

Dear Registrants for the August ACCCR Convocation

The following is a summary of the comments posted in the CHAT BOX during the ACCCR Convocation on THE FUTURE OF CATHOLICISM on 26 August. It reveals a lively interest in renewal in our Church and deep commitment to being part of the on-going work of bringing it about.

While the chat was overwhelmingly courteous and well-mannered, there were a few offensive comments by a few participants. We apologise for this and will be taking measures to ensure it does not happen again.

Be blessed

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Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

Convocation Series: The Future of Catholicism in Australia

Convocation 2: Outcomes and Actions for the Plenary Council

26 August 2021

Summary of the Chat Box comments

I have grouped comments under various headings. However, many do not fit neatly into such categories. I ask the reader to be generous. These are spontaneous responses in the context of an exciting experience, revealing feelings and values as much as, if not more than, thought-through positions. Kevin Liston

Greetings (469)

469 participants posted greetings, most of them nominating the traditional custodians of their areas. As well as those from Australia, messages of greeting were posted from Afghanistan, Canada, England, Indonesia, Ireland, Kiribati, New Zealand, USA, Vietnam and Zambia.

Responses to Speakers (These notes refer to the comments in Chat, not necessarily to what the speakers said).

Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann (9)

Appreciation for the wisdom inherent in Indigenous spirituality, particularly Dadirri. There is regret for colonialising destruction but hope for walking together into the future.

Jessie Rogers (49)

Jessie's exploration of the potential inherent in practicing synodality and discernment, forming small communities, engagement with groups such as Teams and Marriage Encounter were applauded. Concerns related to reaching out to 'outsiders', from disengaged Catholics to other religions.

Robert Fitzgerald (52)

Robert's obvious commitment and his approach - 'telling it like it is' straight talking, balancing hope and challenge - left people feeling encouraged to stay the journey. The theme underlying the Chat conversation was not whether we need major reform but how it is to be done and by whom.

Debra Zanella (24)

Participants responded strongly to Debra's focus on our need for courage in demanding equity and inclusion for women. There is a deep desire for the gentler, kinder language of Jesus, eschewing violence, discrimination and exclusion/exclusivity.

John Warhurst (7)

'Brilliant summary'. 'A courageous stance'.

Set questions

Question 1. One specific practical outcome I want from the Plenary Council is ... (114)

Inclusion is a major issue here with the focus on women, including ordained ministry, (47 comments) and, to a lesser extent, LGBTIQ+ people, laity and people from other countries/cultures. The reservation of ordained ministry to celibate males is a concern for many as is the way in which the Church is organised and managed. Widespread frustration was expressed at the many limiting factors related to belonging and ownership of the Church by Catholics.

Question 2. The form/style/characteristic of governance I would like to see in our Church is ... (144)

*e.g., Inclusion, diocesan pastoral councils, women and men included in all decision making, accountability, transparency.

As expected, inclusion, transparency, accountability and co-responsibility were the issues attracting most comments here (90). The need for Pastoral Councils was a related concern (14) with organisational structures and processes also receiving attention. Ten respondents chose to answer by listing qualities they would like to experience in the Church, such as joy, love and charity, forgiveness/healing, pastoral care and nurturing.

Question 3. The message I have for our bishops regarding my hopes for the Church in Australia is ... (177)

'Listen' was the recurring message for our bishops (54). The sense of the faith of Catholics is demanding to be heard. Preoccupation with power and status is perceived as undermining real leaderships (30). Admonitions such as, 'Be brave,' 'Have courage,' 'Do not be afraid' and 'Listen to the Spirit', followed (28). Other prominent topics included reform, renewal, governance, inclusion especially of women and being open to the Spirit.

General comments (102)

These comments, additional to the above, did not seem to be in response to any particular speaker or question.

The demand for Church reform was the standout, followed by hopes, or lack of them, for the Plenary Council. The concerns of LGBTIQ+ people were prominent. Desire, and often demand, for change was the core theme in comments on matters related to Aboriginal people, women, clergy, synodality, governance, the Spirit and inclusion. A small group of participants pushed strongly for the security and familiarity of traditional ways and spirituality.

Thanks, and appreciation (43)

43 messages of thanks and appreciation were posted, all of them positive and enthusiastic.

Conclusion

Many of the listed themes overlap so they have to be taken together to get a sense of the mood expressed throughout the Convocation. It is one of hope in restlessness, a judgement that the Church we have is not fit for purpose, that lay Catholics have a right to expect more and deserve better. Momentum towards claiming the Church as our community, given life by the Spirit speaking within and through all Catholics, is building.

We can be optimistic about the future but there is much work to be done.

Kevin Liston

7 September 2021