

# Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Catholic reform movement gathers momentum

29 August 2021

The movement for reform of the Catholic Church in Australia is gathering momentum with more than 1,200 people attending the online forum, hearing powerful indigenous and international voices advocating change.

The second Convocation of the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) held on 26 August comes just five weeks before the church begins its historic Plenary Council summit meeting.

ACCCR's Co-Convener, Dr Eleanor Flynn, commented:

'Together with the warm response from the many attending, the forum highlighted the deep desire among Australian Catholics for a fresh vision and new directions.

'The strength and diversity of the views presented by the four speakers demonstrated once more the wonderful talents within the Catholic community and the terrific potential for change that is urgently needed.

'The speakers brought together the rich and diverse perspectives on the current state, and future prospects, for our Church in Australia.'

The speakers were:

**Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann**, 2021 Senior Australian of the Year, who offered a powerful perspective on the changes in the church which are necessary for a First Nations leader. Her insights into First Nations' spirituality taught us about 'Dadirri', inner deep listening and quiet, and still awareness that should inform the council's approach to discernment of the Holy Spirit and spiritual conversation.

**Dr Jessie Rogers**, a member of Ireland's Synod Steering Committee and Dean of Theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, spoke on the synodal journey. That means being on the road together and Pope Francis stresses the 'together' part of synodality to include all the faithful. The 'journeying together' is to embrace all the diversity that makes up the universal Church.

**Robert Fitzgerald AM**, a Royal Commissioner into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, focused on the practical outcomes required to meet the challenges facing the Church today. He proposed five key practical principles: legitimacy, stewardship, accountability and transparency, performance and integrity and faithfulness.

**Debra Zanella**, the Chief Executive Officer of Ruah Community Services in Western Australia, shared her desire for a new Church with a prophetic vision based on lived experience and hope for a diverse, inclusive, and welcoming community. She said truth-telling in the new church must face and name the painful facts that confront women, one in five of whom have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. These women must be given a voice in church governance.

The presentations reflect and echo many of the points made by ACCCR, which has stated that the Plenary Council agenda 'offers limited scope for necessary and wide-ranging reform and renewal', in part because it 'suggests an unrealistic picture of our Church with little recognition of its current perilous state'.

Among the proposals ACCCR has advocated for the Plenary Council are:

- Endorse the Uluru Statement from the Heart
- Require Inclusive Language to be in all church liturgies
- Pursue with the Holy See the ordination to the priesthood of women and married men
- Adopt *Laudato Si* as a blueprint for leadership and action
- Legislate for the establishment of Diocesan Pastoral Councils in each diocese and Parish Pastoral Councils in each parish
- Resolve that the Australian bishops fund social housing initiatives
- Affirm the role of personal conscience
- Adopt, as a core principle, engagement in social action on behalf of marginalised and vulnerable people as an authentic expression of faith on a par with regular Mass attendance.

**Emeritus Professor John Warhurst, AO** the chairperson of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn who gave concluding remarks at the Convocation observed: 'Despite the lack of inspiring direction from our bishops in the run-up to the Plenary, the content and mood of our convocation shows the call for change is intensifying.'

'The Plenary Council is entering a period of intense activity, discerning the future of the Church in Australia. The Catholic community has invested great hopes in the outcomes and will hold its leaders to account if our hopes are disappointed.'

*ACCCR is a collaboration of 19 member groups across Australia seeking Church reform. Each ACCCR member group has its own focus and history; all are united in the call for renewal in the Church. The role of ACCCR, established in 2012, is to foster collaboration and support among its member groups and to disseminate messages of hope and opportunity.*

***A Church for All: A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond***

Includes papers from Convocations No 1 and 2 as well as the ACCC response to the Plenary Council Agenda. It is available at [Garratt Publishing](#).

**Media Contact: Mark Metherell 0417 603 697**