

Concerned Catholics Tasmania Inc.

7 March 2022

Most Reverend Archbishop Julian Porteous
Catholic Archdiocesan Centre
Tower Road
Newtown 7008
Dear Archbishop Julian

Seeking clarification on matters concerning the faithful in Tasmania

We write at a time when the Church is reflecting on what it means to be a synodal Church. It is pleasing to know that a number of individuals, parishes and Church related groups have made submissions and we look forward to further information and feedback as we move towards the 2023 Synod and beyond.

We believe that it would be a mistake, however, for our Archdiocese to delay moving in the direction that Pope Francis sees as essential for the Church in this millennium. There is every reason for our Archdiocese to begin some crucial steps towards embracing some proposed changes. Most of what we suggest below are not changes but are, in fact, the implementation of structures and processes within the purview of you as Archbishop. Many are highly recommended by Vatican documents.

Concerned Catholics Tasmania fields regular queries from members of our Archdiocese about why certain initiatives are not taken. Often, we are unable to appropriately respond because you, as Archbishop, are the only one who holds the answer and has the authority to implement changes.

We therefore ask that you give some clarity so that the faithful may have a fuller understanding of your thinking and decision making.

Our questions to you cover five areas:

1 Diocesan Pastoral Councils

We have asked you about Diocesan Pastoral Councils (DPCs) in the past. When our representatives met with you and put the question, your response was that they 'don't work'.

We find the lack of a DPC in our Archdiocese contrary to:

- a Canon 511: *In every diocese and to the extent that pastoral circumstances suggest it, a pastoral council is to be constituted which under the authority of the bishop investigates, considers, and proposes practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works in the diocese.*
- b The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (Apostolorum Successores) para. 184: *"Ideally, every diocese should establish a diocesan pastoral council, although not bound to do so by canonical discipline, thus expressing through this institution the participation of all the faithful, of whatever canonical state, in the Church's mission."*

c Statements of Pope Francis, such as:

“It is impossible to think of a bishop who did not have these diocesan institutions: a presbyteral council, consultors, a pastoral council, a council for financial matters. This means really being with the people. This pastoral presence will enable you to be thoroughly acquainted with the culture, customs and mores of the area, the wealth of holiness that is present there. Immerse yourself in your own flock!” (Address to a group of recently appointed bishops. Sept 2013)

“In his mission of fostering a dynamic, open and missionary communion, (the bishop) will have to encourage and develop the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law, and other forms of pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear.” (Evangelii Gaudium, 31)

d Comments in the ACBC commissioned report *Diocesan Pastoral Councils: An Australian Historical Study* (Gleeson, DJ, 2021). In this, the author highlights inaccuracies in *The Light from the Southern Cross*:

*“The view expressed in *The Light from the Southern Cross* that the function of DPCs ‘has been rarely exercised’ in Australia overlooks clear historical existence and significant achievements by DPCs in six of the seven archdioceses, and in quite a few dioceses, since Vatican II.”* (para 8.2)

and in the Bishops’ Response to that report:

“The dominant view that pastoral councils ‘withered’, lacked ‘energy’, were ‘dysfunctional’ and/or lacked purpose, appears an inaccurate stereotype or an incomplete assessment. Such views about the decline of DPCs appear to place responsibility almost exclusively on lay council members yet avoids a broader analysis of other possible contextual factors and questions of authentic leadership.” (8.3).

He precedes these observations with a comment on the role of the bishop:

“The attitude, energy, and enthusiasm of a bishop are the largest factors influencing the existence, meaningfulness, and longevity of a Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC).” (8.1)

Earlier, Gleeson notes about our Archdiocese:

“The DPC flourished for many years because (Archbishop Young) recognised it as a ‘very important body’; he gave it ‘teeth and energy’”. (6.4)

So, our questions are:

- i What are the pastoral circumstances you see that preclude our Archdiocese having a DPC?
- ii What collaborative and consultative processes can be put in place to alleviate any concerns and look at the purpose and benefits of a Council in our Archdiocese? Such a process could use the Gleeson report, which we assume was commissioned by the ACBC for such a purpose, and other research to inform possible models.

2 Implementation of recommendations from *The Light from the Southern Cross*

The report on governance in the Catholic Church was commissioned by the ACBC and contained a number of recommendations. Whilst some may need to be considered by the wider Australian Church through the ACBC, we believe that there are a number which are entirely within your purview to consider and implement.

So, our questions are:

- i What processes are in place, or do you intend to have in place, to consider recommendations and to implement those that are appropriate for our Archdiocese?
- ii How will those processes show a commitment to our movement towards a synodal Church?

3 Financial reporting to the faithful of the Archdiocese

We note that, as the faithful, we do not receive any information about the finances of the Archdiocese to which we belong, and to which we contribute, and indeed have done so for many years. We have no information about actual expenditure, nor of planned commitments, despite the statement in The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores*:

“It is opportune, moreover, that the diocesan community be kept informed concerning the financial situation of the diocese. Therefore, unless in a special case prudence suggests otherwise, the bishop will see to the publication of the financial reports at the end of every year and at the conclusion of diocesan projects.” (para. 189b)

Lack of transparency is outside the norms of good practice for the vast majority of organisations, be they Church based or secular, private or public organisations.

We believe that reports should be given as a matter of transparency and accountability. The Standard would provide a suitable means for that to occur. The level of detail should not lead to complexity, neither should it suggest a lack of openness.

Whilst it does not meet the requirement to report in an informative way to the faithful, we note that some dioceses do place a report, albeit a very high level summary version, on the ACNC website, even though this is not compulsory. Our Archdiocese does not do this.

So, our questions are:

- i What are the reasons for the decision of our Archdiocese not to provide financial statements for the information of the faithful?
- ii What level of reporting can be introduced to meet the transparency and accountability expectations of the faithful in a synodal Church?

4 Media and Communication

In previous discussions with our representatives, you stated, in answer to a question about access by Concerned Catholics to The Standard, that The Standard is the official publication of the Archdiocese and should therefore reflect official Church teaching and positions.

We have considered this response and agree that the Archdiocese position should be published in The Standard. However, we do not see that it follows that ‘catholic’ or diverse positions cannot be published as they encourage conversation and discussion. Former versions of the Tasmanian Catholic publication have included opportunities for differing opinions through such things as Letters to the Editor. Editorial discretion can still ensure that inappropriate content is not published; the editor can comment if there is a departure from doctrine. We consider it undesirable that differing views on Church can only be raised through public media, which can further undermine confidence in the Church in the wider community. We have seen comments by Pope Francis saying that differing views are a sign that the Spirit is active!

We note also that opportunities for Catholics to engage in discussion on key matters such as Laudato Si', the Plenary, the Synod on Synodality, The Light from the Southern Cross and hopes for a synodal Church were not deemed suitable for publication through The Standard, simply because they were organised by Concerned Catholics. This is in despite the fact that presenters were recognised academics, Church leaders, clergy, past educational leaders and experienced facilitators who operate within the Church.

So, our questions are:

- i How can the Archdiocese collaborate with Catholic groups such as CCT which are committed to provide faith events relevant to, and inclusive of, all?
- ii What benefits could come from creating an advisory body, drawing lay and other members with differing skills and a broad range of knowledge and experience from across the state, to help broaden the content and reach of The Standard?

5 Preparation for Synod

This matter has been sufficiently dealt with in our correspondence to you on 10 February 2022, to which we have not yet received a reply, in which we asked:

- i What provisions are being put in place for a genuine pre-synod consultation, as prescribed in the Vademecum?
- ii How will the faithful in Tasmania be informed of the content of any submission going on their behalf to the Synod?

Archbishop Julian, the matters we raise in this letter are matters of concern to your faithful in Tasmania who are in communication with CCT. We intend to inform them of our correspondence with you.

We also raise these issues as people who are committed to the future of our Church. We are active members of the parishes of our Church here in Tasmania. There are so many others who choose not to take this path and who, out of frustration and in many cases, anger, just abandon the Church of their baptism, thereby losing their voice for the future of Church. For some leaving was an easy decision, for others it came with great pain. We must work together as a Church to rebuild their faith in us.

We ask that representatives of CCT have an opportunity to meet with you in the next few weeks so that we can better understand your position and put forward our support for finding ways to address these matters of concern. I will contact your secretary to find a suitable time.

Yours sincerely

Kim Chen

Chair

Concerned Catholics Tasmania