

Toward a transparent, inclusive and humble church

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Plenary INSIGHT

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SPREADING THE WORD....

The wider Catholic community has only been able to glimpse the tip of the iceberg during this Plenary Council. The livestreaming has allowed the community an insight into short summaries of the work of the small groups; but the plenary Intervention sessions have been off limits.

Some cogent reasons have been advanced for this decision – protecting individual privacy and encouraging members to speak openly – but the cost has been huge. The community has been denied the fullness of this special experience.

In dealing with this dilemma the Council authorities have not consulted with members, nor have they exhibited any creativity, although I know that discussions continue at the highest level. Their position remains unaltered.

Like with so many things the members have not been asked their opinion. One creative option, as with the earlier question of making email addresses public, would be to divide the Intervention sessions into two parts, according to the wish of the member, into open and closed sessions. This would allow another 45 minutes of live streaming.

The whole community would have been electrified and humbled by many of yesterday's Interventions in the Special Plenary on Questions 2 (healing the wounds of abuse) and 4 (meeting the needs of the most vulnerable). They are still reverberating inside the Council, producing public angst and private politicking. Some of these interventions could have been delivered in a public session and I'm sure many of the speakers would have been pleased with the opportunity to speak to a wider audience, not for personal gratification but to bring important issues before the whole church in Australia.

Into this gulf come the church media. Just as important as what the Council does is how it is reported back to the Catholic community.

The Council authorities have done a lot in this regard through media releases, blogs, personal member stories, and other means. In addition, the diocesan church media have added flourishes of their own. My own diocesan Catholic newspaper in Canberra-Goulburn, [Catholic Voice](#), has provided extensive coverage. The new archdiocesan Chancellor, Professor Patrick McArdle, formerly Dean of the Canberra

campus of ACU, produced instructive short videos addressing some key questions in the week before the event.

But that is not enough. The church cannot be relied upon to report on itself. My great hope is that the diocesan Catholic media enable their communities to hear the full range of voices that we members have heard this week. [The Light from the Southern Cross](#) report (R. 63) asked church media, in the interests of free discussion, to 'encourage the exchange of diverse views conducive to dialogue and discernment amongst the People of God'. The Council is a test case. Without a diversity of voices, certainly witnessed internally in this Council, the Catholic community cannot be fully informed. Without full information there can be no full synodality or co-responsibility.

The record of some diocesan media is that they fail to present a variety of voices. They are gatekeepers of top-down orthodoxy. They should not be afraid of opening up to alternative views.

The value of mainstream journalism, like [Plenary Matters](#), Geraldine Doogue's podcast, and the blogs of members like Francis Sullivan ([Plenary Speaking](#)) has been immense. They lead not just to real insights into the church, like Geraldine's interview with Sydney Vicar General, Gerry Gleeson, but to a wider audience. It was no surprise that [The Drum](#) on the ABC featured Francis and Geraldine on the evening of the Special Plenary Session.

The value, it seems to me, is that such commentators speak to the 90 per cent of Catholics in the wider community rather than just the 10 per cent in the pews in a way that the diocesan church media have no hope of doing.

Watch ACCCR and CCG webinar [Plenary Tracker](#) each evening at 7:30 or catch up on video.

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