

Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform - ACCCR

Response to the *Instrumentum Laboris*

The *Instrumentum laboris* (IL) was drafted on the basis of all the material gathered during the listening phase (2020-22), and in particular the final documents of the Continental Assemblies. It is composed of an explanatory text and fifteen worksheets that reveal a dynamic vision of the concept of “synodality.” It will be the basis for the work of the participants in the General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality, which begins in the Vatican in October 2023 and concludes with a second Assembly one year later.

Specifically, there are two sections:

Section A highlights the experience of the past two years and indicates a way forward to become an ever more synodal church; and

Section B – entitled “Communion, Mission, Participation” – focuses on the “three priority issues” at the heart of the work to be done in October 2023. These are elaborated in three main themes:

- growing in communion by welcoming everyone, excluding no one;
- recognising and valuing the contribution of every baptised person in view of mission;
- and identifying governance structures and dynamics through which to articulate participation and authority over time in a missionary synodal church.

The IL overall seems to concentrate on opening up the way towards creating a synodal Catholic Church for the future, and not focus on addressing specific ‘Signs of the Times’ that came forward through the Continental reports. The assumption seems to be that a synodal church, united in its missionary focus, unified as a community in Christ and with all members actively participating in the life of a church on mission, would be so much more capable of addressing critical issues related to justice, peace and the ecology.

Ultimately, it is up to us – the local church – to lead the way, to spread the word about the worldwide changes in the church, adding to the groundswell that will bring meaningful change. Consequently, the ACCCR feels that our main focus should be to learn the synodal way that best suits the church in Australia and in our own diocese, then introduce these ideas to other seekers of a new way forward.

The Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) is focussed on the following areas:

1. Governance

Any restoration of public trust in the church will be dependent on a commitment to contemporary ethical standards of good governance based on the principles of transparency, accountability and inclusivity. There can be no theological justification for poor governance, structures and practices. There needs to be a complete re-think, a renovation, of the concept of church so as to be more relevant in the 21st century. The construction of an Australian Council of the Laity will be a positive step in the right direction. A renewed view of service through the

development of truly synodal faith communities, small Christian communities, is the desired end in this time of radical change, described by Pope Francis as a ‘change of era’. Clericalism, in all its forms must be rejected; by its very nature it is a clear obstacle to synodality. Further, Canon Law must be openly and transparently reformed in fidelity to the Gospel message and recognising fundamental human rights.

2. The Sexual Abuse Crisis

The church needs to take responsibility for the lifelong care of all those whose lives have been irreparably harmed and continue to walk alongside them – the sexually abused, their families, whistle-blowers and all affected parishes. This goes beyond the notion of “redress”. Ongoing care would typically be based on principles of trauma informed practice, where a healing of the spirit and a restoration of relationships that have been damaged takes place in a spirit of restorative justice, informed by Catholic Social Teaching. Thus, the church must urgently review her processes for responding to ensure that victims are not re-traumatised when they seek support and redress.

3. Equality for all in our Church

Equality for all is consistent with the Gospel message. The world sees the hypocrisy of the inequality in our church. Our Coalition seeks to energetically support Catholic church reform to bring about equality for all the baptised at every level of church life and culture.

3.1 Women

It is essential that the laity, and especially women, are supported to take their rightful place in every aspect of church life. This includes all forms of ministry and governance. It is contrary to the most fundamental principles of Catholic Social Teaching and democracy to exclude baptised women from full church participation. The ACCCR strongly supports women preaching, and the ordination of women to the diaconate and the priesthood.

Equality for all in our church does not just benefit women; it is about reforming a destructive church culture. Equality for all would correct the gender imbalance in our church that has supported clericalism with its associated child abuse. It would strengthen Pope Francis’s agenda to reduce poverty and violence; women and children suffer the most harm and are the poorest in our world. If the Catholic church recognised and acted in ways to promote women’s equality, it would powerfully influence the rights of women in non-democratic countries.

3.2 LGBTIQA+

In “recognising and valuing the contribution of every baptised person” the ACCCR seeks to encourage a review of the church’s doctrinal position in light of the very clearly stated consensus view of contemporary psychiatric thought that LGBTIQA+ orientations are part of the normal variation within human sexuality, gender and bodily diversity. The ACCCR encourages working towards a church and a world that honours the gifts and dignity of our LGBTIQA+ siblings and loved ones. LGBTIQA+ lived experiences, loving relationships, diverse stories, gifts and continual dedication to our church and society must be recognised together with those of other baptised members and communities in our church. This must mean

the full inclusion and acknowledgement of all LGBTIQ+ persons in the whole life of the church.

3.3 First Peoples

The ACCCR acknowledges and supports respectful listening to the voices of First Peoples and recognises the intergenerational price paid by colonisation throughout Australia and across Oceania.

3.4 The Divorced and Remarried

The church position on the divorced and remarried must be rescinded in the spirit of equality. No person should be excluded or abandoned by the church because of rules and laws that are not reconcilable with a loving and merciful God. This includes priests who have married.

4. The Environment and Global Sustainability.

Even though the IL does not mention *Laudato Si* directly, and there is only one mention of the word ‘ecology’ (and none of ‘ecological conversion’), the ACCCR is aware of the urgency of this issue as expressed in the Oceanic Continental discernment process. That applies not only to the Pacific Island nations with the greatest urgency, but to Australasia and the whole planetary community as well.

The Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform is made up of sixteen member groups, each with its own charism and operation, but with a shared vision of actively participating in a church on mission, welcoming everyone, excluding no-one, equally valuing the contribution of every baptised person and reforming its governance structures to make way for a truly synodal church.