

Catholics For Renewal Inc.

www.catholicsforrenewal.org.au



To: Bishops of Australia

cc: General Secretary ACBC (Rev. Stephen Hackett MSC) for information

Response to ACBC response to Open Letter to the Bishops of Australia

Dear (title, name),

On 15 May 2017 Fr Stephen Hackett MSC, General Secretary of the ACBC, advised Catholics for Renewal that the Bishops of Australia had, at their recent Plenary Meeting, considered the Open Letter which had been sent to you and your fellow bishops. The carefully drafted and detailed Open Letter has now been signed by 3770 Australian Catholics (see Table below), including bishops, priests, and religious, from across the nation.

While Catholics for Renewal was pleased to receive an assurance that the bishops had considered the Open Letter's proposals for immediate action, it still seems that the ACBC did not accept its arguments nor its plea to "*Please Listen and Act Now*". This causes serious disappointment for the many committed Catholics who believe that the action proposals in the Open Letter are both urgent and the minimum if further damage to our Church is to be avoided. Further delays to commencing the significant task of rebuilding trust and confidence in your leadership and of convincing the wider Australian society that our Church is relevant, are no longer acceptable.

Catholics for Renewal is grateful to those bishops who contacted us individually about the Open Letter, and has been encouraged by the recent constructive public statements made by some bishops who have identified important issues similar to those raised in the Open Letter. Some have recognised that the 'business as usual' approach must be renounced, and that our church must urgently seek to ensure a more Christ-like model.

A key concern in the Open Letter was the urgency of an appropriate response from our Church to the Royal Commission developments. However, the Summary Report of the ACBC's 4-11 May 2017 Plenary Meeting states that the matters referred to in the Open Letter "might properly be referred to the Plenary Council" in 2020, still some three years away. This delay will be perceived by many as a clearly inadequate response, and even raises concerns that the ACBC may be retreating from some of the undertakings for reform given during the recent public 'wrap-up' hearings of the Royal Commission.

Catholics for Renewal is however encouraged by the ACBC's declared intention to ensure that "the scope of consultation and discernment processes towards the Plenary Council will be inclusive of the whole Catholic community in its breadth and diversity" . This intention is consistent with a key proposal in the Open Letter urging each diocesan bishop to "hold a diocesan synod or assembly in his diocese in 2018, with deanery and parish listening sessions, to develop the agenda for the 2020 Plenary Synod, and as part of normal diocesan governance" . We trust that you will apply this commitment in your own diocese and ensure that all such gatherings are fully open and inclusive.

Most Australian Catholics, and undoubtedly many bishops, know that '*business as usual*' is no longer an option. Substantive reform and renewal is essential across wide areas of governance, ministry, and pastoral care. We all look to you and your brother bishops to take real leadership in this process and to give it your full support. Failure to achieve the needed reform and renewal will lead not just to further disappointment and discouragement, but to anger and a more accelerated disengagement and, indeed, alienation from Jesus' Church and teachings.

We are all mindful that our Church has a missionary responsibility. In Australia, at this time, there are possibly more than a million baptized Catholics who have decided to no longer identify as Catholic. Millions more Catholics now never approach the Eucharistic table or seek spiritual strength from the Sacraments. Our youngest generation of Catholics are the least likely to attend Mass regularly and are incredulous of church teachings and leadership. If our Church in Australia is to be missionary, it must reach out to all these brothers and sisters, and beyond. But first, it must be a credible witness to Jesus and his message.

With you, Catholics for Renewal eagerly anticipates the 2020 Plenary Council. With hope and prayer, it looks forward to a Council whose discernment and decisions will be found in the *sensus fidei* of the Australian faithful under the guidance of the befriending Spirit. However, proper preparation for that Council requires that matters raised in the Open Letter be addressed immediately.

We would be grateful to receive your personal response to these matters which could be passed on to the signatories.

Yours in Christ,

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19 June 2017

Signatures to Open Letter received online and in hard-copy to 15 June 2017

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
Online	284	448	101	26	28	30	125	0	1042
Hard-copy	633	1445	49	0	1	300	300	0	2728
Total	917	1893	150	26	29	330	425	0	3770

Note: The total does not include signatures from Catholics residing outside Australia.