

Concerned Catholics Tasmania Inc.

4 May 2022

Archbishop Mark Coleridge
President, Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference
Office of the Archbishop
Archdiocese of Brisbane
277 Elizabeth Street
Brisbane 4000

Dear Archbishop Coleridge

Our purpose in writing is to draw your attention, as ACBC President, to concerns we have regarding pre-synodal preparation as requested of us by Pope Francis. We therefore ask that any submission from the Archdiocese of Hobart is read and treated as one that does not reflect the views of the faithful of Tasmania as our Archdiocese has not experienced an authentic synodal process.

Our concerns are that:

- (a) the faithful in our Archdiocese have not been provided with an appropriate opportunity to engage with our Archbishop and each other as an archdiocese in a manner consistent with the pre-Synodal preparations as proposed in the Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches;
- (b) the priests and the faithful in our Archdiocese have been shown little leadership or encouragement to gather and participate in the proposed Listening and Discernment processes, with the result that there has been little or no mention of this historic moment in the life of the Church in most parishes in Tasmania; and
- (c) there is a complete lack of transparency in relation to the preparation of the submission to be sent from our Archdiocese to the ACBC and how, or, even if, we will see the submission meant to be representing our views.

We had hoped that our Archdiocese, in this context, would grasp at the opportunity to model synodal processes. Sadly, that did not happen. Our parishes were sent information on how they could organise local events – very few did so. Individuals and groups were told that they could make submissions but there was no momentum generated by the Archdiocese through

ongoing communication with parishes or reference to the Synod in Catholic media. To that end, by letter dated 7 March 2022, we asked our Archbishop *“What provisions are being put in place for a genuine pre-synod consultation, as prescribed in the Vademecum?”*

By letter dated 30 March 2022, writing on behalf of our Archbishop, Michael McKenna (Director, Chancery Services) replied,

“This week His Grace will convoke the Archdiocese of Hobart’s Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting consistent with the Vademecum as it is being applied across Australia. The intended program, which takes into account local circumstances, has been presented to the Council of Priests at their recent meeting. The pre-synodal meeting will be conducted at three locations across the geographical North, Northwest and South of the archdiocese over the weekend commencing 30th April 2022, making it easier for the diverse members of the diocese to gather.

The format for this ‘liturgical celebration’ follows what was provided by the members of the National Liturgical Council to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference as a proposed common format. It takes the form of an extended Liturgy of the Word, structured with times for prayer, proclamation, listening and reflective silence. At the conclusion we will gather for some hospitality and light refreshments.”

So there was to be no pre-Synod Diocesan Assembly and no listening assembly but rather a liturgical ‘celebration’ with no opportunity for discussion.

The fact that these three liturgical celebrations attracted a total of 30 attendees (including only around 15- 20 of the laity) across the three regions of the Archdiocese speaks volumes of the impact this pre-synodal process has had. How can we celebrate a process that did not happen?

Admittedly, at the liturgy we did receive a summary of the responses received from our Archdiocese. However, there has been no opportunity at all for the faithful to meet with our Archbishop or together or both to engage in a true synodal listening and discernment process.

There is a parallel here with the preparation for the Plenary, where poorly prepared and cursory consultation process were hastily arranged after concerns expressed by us in writing. The faithful were given neither any meaningful opportunity to converse with our Archbishop nor access to any recorded outcomes from those consultations and thus are still unaware of whether or not their concerns have been conveyed to the Plenary Council by our Archdiocese. Bearing that experience in mind, and after giving careful thought to the processes for synodal engagement published through the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, we wrote to our Archbishop to ask how he planned to engage Tasmanian Catholics in these processes and offering our assistance. We did not receive an indication of any plans being in place.

These failures to take advantage of the opportunities for dialogue and consultation to seek the best outcomes for our Church have led to great frustration among the faithful. The faithful have been disempowered and are unsure of where to turn to for assistance.

We and many of our fellow Catholics are disheartened because of the complete lack of transparency in relation to the preparation of the submission to be sent from our Archdiocese

to the ACBC and the selection process for those who will be commissioned to execute that task. That lack of transparency has created an atmosphere of distrust. The faithful in Tasmania have no way of knowing whether what will be conveyed through the Synodal processes on their behalf will accurately and fairly convey the hopes and needs of our Tasmanian Catholic community, as expressed through any individual or local small group submissions.

We believe that we have been making every reasonable endeavour to work with our Archbishop and have offered our assistance and raised these and other concerns with him.

Copies of recent correspondence between our Archbishop and Concerned Catholics Tasmania are on our website should you wish to view what we have written

www.concernedcatholicstasmania.org/correspondence-with-archbishop-regarding-areas-of-concern

We are aware that there are dioceses that have fully engaged with the pre-Synodal processes as recommended by the General Secretariat of the Synod, and we are saddened that it has not been so in Tasmania. We feel that this needs to be conveyed to appropriate Church authorities beyond the borders of our own state.

Copy of this letter will also be sent to Cardinal Mario Grech and Sr Natalie Bequart at the Vatican General Secretariat of the Synod, and to the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Charles Balvo, as well as to Archbishop Porteous.

With thanks for your courage and insight in facilitating the synodal processes in the Australian Church and your commitment to help realise Pope Francis' dream for a truly synodal Church, responding to the Holy Spirit and walking in the Way of Christ.

Wishing you the blessings of peace and joy of Eastertide.

Kim Chen, Chairman Concerned Catholics Tasmania