

Chairman's third Annual Report

Good morning, everyone. As chairman of Concerned Catholics Tasmania, I am advised that we have a quorum present and I now officially open the third annual general meeting of Concerned Catholics Tasmania Inc.

Thank you Carmel for the acknowledgment of country and the traditional custodians of the land upon which we are meeting. I, too, pay my respects to their elders, past and present. Thank you, Carey, for your reflection.

Each year in preparing the annual report I start by revisiting two sources. First, I go to our website and cast an eye over our newsletters. Second, I return to our Vision, Mission and Aims to see how well we stayed on track and focused on what CCT is all about.

Much of the last twelve months has been devoted to soul searching. Pope Francis and the Australian bishops asked us to do that.

Pope Francis also invited us to participate in preparation for the Synod. Remember those catchwords: Communion, Participation, and Mission. He appointed Sr Nathalie Becquart to spearhead the Synodal processes. That train moves on. Let's see what October brings.

Coinciding with preparation for the Synod, was the Plenary Council's final session. Business as usual was upset on Wednesday 6 July last year following the rejection of the

motion called for women to be *“appropriately represented in decision-making structures of Church governance”* and to ensure *“the experiences and perspectives of women are heard, considered and valued”*.

Also rejected was a call for the Church to consider allowing women to serve in the ministry as deacons should that be authorised by the Vatican. After that rejection and a break for morning tea, many did not resume their seats but remained gathered at the back of the room demonstrating their displeasure at that outcome. Subsequently, on the Friday following, the Plenary Council adopted what had, up until then, seemed unpalatable.

The reflections and experiences of the Plenary Council of members, Dr. Nimmi Candappa, Professor John Warhurst and Mr Daniel de la Motte were shared with us at a CCT forum held in Hobart on 10 September last year.

From many reports, it seems that one bishop in particular was intent upon swimming against the tide and was out of step with the great majority of members of the Council and, while vociferous, was paid little attention.

Other concerns addressed by CCT during the year included:

- (a) skirmishes with Dr David Daintree of the Christopher Dawson Centre in relation the scurrilous remarks made about Pope Francis by Professor Plimer whom the Institute invited to speak in Tasmania;

- (b) representations to the Non-government Schools Registration Board raising concerns about the religion curriculum proposed by the TCEO for Years 11 and 12; and
- (c) representations to politicians about the continued incarceration of asylum seekers and refugees.

While progress has been made on many fronts, the elephant in the room remains the lack of any real leadership emerging from Tower Road. There is little evidence of any endeavour to unite the faithful and the hierarchy with a common purpose and mission. There is resistance to any attempts by CCT to help facilitate common endeavours whether that be pastoral care, formation or liturgical and spiritual experiences for ourselves and others. The faithful have been left waiting in the wings.

Despite CCT having made strenuous efforts to engage with and assist our Archbishop, he has been unwilling to harness the talents, gifts and energy which have been on offer through CCT. I am left with the strong impression that we are served by an Archbishop who has no enthusiasm for the Plenary Council process, an initiative of the ACBC endorsed by Pope Francis. Similarly, our Archbishop has done little to support Pope Francis' initiative of the Synod on Synodality.

In February this year, we wrote to our Archbishop about the commitment made by the Plenary Council to *“endorse the Uluru Statement from the Heart and encourage*

engagement with processes for implementing the statement, including local, regional, and national truth-telling efforts.”

We asked whether there would *“be a formative message from our Church leadership encouraging the faithful to give serious consideration to supporting the referendum proposal as a matter of justice.”*, as well as asking him to share *“archdiocesan plans to address the Plenary commitments made by you and your fellow bishops”..*

Archbishop Julian replied at the end of February stating he *“is not disposed at this stage to encourage people of Faith to do anything more than continue to listen with open hearts and minds.”*

Faced with a serious justice and moral issue where is the formation and leadership needed by the faithful in Tasmania?

Catholic Education in Tasmania should be a beacon of hope and exemplify what it means to be Catholic. From many of the reports we have received, my understanding is that a diversity of views and opinions is not encouraged and the Director requires strict adherence to a sectarian approach. Compliance is achieved within an atmosphere of intimidation and fear.

Nevertheless, CCT is intent upon modelling how we believe our Church should be. We continue to accept co-responsibility for our Church and we take personal

responsibility for deepening our spirituality and prayer life. CCT remains keen to help Catholics in Tasmania do the same.

To that end, we have made representations to the Apostolic Nuncio in relation to the appointment of the successor to Archbishop Porteous. A copy of the written submission is on the CCT website. Please read it as it may help us all pray together that Pope Francis and the powers that be carefully consider and address the needs in our archdiocese.

CCT continues to look for opportunities for Catholics in Tasmania to gather for formation and conversations at local, national, and international levels about our spirituality and how best that might be lived out. It is clear from the recent survey we conducted that many want opportunities to gather and reflect on who we are as Catholics and the comfort, encouragement and nourishment of the Spirit which can emerge from gathering, reflection and discernment. Many thanks to those who shared their thoughts with us.

On the national front, Trish Hindmarsh is now a member of the executive of Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR). Congratulations Trish. Our members have the benefit of access and connection to encounters within our broader Australian Church and our universal Church which does help when so little is promoted in the hierarchical Church in Tasmania.

In his apostolic letter *Desiderio Desideravi* delivered last year, Pope Francis reiterated points he had made in 2013 in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world. Francis called us to say no to spiritual worldliness. He wrote:

93. Spiritual worldliness, which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, consists in seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being... It takes on many forms, depending on the kinds of persons and groups into which it seeps. Since it is based on carefully cultivated appearances, it is not always linked to outward sin; from without, everything appears as it should be. But if it were to seep into the Church, "it would be infinitely more disastrous than any other worldliness which is simply moral".[71]

94. This worldliness can be fuelled in two deeply interrelated ways. One is the attraction of Gnosticism, a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings. The other is the self-absorbed promethean neo Pelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in

their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past. A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others. It is impossible to think that a genuine evangelizing thrust could emerge from these adulterated forms of Christianity.

Pope Francis's naming of the characteristics of what he calls *adulterated forms of Christianity* should be helpful to us in our search for what is unadulterated or authentic Christianity. As missionaries and advocates for Christ we need to be clear and confident about what we are for. Pattern recognition and *sensus fidei* give us an intuitive awareness of those about us who have been touched by the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis, Fr Bob Maguire of South Melbourne and Fr Ted Kennedy of Redfern by their demeanour and way of being are seen as true believers and apostles both by those within our Church and those without it. The early Christians distinguished themselves by not following the societal norms and by the way they loved one

another. We too, are now perceived by ourselves and others as counter-cultural in the way we live, behave, think and believe. That realisation is a comfort for me and you I hope.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank all those who are helping us on the CCT journey.

Thank you, our members and supporters. Your attendance and membership greatly encourage the committee. Continue to let us know what aspects of Church you would like us to address.

Thank you to all our committee members for your hard work this year.

To Vin and Trish, thanks for keeping up our links with ACCCR and refugee agencies keeping CCT in the loop of national concerns. I know it is a lot of work and a big commitment of time and energy.

To Donna, thank you for your ongoing work as treasurer and the planning for today's event.

To Sue Hyslop, thank you for your energy as Secretary being the conduit for disseminating information to and gathering responses from members and others.

To Judy and Carey, thank you for your work on preparing the foundational material needed to formulate our approach to the Apostolic Nuncio and all the other contributions you each make.

To Chris Smith, our vice president, editor of our Newsletter and general moderating influencer, thank you.

To Kathy Sullivan, thank you for your energy, enthusiasm and efforts in the short time you have been on the committee.

To Susan Chen, thanks for your organisational skills, care and support.

To Carmel Taylor, who is stepping back from the committee today, thank you so much for being our constant reminder of the damage wrought in the Meander Valley Parish and the need for substantial change in our Church. We wish you well in whatever you chose to do and look forward to seeing you at future CCT gatherings. Please help keep us on track.

To Kathy Cuthbertson, who is also stepping back from the committee today, thank you so much for your tireless work attending to the creation and maintenance of our website. Kathy's was a tentative yes to what she was asked to do and she has done a great job and we will miss her quiet manner and deep reflections. We also wish you well in whatever you choose to do and look forward to seeing you at future CCT gatherings.

I repeat: to everyone, your presence here today and support during the year is very encouraging and enlivening for us. We do ask that you pray and think about how CCT might best achieve its aims and please communicate that to

us. May the joy and peace of Christ be with you and remain with you always.