Catholics for Renewal

**AGM – 27 October 2021 – Online at 5:00PM**

**President’s Report**

This time last year Catholics for Renewal committed itself to putting the bulk of its energy into ensuring that the 5th Plenary Council of Australia would be a successful event for the renewal of the Catholic Church in Australia and beyond.

1. **Plenary Council**

We carried through on this commitment in several ways:

* publication, with Garratt Publishing, of our 10 Summary Documents as a flip-book;
* preparation and publication of a series of Editorials focused exclusively on the Plenary Council, which we know were widely read (cf. Attachment prepared by John Costa with reader data):
* Francis on Women: The Need for Discernment (October 2020)
* Waiting with hope for Church renewal (December 2020)
* Synodality - the inclusive element (February 2021)
* *Instrumentum Laboris* - a major disappointment (March 2021)
* Plenary Council Contribution and Concerns (May 2021)
* Renewing the Archdiocese of Melbourne (July 2021)
* Plenary Council Agenda: fit for purpose? (September 2021)
* 5th Plenary Council: what hope for success? (September 2021)
* preparation and publication of the 28 *Diocesan Profiles* of the territorial dioceses;
* preparation and publication of the *Analysis of Plenary Council Membership;*
* support for the work of ACCCR:
* funding support for the 1st Convocation;
* editing input for *A Church for All: A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond;*
* our regular Newsletter and almost daily updates by John Costa ensuring that our readers and supporters were very well informed of the progress of the Plenary Council and the movement for reform across Australia and the world;
* our offer of free copies of *Getting Back on Mission* to all Members of the Plenary Council (a difficult exercise which ended well with over 60 Members requesting copies)
* provision of secretarial assistance to the Plenary Council through the services of C4R President, invited to be a member of the Plenary Council Secretariat.

1. **Members**

Last October we lost a most treasured Member, Maria George, who returned to God. She inspired us all and is sadly missed.

During the year Fiona Lynch had to resign from the group due to work pressures. She has asked to remain connected.

We welcomed our new members: Patricia Boylan, Rhonda O’Connor, and Frank Purcell.

1. **Restructure of Melbourne Archdiocese**

In April 2021 Archbishop Peter Comensoli announced a plan to restructure of the Melbourne Archdiocese from 208 parishes to some 50 ‘Missions’. The decision was made in a non-synodal manner, without proper consultation, and attempted to pre-empt the discernment and decisions of the Plenary Council. We wrote an Editorial urging the Archbishop to pause his plan and wait until the Plenary Council had concluded it business. Over recent weeks it appears that there is growing support for a pause.

1. **Pathways**

The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry and the Royal Commission found the Catholic Church procedures for handling complaints of child sexual abuse - the *Melbourne Response* and *Towards Healing –*were faulty. The Royal Commission recommended that

The Catholic Church, through Catholic Professional Standards Limited, should develop a new standard for pastoral response to survivors, outside of the national redress scheme, which incorporates best practice, having regard to the recommendations set out in our Redress and civil litigation report and those processes already in operation in particular Catholic Church authorities. (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, v. 16, Bk. 3. P. 509).

The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry had also recommended that consideration should be given to expanding the powers of the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) to accommodate complaints of child sexual abuse.

Recently the Victorian bishops proposed a new scheme in the document *Pathways.* After examination of this scheme, both *Catholics for Renewal* and *For the Innocents* were convinced that it would not remedy defects nor provide justice and healing to victims/survivors of sexual abuse by Church personnel. The trust deficit caused by the abysmal failures of the bishops to respond honestly, justly and pastorally to complainants in the past made both groups doubt the ability of any Church-run scheme to overcome the institutional imperatives of self-protection.

They were especially concerned that the *Pathways* model – developed without the input of victims or their supporters – will persist in prioritising its juridical function over its pastoral one.

An alternative proposal for a scheme independent of the Catholic Church for handling complaints of sexual abuse by Catholic Church personnel, was then prepared on behalf of Catholics for Renewal and For the Innocents by Michael Leahy. Titled *LET JUSTICE BE SEEN TO BE DONE*, it argues that only the initial complaints reception and pastoral care elements of *Pathways* should be retained by the Church, and that the principal investigative, adjudicative and redress-determining functions of any new scheme should be outsourced to competent bodies separate from the Church, such as VOCAT.

Earlier this year the two groups were joined by Lifeboat Geelong and In Good Faith Foundation.  We have had a productive meeting with Director Regulation, Emily Sanders, of the office of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People* office of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People* and have requested a meeting with the relevant Victorian Minister, who it has been difficult to identify. Recently, Michael Leahy circulated an assurance from the office of minister, Natalie Hutchins, that a joint reply from her and the Attorney-General is in preparation.

1. **Finances**

The Treasurer, David Timbs, will shortly present his report, which will show that the group is presently in a very sound financial position. I should also say that David sought the assistance of Garry Nolan, our former Treasurer with much experience in financial reporting, and Garry was most generous in helping to prepare the report.

1. **ACCCR**

Catholics for Renewal continues to give its full support to the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal and one of our members, Peter Johnstone, continues to serve as the ACCCR’s Co-Cordinator.

Our Vice-President, Gail Grossman Freyne, facilitated the invitation of the outstanding Guest Speaker, Sr Joan Chittister OSB for the 1st Convocation and Catholics for Renewal offered financial support.

We also offered editorial input to the draft of the text for the publication *A Church for ALL: A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council.*

Our Newsletter has given maximum publicity to the events organised by ACCCR, especially the two Convocation held so far, and will give similar publicity to the 3rd Convocation.

We are committed to ongoing support for and participation in the advocacy and activities of ACCCR.

1. **Communications**

The Communications Sub-Committee has met many times via Zoom over the past year, under the chairmanship of John Costa, to discuss the drafting of editorials, publication of newsletters, and the ongoing development of our C4R website.

All our regular Committee meetings and two AGMs have been held online via Zoom. I anticipate that we will shortly have to decide how we should conduct our future meetings.

I cannot thank sufficiently our Communications Manager, John Costa, for the incalculable support that he provides to Catholics for Renewal though his work in preparing our Newsletter, updating our website on an almost daily basis, providing us with readership reports, ensuring that our website is operating at the highest standard, and generally offering us the best possible communications policy advice. On behalf of all the group I would like to our thanks to John.

1. **Publications**

During the year man articles written by both the group and individual members have been published in John Menadue’s policy blog *Pearls & Irritations* and *The Swag*. The mainstream media have also published comments from the President, as spokesperson for the group.

Garratt Publishing co-partnered with Catholics for Renewal in publishing in May 2021 the flip-book *Keys to Reforming Our Church Together,* which brought together, in revised form, the 10 Summary Documents progressively published over 16 months to support Plenary Council participation*.* We thank Garratt Publishing for assisting and supporting us in this work.

1. **Thanks**

Over the past 12 months, it has been a great honour and privilege of serve as President of Catholics for Renewal. You are an outstanding group of Members committed and dedicated to the renewal of our Church in Australia and making it a credible sign of the Kingdom of God in this nation.

I am in awe at the huge amount of effort which all members have put into the tasks that we took on in the past 12 months and am convinced that they have already produced some fruit with more yet to come.

To all Members of Catholics for Renewal I offer my sincere thanks. I also hope that we will continue to carry forward our work for renewal in the coming year.

Peter J Wilkinson

President

17 October 2021

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| **DATE** | **Title** | **Unique Readers / Total Reads** | ***FULL* Editorial Reads** (assume all Newsletter readers read the editorial summary/extract) | **Diocesan Profile Downloads**  (or other documents where indicated) |
| **27 Sept. 21** | 5th Plenary Council: What hope for success? | 1,763/4,474 | 533 | n.a. Plenary Council Member Analysis   402 downloads |
| **8 Sept. 21** | Plenary Council Agenda: Fit for purpose? | 1,712/4,236 | 368 | 205 |
| **12 July 21** | Review of the Archdiocese of  Melbourne. PC Set to commence with approved agenda | 1,761/4,983 | 727 | 183 |
| **20 May 21** | Plenary Council: Contributions & Concerns | 1,757/4,437 | 362 | 195 |
| **16 April 21** | CONVOCATION of Catholics (mailout) | 1,682/5,733 |  | n.a. |
| **25 March 21** | Instrumentum Laboris  - a major disappointment | *(double  send due  to date correction)* 3,079/6,492 | 337 | 162 |
| **13 Feb. 21** | Synodality - The Inclusive element | 1,681/3,811 | [Final Data missing] at 2 days: 98 Video Summary, 37 Full Editorial | [Final Data missing] at 2 days, 158 Profiles |
| **10 Dec. 2020** | Advent 2020: Waiting with hope for Church renewal | 1,603/4,109 | Video Summary 100 Full Editorial 64 | 251 |
| **29 October 2020** | Francis on Women: The need for Discernment | 1.625/3/726 | 318 | 248 |