



## AUSTRALASIAN CATHOLIC COALITION FOR CHURCH REFORM

### **THE PLENARY AND THE PEOPLE Webinar**

31 March 2022

#### **Transcript of the CHAT input**

*(The CHAT recording commenced with the beginning of the conversation section of the webinar. It has been edited only to remove irrelevant comments and insert a few clarifications).*

#### **Positive comments on the presentations**

Realistic and hopeful.

A beautiful reminder of remaining Christian in the face of temptation!!

Thank you for a succinct and grounding of how we are beginning, and a realistic appraisal of what is possible.

Such an honest reflection on the Plenary so far.

I believe we are being invited to be excited to be part of both Vatican II, our own Plenary Council and the Synod on Synodality. We are blest to be called to be part of this movement in our church.

Your realistic approach is necessary; but dreaming is also required so that we still are on a journey to a better destination

Thank you for your very grounded and real contribution. Let the Holy Spirit continue to be with us all. May we continue to be assisted to remain hope-filled. We are in this together continuing on our pilgrim way.

The integrity presented in these diverse views give such hope for the future.

The Plenary is an attempt to reimagine God, church and mission, and perhaps a time for adventurous experiments. The light might appear in short supply, still we can trust the Holy Spirit, the missionary par excellence and God's few people to break through the darkness to the light. Let's not condemn our human condition or destitute time....the light of Being is much greater.

I thought the Plenary may result in hopes and expectations being dashed and more people leaving the church being disillusioned. Your words were honest and poignant and have given me hope it might bear fruit if the church listens to the breadth of voices and those on the margins and most importantly to the Holy Spirit.

Thank you for saying that what is taken off the table must still go to Rome.

A great encouragement to ongoing renewal and conversion.

Thank you everyone. I go to sleep tonight with hope in my heart that we might allow ourselves to walk the dusty roads with Jesus, and not sit patting ourselves on the back in a huge building, rarely full these days, hanging on to practises and attitudes that leave so many outside the building.

Wonderful to witness the panel's hope, movement, 'excitement' of the church and example of Pope Francis, ahead on important fronts.

Not sure about 'limiting expectations' in order to be surprised.

Let's hope we are surprised with the outcomes of the Plenary.

## Clarification of Synod and Plenary

Can you clarify the difference between procedures and processes in plenary and synod?

I agree that the Agenda should have come first

Puzzled about your distinction between Plenary & Synod but pleased to see you address an ACCCR gathering. Knowing we were asked to submit suggestions for the agenda, could you tell us what happened to these or were they set aside (and perhaps why?) Not to introduce a spoke but what chance is there of coalescing these for the second Assembly and, if not, what is intended to replace all that? Who sets the agenda for debate and decision-making (apart from the Holy Spirit, Who presumably invokes us to employ the reason and common sense available to us before bestowing Enlightenment)?

It seems that the assumptions re the synod and plenary have led to laity being confused and hence disappointed ... clarity was needed at the beginning.

## Concerns about the Plenary

Let's not forget the question posed by the Plenary for its consideration and answer.

Perhaps the reason for no Agenda is simply to allow for no real conclusion. Is it a placebo for the disillusioned?

But we have waited 4 YEARS . NOT just a beginning. Only half has occurred. Will we now allow the Writing Groups to suggest and allow the Spirit to have its influence on the next Assembly .

If outcomes will necessarily be limited, what are the most basic goals? I would say the synodality form of governance. But I don't believe that it's appropriate that huge numbers of Catholic people will have their hopes smashed because an individual bishop is unsympathetic.

Feeling very much deflated. Is the Church really willing to confront itself and not 'gag' its faithful by way of limited parameters?

"Tailor our expectations" ... really. We will go nowhere if we don't raise our expectations. If we lower our expectations we will only water down the outcomes and I fear by July 17 we will be faced with an institutional church smug in the blind, self-serving, self-indulgent "business as usual" attitude we are hoping to leave behind.

So much back peddling.. So depressing

You express the issues that are the stumbling blocks and very destructive spiritually, intellectually and emotionally.

Thanks for giving this webinar some direction (for me at least). I'd like to know: what can David Ranson say about the chances of the Aussie Bishops taking to Rome some idea of the strength of lay opinion about the need for women's ordination, opening up access to the sacraments for LGBTIQ Catholics and also Eucharistic reception to divorced Catholics? By this I mean not just an amalgamation of lay opinion gleaned from consulting the laity but, whether they favour change in these areas or not, at least summoning up the courage and integrity to inform His Holiness of these views, whether they endorse them or not.

To me, Fr Ranson's talk has indicated a closing off of any chance that ANY of the contentious issues (celibacy in the priesthood, the recognition of a meaningful role for women in our Church, the idea that lay people can have any substantial role in running the non-clerical side of parish church life, whilst the pastors get on with having time to spend more time on our spiritual health..., etc, etc) will be discussed in future i.e. (i) our tens of thousands of 'lost' practising Catholics will never see a reason to consider returning; (ii) many people have wasted a whole lot of their time believing that the 'power people' in our Church today (the male hierarchy) would listen to US. 😞

I formed the view from Father Ranson's comments that he expects perhaps hopes any Plenary Council outcome initiatives will be subsumed indeed 'disappeared' without trace into the greater synodic exploration which by its nature will probably lose them forever. I suspect this could be a hierarchy wide hope - hopefully not.

How can we say it's more real when we are told it's off the table? We won't listen.

Yes, let the contentious issues remain on the table and let's pray for courage and a burning desire to deal with these contentious issues so that the church with the spirit. Dare to Dream.

Two matters are at the heart of ecclesial reform: the reform of seminaries which are turning out very clerical priests and emphasis on the fourfold presence of Christ in the Eucharist-see Lumen Gentium on this.

This does not address clericalism, the lack of transparency in the hierarchical Church, the place of women in the Church - we are not strawberries on a cake! The very rigid nature of the plenary/synod is depressing. These are man-made rules. Why no prophecy and sweep those away to not sweep off the table so much of what was put there in the 17,500 submissions. To have started with an agenda as David Ranson suggests would really have meant not listening to those of us now on the margins or beyond. Our interests and concerns would never have seen the light of day.

I heard nothing about the need to remove what Pope Francis has called the evil of clericalism.

I do wonder where clericalism - so liberally peppered throughout the original submissions - has gone? It seemed to be a common link among the diversity of challenges so surely deserves at least another addressing.

I entered with expectation and leave disappointed. Clericalism remains alive and well and the laity marginalised.

There has been no consideration at all by the plenary regarding the apostolate of the laity in the 'world', rather than 'mission' to/in the 'church'. Vis a vis the recent Sth. American synod. This would engage us all.

The vast majority of baptised have walked away and regard the church as irrelevant or irreformable. What hope can the plenary council offer them?

Many of the human, pastoral issues will be neglected and these are the very things that need priority in my opinion.

The bishops and priests are notably absent from discussions and participating. This is the fundamental flaw in the Plenary.

Churchmen also need to see these comments, so please make sure they do.

Seems like most of us are going to be very surprised if the Plenary outcome is a surprise

### **Possible ways ahead**

Like any organisation, family or individual, there will always be challenges and therefore always a place for plenary council/synod-style governance. What we are doing in these moments need to be permanent. Cyclical revisiting of 1) where we are at, 2) what we discern God is calling us to be, and 3) what must happen to get there.

Is there a way to continue to process those elements that cannot be addressed by the Plenary so there continues to promote genuine hope of growth and acceptance of where the person is?

As Catholics we need to be people of hope with a deep respect for those who hold different views. We need to be courageous by naming that which needs to be named and respectfully push boundaries.

What I hear in all speakers is an understanding of an expanded church without rigid walls. For us all our freedom and our answers are in Christ.

If your local church can't do anything, go to and create Intentional Communities and New Ecclesial communities.

Yes, I think it's what we lay-people contribute, visibly, that will gradually change things. It will change us, it will change the Church and it'll make an impact on the people who currently hold the supposed 'power'. I fundamentally think that call for lay-people to tap into their own creativity and bless it, will be key to moving on.

The context of mission is changing rapidly and new possibilities are presenting themselves and won't go away. Maybe it's time to ask how is God experienced in these changing contexts and how the Good News of God best shared in Australia....yes let's continue to listen deeply.

Thanks for your comments for keeping the context of mission before us, and open to modelling transparency and creativity for an inclusive, healthy church as new possibilities emerge. Missionaries have a gift to offer us all in this.

### **Concerns and comments about the current situation in the Church**

Huge problems to solve if the Church is to survive.

Do parts of the Church have to die before they can come back to life?

The brick wall is clericalism both Parish Priest and Bishops. Most don't mention the Plenary or Synodality activities at Mass.

The governance model of a federation of local churches where what can happen depends upon the beneficence of the local hierarchical/patriarchal 'monarch' imitates against a universally acceptable change in the Australian Church. We can only hope for a more local change in the small 'home' churches where it all began.

Governance most important, must sort out because of Royal Commission and sex abuse cases.

Francis is trying but unfortunately, he is also facing a lot of opposition to his Reforms in general. He needs lots of prayers to continue on this way of reform.

We have waited for decades so now we have the opportunity to commence.

I fear that Francis' successor might drag back on all the progress he has made.

Francis is a great gift to us. However - he seems to have a blind spot where it come to moving women into positions of real influence, such as preaching, teaching, healing as recognised local ministers.

The trouble is people won't find Christ in a Church that excludes women from leadership. You are kidding yourselves if you think that way.

I do not like "left the Church". Often the reality is that the Church have left this people.

Many people who are disenfranchised with the institutional church have not lost faith in Christ and commitment to live the Gospel.

Many people have left Mass attendance for various reasons but haven't left the church.

Some of us feel a great deal of sadness for those we love who feel they can no longer belong to the Catholic Church so thank you for embracing all.

The only way to engage with people on the margins is to listen respectfully. But we have not invited them or reached out to them.

What has been said by thousands can't be "unsaid" and won't go away. I think many young people will go away though if they don't see meaningful change.

Many of our loved ones depend on it!

Seems to me that this is a "boiling frog" situation - we are going to wake up one day to empty churches. Not changed, not evolving, but empty. This is the reality that isn't being faced by the clericalists - Byzantine (!) process/procedure/canon-law are serious hindrances to needed root and branch reform

The "church" (clerics and authoritarianism) is irrelevant to people today, but the Spirit of God and Jesus' teaching are very needed and people are hungry for this. Dismantling established hierarchical authority and opening up face to face small group with enrichment from the teachings and rituals. This is happening already, everywhere... look outside the window.

If we are going to continue to depend upon clergy, and religious to move things forward then we are in big trouble. The laity are our only hope.

There is too far for us all to go. Appreciate the input from all as together we work together for the future of a compassionate Church.

I interviewed 2000 people who call themselves catholic the two basic responses were; we are hungry for a deeper relationship with God and we want community. Eucharist doesn't give us that. Loneliness is increasing, people going more into cyber space to get something of what they are yearning for. Ilia Delio in her book Hours of the Universe give me some real light for the future. The Spirit of God is where the action is, in the hearts and minds of all.

Given the proportion of gay priests and bishops the approach to homosexuality is interesting.

Remember that permanent deacons are ordained and married as well

## **Responses to the Spiritual Content of the Webinar**

Loving God precedes loving the Church

We need to follow the Christ!! We also need to remember, that God always wins. We are already ONE, and we need to act with acceptance of all others in Love, Patience and Compassion. Live in fellowship with one another. Yay!!

Yes, renew our sense of encounter with Christ. What is most central and essential is love. Our discipleship is to be the face of Christ to all, to love all and include all, not judge and exclude some.

Is ecological spirituality based on Pope Francis's concept of 'our common home' a viable basis for mediating peace in Ukraine? Why or why not?

Thanks, Trish for opening up the pastoral & social & ecclesial reform complexity & keeping a hopeful and positive view

We cannot look back we are not going that way. Pope Francis has heralded that with his beautiful encyclicals. Surely the signs of our time raise up to us that the Holy Spirit is calling us to lean into the evolutionary cosmos with courage.

Prayer is powerful and many of us are praying for the situation in Ukraine. Prayer in silence and solitude for our parishes, and communities supports the active work of those who are on the front line in conversations and dialogue within the Church to bring renewal.

Responding with pastoral care to those who are disappointment and disillusioned. I hope we can do this for each other, while flaming the light of Christ within us.