



CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

Catholic forum hears blueprint for doable change

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Two Catholic lay leaders have presented a detailed case for how lay people can step up and assume shared decision-making in Church dioceses.

Susan Pascoe AM and Virginia Bourke set out their responses to the historic blueprint for change in the Church, *The Light from the Southern Cross* at an online forum of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn on 22 October. Over 100 people attended.

The report commissioned by the Australian Catholics Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, is an unprecedented review of governance in parishes and dioceses across Australia. It stated that most of its recommendations could be implemented now in parishes and dioceses nationally.

The report is subtitled *Promoting Co-responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia* and has proposed stronger governance, greater involvement of the laity and gender balance in church decision-making, and more transparency.

Ms Bourke and Ms Pascoe (who is a co-author of the Report) gave their detailed analyses of the recommendations of *The Light from the Southern Cross* and how they could be put into practice.

Ms Pascoe said there had been significant improvements in some dioceses in safeguarding practices and adoption of professional standards in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. However, leadership formation was limited, and styles varied across dioceses and parishes due to authority vested in the person of the priest or bishop.

Only 10 of 30 dioceses in Australia had diocesan Pastoral Councils as one indication of limited take up of co-responsible approaches with laity.

She urged the Church to go ahead with considering the recommendations of the report.

Ms Bourke, who chairs Mercy Health, cited *The Light from the Southern Cross* concerning the pain many in the Church felt about the failure to allow fuller participation of women and that this represented the greatest barrier to full participation in the Church and dioceses.

She referred to the 10 not-for-profit governance principles set out by the Australian Institute of Company Directors as a guide for governance reform in the Church. These principles include transparency, accountability, risk management and conduct and compliance.

The forum comes days after Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) announced it supported the spirit and direction of *The Light from the Southern Cross* report. (The ecclesiology, scriptural and theological basis for the Report was strong and relevant for a healthy Church in the third millennium.)

The chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn, Professor John Warhurst AO, who also co-authored the report, said the two presenters had spelled out both the challenges and the possibilities for change in the church. The response from attendees at the forum had confirmed the great appetite for that change.

In a recent statement CRA President, Brother Peter Carroll FMS, confirmed that CRA is committed to actively encouraging its members to live and minister according to the report.

‘The report identifies key principles of good ecclesial governance and we believe that the Plenary Council will focus on these principles and be an important platform for that discussion. It is a large document, requiring consultation and discernment with the faithful across the Church,’ he said.

A copy of both presentations is available at <https://www.concernedcatholicscanberra.org/new-events>

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