



concerned Catholics

of the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese

A response to the Royal Commission

Catholic women's exclusion from power points to church's malaise

1 December 2017

The contrast between the number of women employed by the Australian Catholic Church and their absence from the central power structures, highlights the need for a deep rethink at the top of the Church, Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn, says.

The [Our Work Matters](#) report for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference shows there are more than 220,000 employees in church organisations and 77 per cent of them are women.

"This statistic alone should prompt the bishops to question why the earthly authority of the church should be the preserve of men only," the chairman of Concerned Catholics, Emeritus Professor John Warhurst says.

"It is good that the Church has commissioned a report into the huge workforce given the many important ways the workers of the church contribute to society, in education, health and social support.

"The whole report reinforces once again how much the church relies on women to fulfil its mission.

"But it is telling that this overwhelming reliance on women is not reflected when it comes to the gender of decision-makers at the highest level.

"The exclusion of women from the priesthood and thus the hierarchy is all of a piece with the failure of the leadership to come to grips with the need for an end to the clerical culture and to embark on a new era of inclusiveness, lay leadership and transparency in the Church.

"The evidence before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse demands fundamental changes. Concerned Catholics was formed to press for a much greater role for the laity and women in the administration of the Church.

"The enduring strength of the Catholic Church in Australia has been its contribution to education, health and social welfare, much of it now fuelled by the abiding faith of lay people in the Church.

"Bishop Gerard Holohan says the *Our Work Matters* survey findings help the Church see how notions of the common good, human dignity, solidarity and a preferential option for the poor can be made real through our people and organisations.

"That's all good but the Church's leaders, the bishops, need to accept that a vibrant role for lay people is vital if the Church is to turn around the decline in the faithful.

"The Catholic workforce may be among the largest in Australia but even its future is clouded if the underpinning commitment of the laity continues to fade," Professor Warhurst said.

A copy of [Our Work Matters](#) is available on the ACCER website.

Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn is a group in the Archdiocese concerned about a number of governance, cultural and structural issues arising from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We seek an effective voice for lay people in the administration and direction of our church.

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