

CATHOLICS FOR RENEWAL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: 5 OCTOBER 2022

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The past year has been far from ordinary. In many ways, the project we commenced in 2011 has this year seen the culmination of 10 years of consolidated effort to progress the renewal of the Catholic Church in Australia and beyond.

For 5 years we advocated for a plenary council. For a further 5 years we worked to ensure that the 5th Plenary Council of Australia would secure the renewal so desperately needed.

During the past year our efforts were focused on:

1. Newsletters and Editorials

During the year, with the incredible expertise and dedication of John Costa, we published 8 Newsletters with 8 Editorials (below) which regularly attracted the eyes of some 1700 unique readers, including many of our Australian bishops.

- August 2022 - Which way towards a Synodal Church?
- June 2022 - Plenary Council Motions: No match for the Church's crisis
- May 2022 - Vatican II's call for Synods and Councils
- February 2022 - Australian bishops blank Pope Francis
- February 2022 - There's no Good News in discrimination
- December 2021 - Do not be afraid. See, I am doing a new thing!
- September 2021 - 5th Plenary Council: what hope for success?
- September 2021 - Plenary Council Agenda: fit for purpose?

The Communications Sub-Committee, chaired by John, has been responsible for the detailed work that goes into these newsletters and editorials, and to the authors who skilfully draft the editorials. My sincere thanks to all.

2. Submission on Religious Discrimination Bill 2021

Commonwealth Legislation on Religious Discrimination has been a focus of Catholics for Renewal over a long period. During the past year the Morrison Government introduced the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 as a way to appease the many Christian church groups and other religious groups who were aggrieved after their loss on the same-sex marriage legislation. Mick Leahy drafted a very detailed and comprehensive submission questioning the suitability of the Bill which was fully endorsed by the Committee and submitted to the Parliament. The Bill failed.

3. Joan Chittister Visit to Melbourne

In 2018 Sr Joan Chittister was dis-invited from speaking at a National Catholic Education Conference in Melbourne. Catholics for Renewal investigated what had happened and with the assistance of our Vice-President, Gail Grossman Freyne, managed to invite Sr Joan to speak at the Melbourne Town Hall during the Conference. Due to COVID-19 the event was deferred several times but was eventually held on 12 May 2022 with some 1900 persons in attendance. Catholics for Renewal was a

sponsor of the event. I particularly thank Gail, Peter Johnstone, and David Hukan for the work that they put in, in conjunction with Garratt Publishing, to provide Joan with a national audience in Melbourne, Sydney, Parramatta, Brisbane and Adelaide.

4. Submission to the Synod of Bishops

At our February Committee Meeting it was decided that we prepare a submission to the Synod of Bishops XVI General Assembly on the Synod theme chosen by Pope Francis: *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*. Initially we made a short 250-word submission to the Melbourne Diocesan Consultation. Peter W then prepared a more detailed draft intended to be sent directly to the Sr Nathalie Becquart, Under-Secretary of the Synod of Bishops. Mick Leahy revised that draft, which was accepted with some edits by the Committee and was forwarded to Sr Becquart by the due date. A copy was also sent to the ACBC for its archives.

5. Pathways

The Royal Commission recommended that the Catholic Church should “develop a new standard for pastoral response to survivors, outside the national redress scheme, which incorporated best practice ...” In 2021 the Victorian Bishops proposed a new scheme in their document *Pathways*. Catholics for Renewal, in collaboration with Lifeboat Geelong, For the Innocents, and Good Faith Foundation, prepared a submission titled *Let Justice be Seen to be Done*, drafted by Mick Leahy. It was presented to the Victorian Government, but there was so much confusion in the government as to which Minister was responsible that no progress was achieved.

6. Communications

- a) John Costa continues to ensure that our website is ever fresh and newsworthy.
- b) For some time, John has had concerns about our Mailing List and how it should be reviewed and updated. Recently, John, in collaboration with Peter W, has been able to get some action, and further work is planned.
- c) The transition from Webs.com – Vistaprint has been a long, drawn-out process with the destination unknown (cf. Communications Report)
- d) On 5 October 2022 the new, internationally designated, global Internet domain '.au' goes public and John C has wisely protected our brand by acquiring the domain name catholicsforrenewal.au

7. New Member

During the year we welcomed Jacinta Bright as a new member. Recently, she has eased back into a supportive role on the Committee.

8. ACCCR

Catholics for Renewal continues its strong support for this coalition of 20 renewal groups which had produced several outstanding events during the past year in the lead-up to the Second General Assembly of the Plenary Council: the ACCCR Convocation Series, the publication *A Church for All* (Garratt Publishing), the Plenary Tracker (with CCCG), and the YTU/Garratt Publishing/ACCCR Seminar Series *Building the Church We need*. During the year it was agreed that a review of the Structure and Procedures of ACCCR should be undertaken. A review date was set but this has been deferred. Recently, the Australian Reforming Catholics and Toowoomba Catholics for Reform withdrew their membership from ACCCR.

9. Plenary Council

The Plenary Council has been the focus of our efforts ever since the ACBC decided to convene it in 2016. We put a huge effort into producing our submission to the Council which Garratt Publishing published as *Getting Back on Mission*. We followed up with the Flip-books (Garratt Publishing), the *Diocesan Profiles*, and our numerous editorials.

In 2021 I was invited to be a member of the Council Secretariat, responsible for ensuring that the Minutes of each day's proceedings were accurate and comprehensive. I was assigned the task to preparing the *Interim Acts of the First General Assembly (3-10 October 2021)* and more recently the draft *Acts and Decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia*. This will be a 5-volume opus of around 1200 pages with great detail. It will be presented to the ACBC for its November Plenary Meeting, reviewed and finalised, and forwarded to the Holy See later this year.

10. Thanks

Over the past year I have been very honoured and privileged to serve as president of Catholics for Renewal. It has not been an easy year with my heavy involvement in the Plenary Council Secretariat which placed substantial demands on my time. However, when I look back and see the prodigious amount of work that our group has done, I am both awestruck and heartened.

Catholics for Renewal has been dedicated to the renewal of our Church in Australia and beyond for 11 years. It has been a truly group contribution and I want to thank you all.

However, I wish to give special thanks to some members in particular: to John Costa for astonishing work that he does in keeping our website current and for publishing our regular Newsletters; and to Gail (Vice-President), David T (Treasurer) and Rose-Marie (Treasurer) for the strong support they have given me over the past year in so many ways. I thank you most sincerely.

Finally, we must recognise that the work is not yet done and that we must continue for some time yet to achieve the renewal that we so desperately seek.

Peter J Wilkinson
President
4 October 2022