

Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

‘For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them’ (Matthew 18:20)

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12 April 2018

Most Rev Denis J Hart DD
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
GPO Box 368
Canberra ACT 2601

Cc: all Australian Bishops – by email

Dear Archbishop Denis,

As foreshadowed in my email of 29 March 2018, I write to you on behalf of the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, which gathered recently in Canberra hosted by Concerned Catholics Canberra-Goulburn. We seek a meeting with the Permanent Committee of the Bishops Conference with a delegation comprising myself and some ACCCR leaders.

As explained in my email, the Coalition which was established in 2012 now comprises some ten Australian groups of Catholics sharing a commitment to our Catholic faith and seeking renewal of our Church. The Coalition includes:

Catholics Speak Out - Women and the Australian Church - Catholics for Renewal - Inclusive Catholics - The Friendship Group (Bunbury WA) - Aggiornamento, Perth - Australian Reforming Catholics - Cyber Christian Community (WA) - Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn - Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry

ACCCR exists to facilitate collaboration among groups committed to renewal of our Church through their separate initiatives and to share messages of hope and opportunity, and on occasions to bring voices of like mind together to pursue our shared purpose.

I have again included below a copy of the ‘Call’ statement adopted by the coalition and a copy of the Gathering’s communiqué to bishops and the media. The latter is a strong statement owing to the fact the large majority of committed Catholics whom we represent have expressed that they have lost confidence in the leadership of the Australian Church. We feel that having this meeting will be a significant first step in restoring that confidence as we all want to engage and work with our bishops in an open and trusting manner.

I will contact Fr Stephen Hackett, ACBC General Secretary, about a possible early meeting.

Yours in Christ,

Peter Johnstone

Peter Johnstone OAM
Convener

Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform* - Our Call

Jesus inspired his disciples to form a community to proclaim and live the Good News of love, justice, equality, self-giving and hope. The institutional Church has failed to listen to its people thus alienating many through an emphasis on power, hierarchy and discrimination, with a lack of transparency and accountability. Australian Catholics have a responsibility to act now in ways that reflect the values of the Gospel, the vision of Vatican II and the best values of Australian society.

Our Call as disciples is to be:

A Catholic Church that reflects Jesus' message of love, justice, equality, peace and forgiveness

A Catholic Church in which all people are directed by their conscience and assume their responsibility for the mission of the Church

A Catholic Church which inspires its people to recapture an experience of the mystical and the spiritual

A Catholic Church where God-given authority is used wisely and justly to propagate the teachings of Christ, and respects the role of the People of God

A Catholic Church where all people, men and women, single and married, minister in a spirit of co-responsibility for the Church

A Catholic Church that influences Australian society to be ever more just, compassionate and egalitarian

*The Coalition (as of March 2018) includes:

- *Catholics Speak Out*
- *Catholics for Renewal*
- *Women and the Australian Church*
- *Australian Reforming Catholics*
- *Inclusive Catholics*
- *Aggiornamento*
- *The Friendship Group WA*
- *The Cyber Community*
- *Concerned Catholics, Canberra Goulburn*
- *Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry*

Each of the groups has its own focus and history and all are united in the call for renewal in the Church. The Coalition is open to other groups who share this vision and identify with the call for Church renewal.

The role of ACCCR, established in 2012, is to foster collaboration and support among its groups and to disseminate messages of hope and opportunity, and on occasions to bring voices of like mind together to impact on a common purpose. It also has a key role to lobby for crucial structural change for the type of renewal in the Australian Catholic Church that is envisioned in this Coalition Call Statement. ACCCR does not initiate specific projects rather it supports and adds value to projects initiated by its partner groups. Nor does it have individual members; if you wish to be more involved in our work we invite you to become a member of one of our Coalition groups. For further information, contact the Convener by email: pjgovernance@gmail.com

Communique of the Gathering of the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (2)

Canberra, Friday 23 March

Ten Catholic groups advocating for systemic reform of the Church have met in Canberra today to assert the responsibility of all Catholic people to be heard and to lead in the Church.

The Catholic Church in Australia faces continuing decay unless bishops understand the necessity for grassroots Catholics to have a central role in the direction and decision-making of the Church.

There needs to be a restoration of trust in and by the bishops in the value of advice and wisdom from ordinary Catholics which for too long has been rejected or at best ignored.

The Coalition will seek a meeting between the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and ACCCR representatives to open the lines of communication to press for the bishops to give effect to the significant recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and to respond to our call for greater involvement of the people of God through the coming Plenary Council 2020.

We also call on the bishops to accept the nomination of a woman as co-chair of the 2020 Plenary Council.

The catastrophe that the Church has experienced with the institutional sexual abuse underlines the need for effective and urgent reform. Yet the response of the bishops so far in its preparation for the 2020 plenary indicates a failure to learn a fundamental lesson of that catastrophe.

That is the need for decisive reforms to the governance structure that remains largely unchanged despite that experience.

The people are as much a part of the church as the bishops and we need to work towards their greater participation.

We propose a summit for all Catholics before the Plenary to cultivate open discussion to assert a mature and frank engagement with the issues confronting the church today.

The program content so far for the Plenary Council indicates they have not understood the recommendations regarding transparency, inclusiveness and accountability.

The full equality of women in the Church must be given urgent priority so that at this time of crisis in the church, the wisdom and talents of women can fully contribute to the Church.

There will be no successful governance structure without the grassroots people, particularly women, in leadership and decision-making roles.

Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

The 2020 Plenary is a positive step. It is imperative that the faithful be fully involved in preparation of this Plenary Council. But the plenary council must not be used as a delaying tactic in avoiding immediate issues.

The Royal Commission has identified grave deficiencies in the Church's governance. Those deficiencies resulted in the protection of paedophiles and the abuse of further children.

The horror of child sexual abuse, terrible as it is, is but one example of the lack of accountability in the leadership of the church.

Church leaders have to learn to be accountable, transparent and inclusive of all, particularly women. That means listening to the faithful and engaging through structures such as pastoral councils.

There must be greater and continuing attention to the survivors of sexual abuse as well as marginalised people, Australia's first nations people, refugees, and LGBTI people.

Without strong influence and input of the people of God, the plenary will be like a departing cruise ship, leaving 95 per cent behind at the dockside.

The ACCCR comprises:

Catholics Speak Out
Women and the Australian Church
Catholics for Renewal
Inclusive Catholics
The Friendship Group (Bunbury WA)
Aggiornamento, Perth
Australian Reforming Catholics
Cyber Christian Community (WA)
Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn
Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry

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