

Catholics For Renewal Inc.



**Submission to the
General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops
On the Theme of Synod of Bishops XVI General Assembly
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation
and Mission**

15 August 2022

Australia

**Submission to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops on the Theme of Synod of Bishops
XVI General Assembly For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission**

1. Catholics for Renewal

Catholics for Renewal is a group of committed Catholic women and men, established in 2011 in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia, who call for a renewed Catholic Church that follows Jesus Christ more closely.

We appreciate the invitation to participate in the Synodal Process initiated by Pope Francis on the theme *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*.

2. Synodality: description and expectations

The International Theological Commission understands 'synodality' as an essential dimension of the Church with three main characteristics: a) it expresses the Church's nature as the People of God journeying together, gathering in assembly, listening to the Word, and celebrating the Eucharist in the brotherhood of communion, co-responsibility and participation on all levels in various roles and ministries; b) it denotes the structures and ecclesial processes through which the Church's synodal nature is expressed at an institutional level - locally, regionally and universally – and which serve the Church to discover the way forward by listening to the Spirit; and c) it designates the program of those synodal events in which the Church as the People of God is called together at the local, regional and universal levels by the competent authority and with the bishops presiding, to discern the way forward and to take decisions to fulfil its mission.¹

For a long period synodality as a *modus vivendi et operandi* had disappeared from Catholic Church governance and pastoral planning. Vatican II sought to revive it with its desire that “the venerable institution of synods and councils flourish with new vigour”.²

More recently, the fundamental meaning of the question asked of the faithful was clarified in another document. Our submission begins with consideration of this 'fundamental question'.

3. The Fundamental Question for the Synod on Synodality

The *Preparatory Document* for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops states that “the fundamental question that guides this consultation of the People of God is: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together”: How is this “journeying together” happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”? (n.26).

To respond, we are invited to: a) ask yourselves what experiences in your particular Church the fundamental question calls to mind; b) re-read these experiences in greater depth: What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited? c) gather the fruits to share: Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is he asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our particular Church? and d) “to gather the wealth of the experiences of lived synodality, in its different articulations and facets, involving the Pastors and the Faithful of the particular Churches at all the different levels, through the most appropriate means according to the specific local realities” (n.31).

In what follows we will attempt to respond to these questions in the light of our experience as members of the Church in Melbourne but drawing also upon our experience as members of the Church in Australia and the universal Church.

4. Our responses

a) Experiences called to mind by the fundamental question

At the universal level, we shared in the experience of the reform to the understanding of the Church's nature and mission, and to the structural, liturgical, and pastoral changes consequent upon that reform. The rediscovery of the nature of the Church as the People of God rather than a hierarchy in which the laity were mere auxiliaries with no status of their own resonated with the many engaged in the lay apostolate at that time. The restoration of the vernacular to the liturgy and of the role of the laity in its celebration gave an expression to that status as members of the People of God that over time was itself educative and empowering.

More important than these domestic issues, however, was Vatican II's re-conception of the Church's mission. Renouncing the triumphalist view of the Church as the besieged bastion of divinely revealed truth which the world rejected at the peril of eternal damnation, in defining the Church as the People of God the council presented the Church as part of humanity engaged on its historical pilgrimage in search of its destiny:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise and echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of human beings. United in Christ, they are led by the Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for everyone. That is why this community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with humankind and its history (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1).

For us, this humility of the Church was a far cry from the triumphalism reflected in the cult of the papacy, and shared in to a lesser degree by the rest of the hierarchy. Instead of being a self-serving institution, the same Council document modelled the Church on Christ the servant:

... the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.3).

This new vision of Church served as an inspiration and powerful motivating factor in all aspects of our life within it.

The renunciation of triumphalism, and the recognition of the limitations on the Church's comprehension of divine revelation, naturally entailed the consequence that God's truth had been spoken, and could be found, in sources outside the Church itself. In the early years after Vatican II, this recognition led to the establishment of warm relationships with members of other Christian communities, and with Jews and members of other non-Christian faiths as well. Many members of Catholics for Renewal have felt the warmth of these relationships and learnt from the wisdom of these other faiths.

At the local level, the implementation of the reforms of Vatican II was patchy. However, for the most part the *liturgical* reforms were received by priests and people across the Church in Melbourne and indeed Australia.

Structural reforms were more difficult³. In the 1970s we also saw a widespread effort, mandated by our Archbishop (Knox), to establish Parish Pastoral Councils. For many members of such councils, and parishioners whom they represented, the experience of having a say in parish affairs was a new one, and one they relished because they saw it as an active, adult participation in the life of their Church. The experience of cooperating with their priests and their fellow parishioners enlivened

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their sense of their membership of the People of God to which the local Church was trying to initiate them. Although its establishment might have been envisaged, no Diocesan Pastoral Council ever eventuated.

Pastoral reforms also flowed from Vatican II. The lay apostolate following the Cardijn method of 'see, judge and act' was already strong in Australia, and it found new impetus from the Council's recognition of the role of the laity in its own right in the mission of the Church. From the 1970s onwards the laicisation of Church structures progressed rapidly. Lay teachers replaced religious in schools, even as principals and leaders of Catholic Education bureaucracies. Over time, other Church social services and their administration passed increasingly into lay hands. The catechesis of Catholic children in government schools could not be carried out without the services of lay catechists. This process of laicisation relied upon increased adult education in theology, scripture and allied disciplines. Although its extent should not be exaggerated, there was a significant increase in the laity's appetite for such education, which predictably prompted a growing demand for enhancement of their role as members of the People of God.

At a deeper level, inspired by the vision of *Gaudium et Spes* referred to above, laity and clergy, especially those associated with the lay apostolate, were moved to take even more seriously their responsibility for their social, political, economic and ecological world. Justice and Peace groups, led by the body set up by Pope Paul VI, were established across the dioceses of this country, and commitment to this apostolate grew and continues to this day. Indeed, though many of the children of members of Catholics for Renewal have ceased to practise their faith, a significant number of them are committed to social justice, and define whatever measure of faith they retain in terms of this commitment. The conception of mission reflected in this movement is that of transforming the world in which human beings live into one where justice, peace and community – the defining features of the kingdom of God – flourish. On this vision evangelisation does not simply consist in winning acceptance of the eternal truths defined by the Church, but in bearing witness to the action of the God those truths proclaim in the yearnings, sufferings and strivings of all human beings by serving them and walking with them in those things.

For Australians, the most conspicuous victims of the triumphalist conception of mission, and the sufferers of the greatest injustice in this nation's history, are our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The contribution of the Christian Churches to the colonisation of these peoples, and their consequent dispossession of sovereignty, land, culture and even their children, is an enduring cause for repentance and reparation by Christians of today. To their credit, many Christians remain active in the Reconciliation movement in this country, and many Church institutions are joining with their fellow Australians in contributing to efforts to serve our First Nations peoples in education, health and other fields. The vision of mission and evangelisation announced by Vatican II, however, calls us to perseverance in labouring for justice for these peoples until they achieve the place in this nation that is rightfully theirs. The wider understanding – particularly in schools – and increasing commitment by young Australians especially is genuine example of walking together.

b) Reflecting on these experiences in greater depth

At all levels of its life, the experience of the laity – and even of the clergy in some respects – was that, after centuries of treatment as children required by the Church to 'pray, pay and obey', they were now being treated more as adults with rights and responsibilities. The role of the Church as arbiter of the morality decreed by the supreme magisterium and policed by priests in the confessional came under increasing challenge, especially following the issue of *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. The refusal of Pope Paul VI in this encyclical to reform the Church's teaching on the use of so-called artificial means of birth control caused widespread anguish among married couples and among priests ministering to them in this country. Indeed, it has to be said that over time this

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teaching has not been received by the faithful in Australia. Many of them left the Church on account of this teaching, and many who remained rejected it, and at the same time drastically revised their understanding of the Church's authority to teach in moral matters. This was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, no longer being able to rely upon the Church for guidance in moral matters, they became increasingly open to the influence of other sources, some of them morally ambiguous. On the other hand, however, they discovered in their new predicament a consciousness of their own conscientious responsibility in moral matters. Other members of the faithful were less willing to abandon their reliance on the authority of the Church in moral and doctrinal matters, and thus divisions arose within the ecclesial community throughout the country.

Some within the hierarchy engaged in a rear-guard action to restore the moral authority of the Church. They were supported in this particularly by Pope John Paul II who required candidates for the episcopacy to declare their alignment with Church teaching on birth control. Priests came under sanctions for challenging this teaching, and for exercising their pastoral responsibilities in line with their doubts about it. This restorationist movement was driven into more extreme positions when confronted by the bioethical challenges posed by emerging fertilisation technologies. It was lay leaders who presented a credible response to these challenges in the development of public policy and legislation on the use of these new technologies. These leaders were bitterly criticised by members of the hierarchy as not being Catholic for their stands on these bioethical issues. This effort to restore the authority of the Church extended to *doctrinal* as well as moral matters.

Vatican II's re-conception of divine revelation as not just assent to a set of verbal propositions but as the community's experience of the guidance within themselves of the Spirit received in Baptism alerted theologians and religious educators to the anomalous character of existing forms of religious education. These forms consisted still in catalogues of doctrines presented with explanations and support of variable quality. Rote learning of the catechism was the form of religious education that virtually all Australian Catholics had received before Vatican II. Post-Vatican II methods of catechesis aimed at enabling students to reflect on their own life experience in the light of the scripture and tradition of the Church. While some of the hierarchy and much of the Church bureaucracy supported these catechetical reforms, there was a highly organised and well-funded campaign conducted by a prominent conservative Catholic group that criticised these reforms in the bitterest terms and enlisted powerful members of the hierarchy in support of the campaign. The result was what is known in the relevant literature in Australia as 'the catechetical wars'. It is a lamentable fact that this restorationist movement has had considerable success in retarding the spread of the consciousness of the laity of their rights and responsibilities as members of the Church.

The most compelling feature of the Australian experience of journeying together, however, is the elation of seeing its mission as serving the fundamental yearnings and aspirations of the humanity of which the People of God are a part spelt out in the quotation from *Gaudium et Spes* above. The concern expressed by this same document (ch. 1) for the dignity of all human beings, a dignity culminating in their communion with one another in the Trinity, leads many women and men in the Church to see its *treatment of women* as scandalously at odds with that concern. These women experience the Church as paying lip service to their equality but in practice fashioning the Church as a men's club in which their role is merely auxiliary to the purposes defined by men. As well as being totally anomalous with the doctrine of their equality with men, there is a bitter irony in the fact that in so many cases women are in practice performing functions theoretically closed to them because there are no longer enough men to perform them! Moreover, those communities benefiting from the leadership of women in ministry are finding in it new experiences of journeying together. Having broken down barriers to their admission to positions of leadership in fields of education, health care, social services and administration within the Church, the pressure has risen for women's admission to ministry. Since admission to ministry in our Church requires ordination, this pressure has been

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stoutly resisted, right from Pope John Paul II who declared the ordination of women to be beyond the Church's power. Women both inside and outside the Church see the continuing resistance of this aspiration of women as damning evidence of the continuing patriarchalism of the Catholic Church. In an age when the increasing recognition of the equality of women with men in all spheres of life is one of its defining features, it would be impossible to overstate the scandal constituted by the Church's continuing discrimination against women in this respect. If the Church can treat women as second-class citizens in its own structure and functions, how can it credibly condemn the patriarchal mistreatment of women by other social institutions, and the discrimination and violence in daily life that this leads to?

The same *Gaudium et Spes* vision alerted us to the plight of the poor and afflicted in different ways. One such way was the recognition that some groups were marginalised by the Church, and even excluded from her Eucharistic table. Our members are well acquainted with fellow Catholics who have experienced divorce and have remarried, often successfully. Despite their marginalisation, many of these persevere in their faith and in their service of the Church. Modern biblical and theological scholarship has highlighted the fact that Christ, in taking the announcement of salvation first to the people of Galilee, and to the shepherds, was offering entry to the kingdom of God to the very people deemed to have no hope of such entry because their life situations made obedience to the Law impossible. Moreover, the New Testament story of the disciples at Emmaus has always made it clear that it is in the breaking of the bread with one another that we recognise our communion in Christ. Our group therefore sees persistence in this exclusion of the divorced and remarried from the Eucharistic table as persistence in the legalism of the pharisees so emphatically rejected by Jesus.

Among the marginalised who have suffered most in the course of history, in our opinion, are members of the LGBTQTI+ community. Most of us know people, and some even have family members, who belong to this community. We know some of the pain they feel, and we even feel it with them, as a result of the discrimination and sometimes persecution they suffer at the hands of secular society and the Church. Despite the fact that, to some degree, the former discriminatory laws of secular society were the result of the influence of the Church, many members of this community persevere in their Christian faith. Honesty demands that the magisterium recognise that the biological and psychiatric assumptions, on which the Church's condemnation of homosexual behaviour is based, has changed. Logically, therefore, the Church's appraisal of non-heterosexual orientations and behaviour ought to change also. We perceive the refusal to make that change as a self-serving effort at preserving the Church's appearance of inerrancy. The price of this self-serving behaviour is the anguish of this long-persecuted group whom the Church claims to love.

The restorationist reforms of the *liturgy* have sometimes been reactionary and at others petty. The efforts to restore the Tridentine liturgy to mainstream worship marks the extremity of this group's resistance to Vatican II. The slavish literalism of the English translation of the liturgical texts is alienating, and grates on the ears of hearers. It is a petty way of reminding the faithful that the 'real' liturgy is the Latin form of it, and the vernacular is only a concession to the fact that the faithful do not know Latin and so cannot engage in that 'real' form. This restorationist regime is also an attempt at countering the sense that, as members of the People of God, the laity had a right to a role in the liturgy, and one that needed to be more fully expressed in the light of reflection upon it. The laity in many cases have experienced restorationist impositions as a reassertion of the hierarchical understanding of the Church's nature, and the curbing of lay assertiveness in this vital area of Church life. There is a bitter irony in the fact that the restorationists who so often condemn reforms mandated by Vatican II as 'post-modernist' are, by trying to restore the Tridentine Latin liturgy, exemplifying one of the characteristic features of post-modernism: aping the past!

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In the early years after Vatican II, the Church in Melbourne felt the enthusiasm for, and tasted the experience of, *structures* for collaboration between clergy and laity in parish pastoral councils (PPCs). Though patchy in their distribution and varying in the degree to which they genuinely represent their parishioners, PPCs continue to operate in many parishes and thus to provide some measure of the experience of lay participation in Church governance. Since their inception, however, bishops have insisted on the Parish Priest retaining the power of veto over the decisions of parish councils. At first, this insistence was more a reflection of the tentativeness of acceptance of a new paradigm of Church than of rejection of that paradigm. As time went on, however, this resistance became a deliberate and organised campaign to reject this new paradigm. It was not possible for bishops to dismantle existing PPCs, or to ban the establishment of new ones, but it was not only possible, but in fact, what happened, to prevent the evolution of such structures into further synodal bodies and processes within the Church. The prevention of such evolution only required neglect on the part of the bishops.

At the heart of this resistance was the rejection of the synodal paradigm of the Church implied in its definition by Vatican II as the People of God. This rejection was based on the claim that the new paradigm conflicted with the hierarchical paradigm of the Church allegedly laid down in its tradition and founded in the New Testament. The foundation of that hierarchy was priestly ordination which not only commissioned men to ministry but changed them ontologically to render them fit to exercise that ministry. For many of the Australian faithful – and many outside the Church as well – the moral bankruptcy of that theology of the priest as 'ontologically changed' was hideously exposed by the clerical child abuse scandal that provoked a secular Royal Commission.

In the entire history of the Australian Church, no event has impacted more on its journey of faith in general, and on its trust in the hierarchical paradigm of Church, than the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. . The Royal Commission found that the factors leading to such abuse, and to poor responses to it were not only individual, as one would expect on the hierarchical paradigm, but systemic:

We are satisfied that a combination of individual and systemic factors enabled child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and contributed to inadequate institutional responses to allegations or instances of abuse (*Final Report, 2017, Book 2, p. 586*).

Indeed, the commission catalogued several of these 'systemic factors', all of which were in some way parts of the hierarchical paradigm of Church:

As addressed in Section 13.11.1, 'A combination of factors', based on our consideration of all our case studies, private sessions, submissions and our review of relevant literature and previous Australian and overseas inquiries regarding child sexual abuse, we have identified a tightly interconnected cluster of systemic structural and cultural factors that appear to have contributed to both the occurrence of child sexual abuse and to poor institutional responses to child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. These relevant factors include:

- theological factors, including a patriarchal imagery of God, theology of the Church and theology of priesthood
- the culture of clericalism in the Catholic Church
- the organisational structure and governance of the Catholic Church
- the limitations of canon law
- celibacy
- screening, selection and initial formation of clergy and religious for ministry
- oversight, support and ongoing formation of people in religious and pastoral ministry
- a culture of secrecy in the Catholic Church (*Final Report, 2017, p. 616*).

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A major obstacle to the Church in Australia's journey as God's people has been the exposure of this scandal. All members of Catholics for Renewal have had some acquaintance with both victims/survivors and perpetrators of this abuse, some having been closer to incidences of it than others. All of us are scarred by the experience of a Church in whom we had been educated to trust as the earthly custodian of God's saving word betraying that trust by preying upon innocent children, and then trying to cover up the crimes. We are further scandalised by the resistance maintained in some quarters of the hierarchy and the laity to acceptance that the causes of this abuse were 'systemic', and that they were related to the factors identified above by the Royal Commission. Despite the protestation of some bishops to the Royal Commission and to the public that the Church could not, in the light of this scandal, continue 'with business as usual', the efforts of reform groups like ours to eliminate 'clericalism' and promote Vatican II's definition of the role of the hierarchy within the People of God have been condemned by restorationists as efforts to abolish the hierarchy and the ministerial priesthood, and replace them with lay-controlled boards of management of some kind. Our group acknowledges that this restorationist attitude springs from a deep-seated fear of loss of certainty of their salvation that is dependent upon their hierarchical paradigm of Church which presents it as the infallible source of saving truth. However, it is clear to us that the Spirit is calling the Church to embrace Vatican II's vision of it as the People of God, and to accept the consequences of that vision for our understanding of the roles of the hierarchy and the laity in all aspects of its life.

c) Gather the fruits to share

The members of Catholics for Renewal are convinced that the Holy Spirit is calling our Church to move on from the debilitating divisions between the defenders of Vatican II and the restorationists. Fifty-seven years after the closing of Vatican II are sufficient to demonstrate that the reforms inaugurated by the Council are not departures from the tradition of the Church but moves to a new paradigm of that tradition. It is this new paradigm, which sees tradition as the Church receiving the living faith handed on from the apostles under the guidance of the Spirit, that enables a proper understanding of the Church's mission of evangelisation in the modern world. The triumphalism that the restorationists are trying to revive can dismiss the moral, social, economic, and political travails of modern society as the fruits of its option for the sinful allurements of this world and its neglect of the eternal truths supposedly preserved in the Church's 'tradition'. The humble service to the humanity of which it is a part offered by the pilgrim People of God can only see these travails as its own and must therefore journey with the rest of humanity in dealing with them. The evangelisation that the People of God brings to humanity is their witness to the action of God within those travails within the whole of creation, action promising a culmination of the evolutionary process in an eternal participation in the life of the Trinity. It is time for the Church in Australia – and indeed the universal Church – to leave behind such resistance to the reforms of Vatican II and allow the breath of the Spirit admitted by those reforms to circulate freely.

There are some causes for joy in the experience of our Church in Australia. The recently concluded Plenary Council (July 2022) gave ringing endorsement to motions supporting national efforts to advance the cause of Reconciliation with our First Nations peoples by embracing their *Uluru Statement from the Heart*. The Plenary Council also united in their embrace of Pope Francis' leadership in social and ecological responsibility, most notably in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Although their establishment was not mandated, the Plenary Council also voted in favour of the call to establish such synodal structures as Diocesan and Parish Pastoral Councils, and regular Diocesan Synods. Resistance to these structures and procedures lives on in the positions of some bishops, but the passing of this vote must surely be regarded as an indication of the direction in which the Spirit is leading our Church.

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The movement of the Spirit in this Plenary Council is most widely recognised as having been manifested in the result of the votes on Part 4 of the Council's *Framework for Motions* document 'Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men'. Since under the *Statutes* of the Council, votes expressing *placet juxta modum* had to be counted as 'no' votes, the results of the votes were that the Motions to bear such witness were defeated. Understandably, these results produced shock and dismay among members, particularly among many women. The silent protest of several women and some men, including at least two bishops, was recognised by the organisers as a signal that these results had to be revisited. Accordingly, the Motions were re-drafted and achieved a 'qualified majority' in their new form. Since the new form of the Motions are very conservative in the demands they make to recognise the equality of women with men in the Church, it is not their content which marks them as signs of the movement of the Spirit. It is rather that human attempts to manage the voice of the Spirit in the formulation and application of the voting rules had led the Council to the utterly untenable position of being unable to say *anything* about the place of women in our Church! In the view of Catholics for Renewal, Decree 4 should be seen as the admission of this topic to the Church's agenda rather than a substantive response to it. The timidity of the Plenary Council's response to the claims of women sadly leaves the Church in the position of acquiescing in the present state of affairs where it operates as a men's club. The strength of the women's movement in the Church, however, and even more the dependence on their services for so much of its life, is to us an undeniable sign of the invitation of the Spirit to recognise that their calling to the roles they are claiming is divine in its origin, not secular as their opponents argue. The life of the Church, we believe, cannot flourish in the way the Spirit intends it to flourish unless women are allowed to exercise the roles to which that Spirit is so clearly calling them. We believe the Spirit is calling us to uproot these remnants of patriarchy and clericalism from our Church.

We see it as highly significant that the passing of the new Motions on Witnessing to the Equality of Women and Men in the Plenary Council emerged from an encounter of the hearts as well as the minds of Members. Face to face dialogue between people of differing views but of the one faith is more likely to promote journeying together than written exchanges, valuable though the latter can be. We believe, therefore, that an essential condition of synodality is the implementation of the structural and procedural reforms called for in Decree 7 of the Council. Structures and procedures reformed in the manner recommended afford the ways and means of such encounter on a regular basis. Their regularity in turn will serve to promote the development of a culture of dialogue between people united in a communion, a communion in Christ. It is much more difficult to caricature and even vilify a member whose opinion differs from yours when you recognise that person as a fellow member of that communion. We think that our bishops in particular are being called by the Spirit to cease clinging to what they regard as the old 'tried and proven' ways of doing things, and like Abraham to place their trust in the God who is leading them into the unknown.

Clericalism has poisoned the mission of the Church in Australia. A Church that was already in decline was brought to its knees by the clerical child sexual abuse crisis. There can be no doubt that the Spirit is calling our Church to uproot the causes of clericalism. The paradigm of ministry which defines the priest as an ontologically different member of the People of God faces in the phenomenon of clerical child sexual abuse an insuperable anomaly. Redefinition of ministry in terms of the commission from the community to preach the word of God, the power that makes the sacraments efficacious, is indispensable to the recovery of the Church from this crisis. Admission to the ministry so conceived must be based on the community's recognition of the candidate's calling to it by the manifestation of qualification for it. Male or female, celibate or married, becomes irrelevant to such qualification. Again, we point to the fruitfulness of the de facto exercise of such ministry by persons – male and female – who are not ordained. We note the shift towards openness to the admission of women to the diaconate as a positive step in this direction, but we see a great danger of this being a case of too little, too late. The mission of the Church is already crippled by lack

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of effective ministry. The Church can no more afford to delay such reform over petty disputes about roles in it than an army facing defeat in battle can afford to argue about who is qualified to be an officer. If certain personnel are already doing the job effectively, this is the sign required that it is the Spirit calling them to it.

There are already signs of openness to inclusion of marginalised groups in the life of the Church. The universal Church has considered the re-admission of the divorced and re-married to the Eucharist. We believe that the season of grace for these people is here: we need to seize that offer of grace here and now. Although there is strong resistance at the highest level of the Church to the inclusion of LGBTQI+ members of the People of God in the Eucharistic community, there is undeniably widespread dissent from this practice, and from the teaching underpinning it, throughout the Church. Rather than persist in repeating the traditional assessment of homosexuality as 'an objective moral disorder', we believe the Church is now called to reassess that teaching in the light of modern scientific evidence, and to make adjustments to its practice in the light of such reassessment. In theological terms, the *sensus fidei* of the faithful is changing on this teaching, and so the hierarchy is bound to discern this change.

d) to gather the wealth of the experiences of lived synodality

In the experiences described under a) above, Catholics for Renewal has tried to express in words something of what they felt in joining with others, clerical and lay, in their efforts to live their faith and to reform the Church they find in crisis. We are united in our gratitude for the inspiration to our efforts provided by the leadership of Pope Francis. His focus on the Church's mission of service to the poor, even to the extent of accepting responsibility for the effects on them of the ecological destruction our current economic system is wreaking on the world, has raised our sights considerably. Integral to that focus, in our view, has been his sense that the Church cannot have a sense of its true identity and a consequent understanding of its true mission, unless it sees itself as the People of God. Unless it sees itself as the People of God, it cannot be conscious of its solidarity with the rest of humanity in groping its way through the joys and sufferings of history towards its divine destiny.

We have been buoyed by the leadership of a small number of our bishops in Australia who have embraced the Pope's vision and tried to implement it in this country. Despite the claims of our critics, we see the role of the bishops and presbyters and deacons in the Church's mission as vital. We continue to look to them for their leadership in the carrying out of that mission. It is the clericalist manner of the exercise of that mission that has been predominant, however, for so long in our Church that has been chiefly responsible for the crisis in which it is presently mired. It is clearly the Spirit that is telling us that the hierarchy, like the laity, can only exercise its role in the Church if it does so *synodally*. The very nature of the People of God is that it is a people who walks together.

Our experience as a group working together to promote the reform of our Church has been a powerful one for all members. The meeting of minds and hearts – despite sometimes significant differences – as sisters and brothers in faith has been an enriching and enlightening one. We have learnt to admire the zeal, and benefit from the wisdom of people – female and male – from very different walks of life. We have had to amend our views at times in the light of the witness of others. Our efforts, in our view, have often been productive, and this involvement in a productive enterprise of Church renewal has provided a significant boost to our sense of solidarity with one another, and to our commitment to persevere in this work.

5. Conclusion

Our faith calls us to accept the loftiest vision of the dignity we share with our fellows, and of the rights that this dignity confers on us to organise our common life, and of the mission to humanity to which that common life drives us. That vision however is reduced to little more than pious rhetoric – even pernicious cant – if our faith fails us, and we place our trust in the trappings of human power instead of in the power of the Spirit within us.

In the experience of the Australian Church, nothing has brought our faith closer to pernicious cant than the phenomenon of clerical child sexual abuse referred to in this submission. No amount of pious rhetoric or ritual hand-wringing can restore the credibility forfeited by the scandalous perpetration of these evils, and their hypocritical cover-up by Church authorities. If there is anything to celebrate about this scandal, it is not the action for justice on the part of the Church, but the action of the Spirit evident in the work of the secular Royal Commission.

The inequalities identified by that Commission as underlying the grotesque crimes of priests and religious against innocent children demonstrate that the Church is anything but the communion it claims to be. To achieve this communion, the bishops, individually and then collectively must first make a full apology, including setting out its sins and crimes as an institution. To say I/we are sorry that it happened is not an apology; we are all sorry that it happened. There must be detailed truth-telling because without the truth there can be no healing and without healing there can be no communion. If its members, particularly its hierarchy, are sincere in their professed desires to be such a communion, they will no longer be able to tolerate the inequalities between hierarchy and laity, men and women, child and adult that facilitated and encouraged the abuse of children. Clericalism in all its expressions is a gross violation of sacred communion.

Rhetorically, it is easy enough to agree with the claims made so far. But genuine communion cannot be founded on rhetorical agreement. It must be founded on effective reforms to the inequalities that prevent it. We have argued throughout this submission that clericalism springs from the failure to accept the teaching of Vatican II about the relationship between the hierarchy and the laity. The collegiality of the bishops and the synodality of the entire Church has been paid little more than lip-service, and the papal-monarchical model of Church which confers absolute authority upon the hierarchy has been retained.

Consistent with the true synodal nature of the Church, where the laity have been allowed to express their legitimate autonomy in the life of the Church, great fruit has been borne. The Cardijn Jocist movement is a conspicuous example of how the Church can realise experiences of communion by engaging with the needs of others. This movement, and others like it, has involved both women and men without discrimination. Moreover, its method is one which focuses on the needs of others rather on those of individual persons. In this respect, it contrasts with methods like the *Alpha* program used in some Australian dioceses today. Genuine communion is difficult to achieve when one's focus is on individual need.

The institutional Church cannot take credit for the fruits of movements such as the Cardijn Jocist movement when the participatory nature of that movement's practice is excluded from the institutional Church's mode of governance. The Cardijn Jocist movement and others like it flourish *despite* the governance practices of the institutional Church, *not because* of them.

Australian society is characterised by a hunger for freedom, social justice, prosperity, and racial and sexual equality in a world threatened by cataclysmic nuclear war and climate change. These are signs of the times through which the Spirit calls the Church to exemplify experiences of these

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features of human dignity. The Church's mission therefore cannot be to preserve a form of hierarchical authority that denies freedom even to its own members. In its way of life, it must model ways of expressing freedom that satisfy the yearnings of all members. Its strong rhetoric about social justice is stripped of credibility when the Church is miserly in its compensation of victims of clerical child sexual abuse, and cruel in the procedures to which it subjects them in pursuing justice. The Church faces a massive doctrinal challenge in engaging with the spiritualities of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Past sins here must be repented of, and humble listening engaged in, if its mission is to draw these peoples into Church communion. The institutional Church is throwing dust in its own eyes if it pretends that anything less than total equality of women with men will fulfil the call of the Spirit and stem the exodus of women from Australian ecclesial assemblies.

We in Catholics for Renewal live in hope or we would not be making this submission. However, our hope is severely challenged by the state of our Church today and by the feebleness of current attempts to reform it.

15 August 2022

¹ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2018, nn. 70, 81, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html

² Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, n. 36

³ The history of the use of synodal structures is a sad one, as the following tables reveal:

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Table 1: Diocesan synods, assemblies, and pastoral councils in 28 Australian territorial dioceses, March 2022

Diocese	Last Diocesan Synod held	Last Diocesan Assembly held Since 1965	Last Diocesan Pastoral Council	Policy for Parish Pastoral Councils (initial policy)
Adelaide	1945	2021	Ceased 2017	Expected (1970)
Armidale	1951	Unknown	Never	Encouraged
Ballarat	1944	2004	Functioning	Encouraged (1971)
Bathurst	1911	2019	Functioning	Mandated
Brisbane	2003	2019	Ceased 1996	Encouraged (pre-1974)
Broken Bay	2011-12	Never	Ceased 2013	Encouraged
Broome	Never	Never	Never	Encouraged
Bunbury	2019	Unknown	Ceased 2011	Encouraged
Cairns	2008-15	Unknown	Never	Encouraged
Canberra & Goulburn	2004	2015	Ceased 2006	Mandated (1972)
Darwin	Never	Never	Never	Expected
Geraldton	Never	1994-96	Never	Encouraged
Hobart	1916	2008	Ceased 1988	Encouraged (1967)
Lismore	1958	Never	Never	Encouraged
Maitland-Newcastle	2021	2010	Ceased 2021	Encouraged
Melbourne	1916	Never	Never	Encouraged (1996)
Parramatta	Never	2022 (planned)	Functioning	Mandated
Perth	1940	2014-16	Ceased 1994?	Encouraged (1971)
Port Pirie	1950s	2011	Functioning	Encouraged
Rockhampton	1959	2019	Functioning	Encouraged (1967)
Sale	1906	2019	Ceased 2008	Encouraged
Sandhurst	1948	Never	Ceased 2010	Encouraged
Sydney	1951	Never	Ceased 1983	Encouraged (1967)
Toowoomba	1948	2011	Functioning	Encouraged
Townsville	1958	2021	Ceased 2014	Expected (1971)
Wagga Wagga	1952	Never	Never	Encouraged
Wilcannia-Forbes	1890	Never	Functioning	Mandated
Wollongong	Never	2014	Functioning	Encouraged

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Table 2: Diocesan Pastoral Councils established in 28 Australian territorial dioceses since Vatican II (1962-65)

Diocese	DPC 1	DPC 2	DPC 3	DPC 4	Currently (March 2022)
Adelaide	1968-71 (+ Beovich)	1971-85 (+ Gleeson)	1985-2001 (+Faulkner)	2001-2017 (+Wilson)	Planning underway (+ O'Regan)
Armidale					Never established (+ Kennedy)
Ballarat	1994-97 (+ Mulkearns)	1997-2003 (+Connors)	2018-present (+ Bird)		Functioning
Bathurst	2017-present (+McKenna)				Functioning
Brisbane	1974-1991 (+Rush)	1991-1996? (+ Bathersby)			Not established (+ Coleridge)
Broken Bay	1996-2013 (+Walker)				Not established (+ Randazzo)
Broome					Never established (See vacant)
Bunbury	2006-2011 (+ Holohan)				Not established (+ Holohan)
Cairns					Never established (+ Foley)
Canberra & Goulburn	1966-67 (+ O'Brien)	1978-83 (+ Clancy)	1983-2006 (+ Carroll)		Not established (+ Prowse)
Darwin					Never established (+ Gauci)
Geraldton					Never established (+ Morrissey)
Hobart	1967-88 (+ Young)				Not established (+ Porteous)
Lismore					Never established (+ Homeming)
Maitland- Newcastle	1994-95 (+ Clarke)	1995-2011 (+ Malone)	2011-2021 (+ Wright)		Awaiting appointment of new bishop (Table 2 continued)

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Table 2 cont...					
Melbourne					Never established (+ Comensoli)
Parramatta	1987-1997 (+ Heather)	2018- present (+ Long)			Functioning
Perth	1972-83 (+ Goody)	1983-91 (+ Foley)	1991-94 (+ Hickey)		Under consideration (+ Costelloe)
Port Pirie	2011-2020 (+ O’Kelly)	2021 – present (+ Kulczycki)			Functioning
Rockhampton	1971-73 (+ Rush)	1973-92 (+ Wallace)	1992-2013 (+ Heenan)	2013 – present (+ McCarthy)	Functioning
Sale	1996-2008 (+ Coffey)	2012-2013 (+ Prowse)	2014-2016 (+ O’Regan)		Not established (+ Bennet)
Sandhurst	2004-2010 (+ Grech)				Not established (+ Mackinlay)
Sydney	1967-1971 (+ Gilroy)	1971-1983 (+ Freeman)			Not established (+ Fisher)
Toowoomba	1980-1992 (+ Kelly)	1999-2011 (+Morris)	2011- present (+ McGuckin)		Functioning
Townsville	1973-1986 (+ Faulkner)	2001-2014 (+ Putney)			Under consideration (+ Harris)
Wagga Wagga					Never established (+ Edwards)
Wilcannia-Forbes	2020- present (+ Macbeth- Green_				Functioning
Wollongong	1997-2000 (+ Wilson)	2012-2017 (+ Ingham)	2018-present (+ Mascord)		Functioning

Sources: *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia*, various years; Gleeson, DJ, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils: An Historical Study*, September 2021; Wilkinson, Peter J, *Know the Dioceses in 2020*, [Know the Dioceses in 2020, Peter Wilkinson September 2020-2.pdf \(catholicsforrenewal.org\)](https://www.catholicsforrenewal.org/)

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Table 3: Particular Councils convened in Australia, 1844 – 2023

Particular Councils	Year held	Place held	Bishops in attendance	Other clerics present	Lay persons present	Decrees enacted
First Australian Provincial Council (Follow-up Meeting)	1844 (1862)	Sydney (Melbourne)	3 (3)	33		48 (Supplement)
Second Australian Provincial Council	1869	Melbourne	8	30		38
First Australasian Plenary Council	1885	Sydney	18	52		274
Second Australian Plenary Council	1895	Sydney	23	49		344
Third Australian Plenary	1905	Sydney	21	49		371
First Melbourne Provincial Council	1906	Melbourne	4	18		112
Fourth Plenary Council of Australia and New Zealand	1937	Sydney	33	59		685
Fifth Plenary Council of Australia	2021-2022	Online - Sydney	45	102	103	10