

PRESENTATION

Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn

Public Forum

A Diocesan Pastoral Council for the Archdiocese: Why not?

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Like me you might be wondering what experience, qualifications or right I have to be speaking about Diocesan Pastoral Councils.

All I can think of is that I have experienced collaborative leadership within the Catholic Church on many different committees, Commissions, Councils at Parish, Diocesan, national and International levels.

I will make a number of observations, broad brush strokes, related to Diocesan Pastoral Councils.

From the time I served on a parish liturgy committee as a young adult I have known that the experience of being involved in collaborative leadership and service for the sake of the Church changes you.

Not only does it provide you with unique formation that prepares you for ongoing service, initiates you deeply into the Catholic tradition, it also gives you an intense experience of what it means to be a Gospel community.

I would say that the experience of being on Church committees breaks down barriers between clergy and laity while building cooperation and mutual respect.

When your bishop or parish priest sits beside you in a small group or at a meeting table, physically at the same level, focused on the same goals, you can experience genuine dialogue both with clergy and other people of diverse backgrounds.

It may not be wonderful 100% of the time but overall, I stand by my belief that Diocesan Pastoral Councils and other such committees, transform the members in powerful and positive ways.

I invite you to write in the chat, name a positive experience you had on a Church related committee, and describe what made this a positive experience for you.

I'll give you a minute to do this before moving on.

I've also had recent experience of re-establishing the Catholic Women's Taskforce in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Women, reviving the national incorporated organisation known as WATAC (Women and the Australia Church), visiting dioceses to support them in establishing Catholic Women's groups, and participating in an international meeting in Rome on the Promotion and formation of the Laity, in 2018.

In every venture I did not work alone, and we did not hurry.... nor did we tarry!

The Catholic Women's Taskforce was formed after consultations in 2018-2019 with the women of the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn after several archdiocesan meetings in Canberra, and regional meetings in Goulburn, Young, Nimmitabel, Batemans Bay and Bega.

Committees of all kinds exist within the Church.

Establishing a Diocesan Pastoral Council would not be difficult.

However, it would take a team and the consultation with people of the Archdiocese would have to be open and genuine.

Regarding the Taskforce experience: The efforts of eight women working on a voluntary capacity in the Archdiocese of Canberra without funding or resourcing support attests to this.

Australian Catholics are aware that some dioceses have had successful diocesan pastoral councils for much of their history.

Here in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, there has been a Diocesan Pastoral Council for 37 of the past 55 years. Terry Fewtrell's excellent paper which would have been forwarded to you previously, captured some of the spirit, energy and collaboration that characterised Archbishop Carroll's leadership.

I wonder how many zoomers were involved in DPC in those years? You might write a message in the chat if you were on the DPC during the time of Archbishop Carroll.

Terry's paper makes it obvious that a Diocesan Pastoral Council can work successfully here in this peculiar Archdiocese that straddles rural, coastal, mountains and urban. If it can work here, I can't see why it wouldn't work elsewhere.

I wish to draw your attention to the fact that a Diocesan Pastoral Council is not an end in itself nor an isolated achievement in the diocesan church.

If it was that easy, I think there would be more DPC's in Australia.

Terry's paper outlined how the Diocesan Pastoral Council was part of the overall activity of the Church in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. During the years that the DPC operated, there were several Archdiocesan Assemblies and Synods, many regional gatherings and numerous regular and ongoing opportunities for consultation and formation.

A DPC is not just a cherry on top of the Archdiocesan cake.

Sr Pat Fox, writing in the Australasian Catholic Record in 2018, reflected on being part of the first Diocesan Leadership Team in Adelaide during the time of Archbishop Leonard Faulkner (1986–2001). She concludes that its success was due to the concept and design emerging from 'the people'. She writes "A culture of welcome and respect for voices that differed was unfolding, and this included a capacity and a commitment to value the gifts of all the baptised" also there was "a long tradition of educating and forming adults' to inspire and serve the community in faith."

Pat acknowledges that the groundwork for the innovative Diocesan Leadership Team, which was open to lay men and lay women and religious, was laid by the previous Archbishop James Gleeson who had initiated a three-year program of diocesan renewal. At his retirement Archbishop Gleeson claimed that this diocesan pastoral renewal (1982–85) was the 'most important initiative and legacy' of his episcopate.

These examples of successful diocesan governance initiatives emerged from substantive, people-centred diocesan renewal programs seeking to implement Vatican II.

So, beware the DPC that is announced and appointed overnight.

An archdiocesan consultation or even better, an Archdiocesan renewal process would be the best preparation for establishing a DPC.

While at that international meeting in Rome, I discovered two important things. One was that it is a great disadvantage to only speak English at an international meeting. The other was that most of the other lay representatives were members of a National Council of the Laity in their respective countries. I discovered that there is a National Council of the Laity in Brazil, Nigeria, Philippines, Ghana, Southern Africa.

I felt outraged! What about the Australian Catholic Church? What about the Australian laity?

As I understand it from my limited research over the dinner table (remember only with those delegates who spoke English), many countries have Parish Councils in every parish, Diocesan Councils in every diocese and National Councils of the Laity.

For example, the Council of the Laity of the Philippines, (or Laiko) is a public association of the faithful erected by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in order to "develop the consultation and collaboration of the lay faithful".

Without DPCs the Australian Catholic Church is weakened. A whole level of governance is missing. It's like we are living and working with one hand tied behind our backs.

Not to mention the missing piece at the National Level, a National Council of the Laity. Another piece of governance and capacity is missing. We are the less.

If the three levels of participation and engagement were active, I believe that the councils would be interdependent and purposeful.

I hope for strong and healthy parish pastoral councils in every parish, lively and engaged diocesan pastoral councils in every diocese and for a dynamic Australian Council for the Laity.

What is your opinion? Use the chat to rate your support on a scale of 1-5 for this idea.

It is almost a year since the report *Light from the Southern Cross* was presented to the bishops of Australia.

The overarching theme for the report — written as part of the local church's response to a five-year government inquiry into institutional child sexual abuse — is how governance in the church can be more "co-responsible," or better shared among bishops, clergy and laypeople.

Revelations of clergy abuse and cover-up, showed "the widespread failure of the Church's authorities to respond with justice and compassion" and "give a particular focus to the need for reform in practices of governance within the Catholic Church."

The report was delivered to the Australian bishops in early May 2020.

LSC calls on some foundational principles as it formulates its recommendations and provides advice on the way forward. These principles are collegiality, synodality, stewardship, dialogue, discernment, participation and good leadership (R3). Recommendations 4 and 5 develop 'good leadership', indicating that it involves integrity, accountability, transparency, inclusivity, sound risk management practices, active engagement and communication.

On relevance to us this evening are the six recommendations about diocesan pastoral councils. In summary they propose

The legislating of particular law requiring all dioceses to establish a pastoral council or equivalent, as well as mandating the role, development, constitution, support and review of those councils (R50-55, 65);

Remember LSC is responding to grave and widespread failure and seeks to remediate the Church in plotting a way forward.

Unfortunately, the bishops' response to the recommendations about DPC was guarded. Stating that DPCs are 'encouraged' but voluntary, bishops should be free to respond to local circumstances, that DPC would only ever **assist** with decision making, and that many DPCs have 'withered' over time. ...and let's do a study about DPCs!

You will be pleased to note that the bishops did support the recommendation that “for diverse membership on DPC” was supported.

Many Catholics hope for change and renewal. Some see ‘the Bishops’ as the problem. However, I invite you to pause for a moment and consider the extraordinary impact that the clergy sexual abuse crisis has had not just in Australia but internationally.

When a crisis or an issue is a management or technical issue, leaders and organisations might stumble but can usually respond and make the necessary changes.

However when the challenge or issue requires takes them off the existing maps into completely unknown territory, a different style of leadership is necessary. This is known as adaptive leadership in contrast to technical leadership.

A pastor in the US, Todd Bolsinger, has written a book called *Canoeing the Mountains*. He draws on the story of explorers Lewis and Clark (1803-1806). They followed the Missouri river to its source and expected to find a waterway that would flow west to the Pacific Ocean, they instead found themselves in the Rocky Mountains.

For the first part of the journey canoes were ideal as they travelled up the Missouri. For the second part of the journey the canoes were ridiculous. The skills that they had for the first part of the journey were perfect, but then.....

Consider that many Church leaders may feel that they are leading in a cultural context they were not expecting. They might even feel that their training holds them back more often than it carries them along.

Bolsinger makes more of the Lewis and Clark experience to reflect on how to lead in uncharted territory as a pastor.

He is not reflecting on the impact of the sexual abuse crisis but on the growth of secularism. As Catholics we have a double whammy, external challenges from secularism and internal challenges as a result of the clerical sexual abuse crisis.

I’d like to share a couple of hopeful ideas from *Canoeing the Mountains*.

Let’s reframe this moment of history ...as an opportunity put before us by God for adventure, hope and discovery—all the while embracing the anxiety, fear and potential loss that comes from answering this call.

Let’s recover the calling for the church to be a truly missional movement that demands leadership that will take up the gauntlet of Guder’s charge: “If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields, how can the traditional church become a missionary church?”

Let’s discover—even more than the uncharted territory around us—the capacity for leadership within us.

The whole body of Christ is going on an adventure .

Establishing DPCs is but a small part of what is asked of us. Perhaps some bishops think that lay women and men want to be involved in leading the diocesan church because they crave power or they want to make life hard for the bishop.

I believe that there are many women and men who can see the extent of the transformation that is required, and they want to help bring that to reality.

We are not promoting DPCs because we want to paddle the canoe. We know that we are in a post canoe situation and we want to be involved in the risky work of finding our way through this uncharted territory.

Together.