

# Communique of the Gathering of the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

**Canberra, Friday 23 March**

Nine 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 of the 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 the Institutional Response 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 place 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.

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 pedophiles and the abuse of further children.

The horror of child sexual abuse terrible as it 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, indigenous Australians, refugees, and LGBTI people.

Without strong influence and input of the people of God laity, 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)  
Aggioramento, Perth  
Australian Reforming Catholics  
Cyber Christian Community (WA)  
Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn