings, its status and privileges. It should seek to sow and not reap (judge) and recognise that life is about searching, not the dispensing of certitudes.

The brief of two of the Discernment groups seemed to cover this topic, namely # 4 and # 5. The former was specifically charged with considering a Humble church. Its perspective in doing so is from a perspective of alleviating pain and hurt caused by the church. It also recognises the call from the people for a humbler church and invokes the spirit of Pope Francis as the humble servant, close to the people.

However, the paper from Group # 4 fails to plumb the depths of what 'Humble' would mean. In no way does the working premise of Humble challenge the church as an institution or a community of believers in the spirit of Jesus. It works with a definition of humble as being related to the earth, expressed in the phrase 'down to earth'. It would be reasonable to say that this is a particularly shallow reading of Humble and the outcomes from the group's considerations are similarly shallow and unchallenging.

The paper has a disconcertingly self-pitying character – the poor church needs healing. The paper seems self-absorbed and not at all inclined to examine itself in terms of what it does that enables and what it does that inhibits. In simple terms it does not pass the Jesus test, in the sense that given the church's predicament it is hard to imagine Jesus would not have challenged and cut through on such questions.

The solutions that Group # 4 puts forward have a 'dream'-like quality. They call for a "revolution of tenderness" to soothe the church. It says the church needs a mother – Mary. There is a sense of unreality about the discussion. The group urges that the church "strive to adopt a humble disposition". There is no challenging thinking here. No real insights beyond the aspirational statements with little to back them up or make them real.

The paper from Group # 5 suffers from a similar failure to explore the real sense of 'servant leadership', particularly at a time when the church has lost respect and credibility. On other matters covered by its remit, the paper makes some useful suggestions about co-responsibility and engagement with others in the church. It reflects "could this time be a watershed and privileged moment in the history of the church? Perhaps from this humbling experience we can rise up and assume the role of servant community, aware of our brokenness and work to rebuild trust."

In terms of the church humbling itself, to effectively live its mission, there is little offered to inspire confidence. The easy comfortable options will remain the status quo. It seems likely there will be no energy or vision emerging from this phase of the Plenary process.

Other reform agenda issues

There are several issues raised by ordinary catholics in the submission stage which seem to have dropped off the radar, judging by the content of the Discernment papers. These include (but are not limited by) the following:

Lack of lay confidence in leadership of the bishops: The report on the submission stage highlighted the fact that 'many participants' expressed their lack of confidence in the local hierarchy, especially in the handling of the sexual abuse crisis, and lay people's criticism of their failure to provide real leadership to the church in Australia. This was recognised as a major obstacle that needed to be acknowledged and addressed. Sadly, there is virtually no reference to this matter and nothing to suggest that the bishops might need to factor it into the consideration of issues such as clericalism and governance. The silence on this matter casts a doubt over the integrity and bona fides of the Discernment phase and, worryingly, the Plenary process itself.

Calls for radical changes to the structure of the church (inverting the pyramid) and the model of leadership: These matters were referred to in the report on the submissions as of 'critical importance'. Based on the Discernment papers there is little interest or recognition in opening up consideration of such issues. This failure links into the reluctance that is evident to really delve into such topics as Humble, Clericalism and Servant Leadership. There is a failure to ground consideration of these items in the reality of the church's predicament in Australia as seen by large numbers of its adherents.

Concept of Parish: There is some mention in the papers of the need to be open to new ideas and concepts of parish, however the net offerings on this matter are rather barren. They tinker and suggest things that are only slightly different to business as usual. It seems that this question would take people too far out of their comfort zone or ability to imagine a different future.

Bringing the church into the 21st century: This was the title and the focus of a whole chapter of the report on the submissions. It outlined the 'significant call' made by ordinary catholics in their submissions for modernising church teaching in areas of birth control, IVF, same sex marriage and the concept of sin. To the extent that these matters were addressed in the Discernment papers it was mainly in terms of how ordinary catholics could be helped to better understand the church's teachings.

Obviously these matters are larger than just the Australian church, but when such issues are, in so many cases, a total blockage to retaining and growing the faith community, then it serves no purpose to pretend effectively that they don't exist. If the Plenary process is about discerning and responding to the reality of the church in Australia, it must at least ventilate the widespread fact that many in the catholic community have determined their views on such topics and have rejected the teachings of the Magisterium. Evangelisation in such circumstances doesn't have much of a chance.

Theological Visions: Each Discernment paper has a section headed Theological Vision. While a uniform component of each paper, the quality of the offerings is consistent only in their mediocrity. Given the resources provided to the groups and the significant involvement of clerics and bishops, it is surprising and disappointing that there is little real insight or fertile substance. Overall, they present a theology that is uninspiring and pedestrian. There is little in them that is spirit-filled, tills fresh ground or offers new insights.

An Australian Plenary Council: Or is it? There is little discernible effort in the papers to look with a confronting but constructive eye at what an encultured church in Australia might look like, its needs

and its potential contribution to national spirituality or indeed the world church. Various worthy initiatives are proposed for working with Aboriginal Australians but there is no thought to the development of an authentic Aboriginal Australian catholic spirituality.

It emerges from the papers that the challenge of multicultural Australia is confounding the local church in what is a mix of various ethnic communities and imported pastors have produced an array of cultures and spiritualities that are unable to be led into a vibrant overarching sense of an Australian church. This can only be said to result from a failure of leadership to imagine and create a distinctive and vibrant church relevant to its place and its people.

An observation on Discernment

Discernment has been put forward in this process as a deep, collective, and prayerful listening of all viewpoints. Discernment draws from a deep well in catholic spirituality and faith. It has been stressed many times that it depends on all parties bringing good faith to the table and an earnest openness to the Holy Spirit. It is troubling therefore that since the publication and commentary on the papers, evidence has emerged that groups were in the end focussed on finding consensus. Consensus and discernment are different things. If we are looking for consensus then it follows that a group charged with that process must be truly representative and properly facilitated. Neither was the case with the current exercise. The composition of the groups was the gift of the bishops and the honest result was six groups with compositions skewed towards the protection of a traditionalist church. In such circumstances genuine consensus seeking is unlikely to deliver outcomes that are productive, insightful, or relevant to the wider community of the church.

Next steps: From Discernment to where?

Just as there was no evident link between most of the input at the submission stage and the Discernment topics and their output, so it is likely that there will be clear line of sight into the agenda of the Council. As has been outlined, there is little to inspire confidence that the genuine concerns and earnest yearnings brought forward at the submission stage will be translated into meaningful consideration of those matters at the Plenary assemblies. To the average catholic the whole PC process has had an opaqueness that seems to defy logic or fair dealing.

An abiding fear in the process has been that at some point the nourishing and meaningful input provided by the People of God in Australia, would be ground down so that rather than enlivening as a form of yeast, the output would be akin to gruel. Sadly, it seems that we have reached that point with the reports of the Discernment groups. Because they involved themselves so intimately in the development of the Discernment papers, the bishops now own these documents. They also control the next step, as they do every step, of developing an Assembly agenda.

Conclusion

It was obvious from the report on the submissions that the catholic community had invested significantly in the PC process. Their submissions brought with them earnest, but fragile, hope. It would be perverse and pastorally destructive for the bishops to formulate an agenda that, like the Discernment papers themselves, fails to honestly deal with the issues that the People of God in Australia yearn to have addressed seriously and conscientiously.

The lack of confidence and trust in the bishops that was manifest in the submissions related as much to the processes of the Plenary Council as to their performance over recent times. The PC was an opportunity to staunch that wound. It now rests with the bishops to demonstrate that they are bona

fides and ensure that the next steps on the journey truly reflect the synodality that Pope Francis advocates. At this stage, only a relevant and realistic agenda will keep that hope alive.

Terry Fewtrell
Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn

30 July 2020

National Themes for Discernment - Membership

1 Missionary and Evangelising

Chair: Peter Grace 49, NSW

Members:

- Laura Avery 44, *NT*
- Fr Greg Bellamy 41, *NSW*
- Archbishop Peter Comensoli 55, *VIC*
- Sally FitzGerald 69, *ACT*
- Fr Vincent Glynn 61, *WA*
- Catherine Jenkins 57, *VIC*
- Fr Michael Kelly 70, *VIC*
- Daniel Lynch 32, *wa*
- Fr Patrick McInerney 61, *NSW*
- Alison Newell 66, *NSW*
- Francine Pirola 53, *NSW*
- Archbishop Julian Porteous 70, *TAS*

2 Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal

Chair: Peter Holmes 49, NSW

Members:

- Peter Bierer 38, *SA*
- Sr Clare Condon SGS 71, *ACT*
- Archbishop Anthony Fisher 59, *NSW*
- Catherine Garner 59, *VIC*
- John Honner 73, *NSW*
- Philippa McIlroy 31, *VIC*
- Carmel Ross 62, *WA*
- Shirley Quaresimin *WA*
- Bishop Bill Wright 67, *NSW*

3 Prayerful and Eucharistic

Chair: Sr Clare Sciesinski PBVM 71, WA

Members:

- Fr Yuhanna Azize 62, *NSW*
- Bishop Paul Bird 70, *VIC*
- Sr Moira Broderick CSB 81, *VIC*
- Catherine Connors 43, *QLD*
- Fr Justin Darlow 39, *NSW*
- Philippe Dulawan 32, *NSW*
- Bishop Greg Homeming 61, *NSW*
- Jesse Mowbray 37, *NSW*
- David Nelson 40, *NSW*
- James O'Brien 40, *VIC*
- Matthew Smith 59, *NSW*
- Bernadette Sullivan 31, *VIC*

4 Humble, Healing and Merciful

Chair: Selina Hasham 50, *NSW*

Members:

- Belinda Chapman 42, *TAS*
- Bernard Cumming 53, *NSW*
- Deacon Jim Curtain 63, *VIC*
- Simon Donahoe 75, *VIC*
- Bishop Charles Gauci 67, *NT*
- Sr Margaret Ghosn 49, *NSW*
- Caitlin Humphrys 33, *QLD*
- Sr Rachel McLoughlin 49, *VIC*
- Rhonda O'Connor 53, *VIC*
- Archbishop Christopher Prowse 65, *ACT*
- Flora Minsun Suh 31, *NSW*

5 Joyful, Hope-filled and Servant community

Chair: Sharon O’Keeffe 42, QLD

- Denis Fitzgerald 71, VIC
- Fay Gurr 60, NT
- Deacon Adrian Gomez 46, NSW
- Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green 51, NSW
- Donna McLaughlin 59, NSW
- Margaret O'Donnell 72, VIC
- Br Damien Price 63, QLD
- Bishop Robert Rabbat 51, NSW
- Vincent Restifo 31, WA
- Ben Smith 44, TAS

6 Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform

Chair: Renee Kohler-Ryan 43, NSW

- William Brennan 20, QLD
- Garry Everett 78, QLD
- Lawrence Hallinan 55, NSW
- Jennifer Hickson 40, NSW
- Bishop Ken Howell 61, QLD
- Fr Kevin Lenehan 55, VIC
- Bishop Vincent Long 57, NSW
- Elise M. 35, NSW
- Patricia Hindmarsh 74, TAS
- Loretta Wholley 48, ACT

Definition of Clericalism

Ch 7 p 81 of Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue.: Definition of Clericalism

We defined clericalism as an attitude among laity and ordained that the ordained is somehow superior, “above”, worthy of more respect, has an entitlement to more authority, a power of veto over lay decisions as desired, less accountability and less transparency in decision-making than the non-ordained are entitled to by virtue of their Baptism. This attitude can be overt or more subtle.

Top-down, clericalist governance does not serve the silent majority, nor the marginalised, nor those in minority groups. Clericalism is self-serving; it is not “doing the right thing”.

Definition of Clericalism used in CCCG submission:

Clericalism is a perversion of priestly mission and humility, into priestly and hierarchical power and exclusiveness. It is a toxic mix of attitudes, dispositions, behaviours and judgements that have come to characterise an entrenched male, celibate priestly class, distracted by perceived status rather than driven by real service. Clericalism has become a prevailing characteristic of church culture and it is often the attitudes of lay groups that encourage and sustain it.