

AUGUST 2020 EDITORIAL

Catholics For Renewal (reconstructed from archive without original image 20241018)

No time for delay in local implementation of Church governance report

After a leaked confidential copy of the groundbreaking report on Catholic Church governance was published in May 2020, the now ‘official’ version (with some corrections and clarifications) of *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia (LSC)* has been published by the [Australian Catholic Bishops Conference \(ACBC\)](#) and [Catholic Religious Australia \(CRA\)](#). This earlier than planned release came as the result of a concerted campaign by Australian reform groups, including [Catholics for Renewal](#)

The 208-page report is the result of a recommended review of church governance by the recent [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#). It was prepared by the Implementation Advisory Group (IAG) and the Governance Review Project Team (GRPT) and contains 86 recommendations.

In May 2020 the [ACBC](#) assessed the report as ‘[historic](#)’, ‘[substantial](#)’ and ‘[comprehensive](#)’ and renowned theologian Professor Massimo Faggioli said it was a model for how a local church can reform its governance structure and “will be studied for many years to come by [theologians, historians and canon lawyers](#).”

CRA President, Br Peter Carroll FMS hopes that it will “illumine a path of contemporary good governance for the Church in Australia, and possibly beyond”.

The published report is accompanied by a [Reading Guide](#) which points to the foundational principles underpinning the recommendations - collegiality, synodality, stewardship, dialogue, discernment, participation and good leadership – and the virtues required for good leadership: integrity, accountability, transparency, inclusivity, sound risk management practices, active engagement and communication (Recs. 3-5). This is the heart of *LSC*, and everything else serves to explicate what is found here. Over the last 9 months Catholics for Renewal has been publishing [Summary Documents](#) on most of these principles and virtues.

Catholics for Renewal agrees that *LSC* contains a rich lode of gold requiring patient mining, for it offers the Church in Australia a unique opportunity to learn from its mistakes, re-establish its credibility with the Australian public and, above all, get back on its God-given mission to build the Kingdom of God in this nation.

But the challenge now is whether the ‘particular churches’ in Australia – dioceses, eparchies, ordinariates and personal prelature – are prepared to move on the *LSC* recommendations and, if so, when?

While the ACBC is encouraging the faithful to give feedback to their local bishops on what they think needs to be done on the *LSC*’s recommendations, the bishops show no sense of urgency. They are content to leave consideration of the report and local feedback to their

plenary meeting in November 2020, and to postpone most of the recommendations until to the Plenary Council which meets in 2021 and 2022.

But the *LSC* is not just a document for the collective consensus and legislative action of the Plenary Council. There is urgent local discernment, consensus and action which cannot and must not be delayed. Many of *LSC*'s recommendations can be acted on immediately by individual diocesan bishops. Two clear examples are the establishment of diocesan pastoral councils (most dioceses do not have one) and annual diocesan reports (including financial statements). These and many others can be implemented by [local diocesan bishops immediately](#).

Catholics for Renewal, therefore, urges all its readers to read *The Light from the Southern Cross* in full, discern in the Spirit what you think your local bishop needs to implement NOW, and write to him asking for IMMEDIATE ACTION.¹

Freedom of expression is integral to the Christian vision and *LSC* points out that the exchange of views and lay input on matters related to the Church and its leadership has to be encouraged.

Good governance practice flourishes best in a climate of free and open dialogue within the Church. Accordingly, Catholics for Renewal urges each local bishop in Australia to take two actions immediately:

- invite your diocesan faithful to give you feedback on this important report; and
- convene a public diocesan assembly where you and your local faithful can openly dialogue, listen to one another, and discern in the Spirit.

These actions are the 'principle of subsidiarity' in operation - the local bishop engaging and dialoguing with his people in a synodal manner, and giving them a co-responsible part in arriving at the decisions which will impact on them as a local community.

In conclusion, Catholics for Renewal thanks and compliments the IAG and GRPT members who have gifted the Church in Australia with an outstanding document.

¹ Contact details for your local diocesan can be found in *Getting Back on Mission: Reforming our Church Together*, Garratt Publishing, 2019, Supplement 1, pp. 304-313. To purchase: <https://garrattpublishing.com.au/product/9781925009651/#::~:~:text=Getting%20Back%20on%20Mission%20is%20forward-looking%20and%20founded,articles%2C%20and%20public%20evidence%20at%20major%20government%20inquiries.>