



## CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

### **Fr Frank Brennan farewells Canberra home cautioning Church against becoming a ‘museum’**

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Catholic leader Frank Brennan SJ has called for more open dialogue in the Church on issues such as women priests, warning that even with currently suggested governance changes, the Church “remains at a crossroads between life and death”.

Speaking to a standing room only audience of 200 in Canberra, on Wednesday night (26 June) Father Brennan discussed eight issues confronting the Church in an address entitled *Our Church or Our Museum? --- Contributing to a confident, humble listening and questioning Church*.

Fr Brennan cited Pope Francis: “A Church always on the defensive, which loses her humility and stops listening to others, which leaves no room for questions, loses her youth and turns into a museum.”

He was delivering a farewell to the Capital at a forum of the reform group, Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn. His departure after 11 years will mean the closure of the Jesuits’ Xavier House in Canberra. He is concluding his role as CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia to become Rector of Newman College at the University of Melbourne.

Father Brennan also quoted the words of Pope Francis in pressing for a more open and questioning Church and the Pope’s statement that “Demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected...that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded”.

Father Brennan said the Church would continue to suffer for as long as it did not engage in open discussion and education about women priests. The Vatican's position in trying to shut down the women priests' issue was incoherent.

“The official position is no longer comprehensible to most people of good will, and not even those at the very top of the hierarchy have a willingness or capacity to explain it.”

It was heartening to see that more than 220,000 Australian Catholics had already participated in preparation for the 2020 Plenary Council and that there had been more than 17,000 submissions. He held “broad strong sympathy” for the call for renewed governance in the Church in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and also for the need for women to enjoy equality at all levels of leadership in the Church.

Throughout his address, Father Brennan turned to the words of Pope Francis for guidance. On the issue of individual conscience, Pope Francis had said this needed to be “better incorporated into the Church's praxis (practice).

But Father Brennan said in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis it could be asked “why bother with the Church. In the wake of the Church's ongoing failure to give women their place at the table, why persevere with the Church.

“In the wake of the Church's wrong turn 50 years ago on the issue of birth control, why expect that the Church will in our lifetime play catch-up with the social mores of those who think the strident utterances of a group of celibate men ring hollow given the prevalence of child sexual abuse by those in the ranks of those supposedly celibate men at the very time that *Humanae Vitae* was promulgated and enforced...”

On the conviction and imprisonment of Cardinal George Pell, who has appealed, Fr Brennan said: “Perhaps Cardinal Pell is a paedophile who has effectively groomed the Church as an institution all the way to the top. But then again, perhaps he is not a paedophile and it has reached the stage in Australia that 12 of his fellow citizens were prepared to convict him of offences beyond

reasonable doubt despite all manner of improbabilities because they don't trust him or our Church, no matter what we say or do."

***Frank Brennan will speak at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, 15 Blackall Street, Barton, at 7.30pm tomorrow, Wednesday, 26 June.***

*Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn is a group in the Canberra-Goulburn 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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