



Archdiocese of Hobart

Chancery Services

30 March 2022

Mr Kim Chen
Chairman, Concerned Catholic Tasmania Inc.

Dear Kim,

His Grace asked me earlier this month, in my capacity as the appointed Diocesan Contact, and Directory Chancery Services, to respond to your two further letters to him with regard the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and associated sundry matters you indicated are of interest to those faithful in the Archdiocese who are in communication with Concerned Catholics Tasmania. My apologies for the delay but I recently succumbed to COVID and have just now returned to the office.

In response to your 10 February letter, can I start by noting that the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting will occur within the broader Australian context of the Fifth Plenary Council by which "the synodal path along which God's Spirit is calling the Local Church" is being advanced.

This week His Grace will convoke the Archdiocese of Hobart's Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting consistent with the *Vademecum* as it is being applied in dioceses 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 of prayer, proclamation, listening and reflective silence. At its conclusion we will gather for some hospitality and light refreshments.

Your most recent letter listed five areas of enquiry with the fifth referencing your earlier 10 February letter. Already subject of discussion at the Plenary Council, one might reasonably deduce from the forthcoming Synod of Bishops' focus on "A synodal Church"

that Diocesan Pastoral Councils may receive a thorough treatment in this forum also - not just regarding new variations of what has gone before, but new models better aligned to the synodal path outlined for us by Pope Francis. Accordingly, His Grace has expressed his intention to allow the anticipated dialogue and discernment from these forums to mature fully before advancing the issue locally.

Beyond the specific purpose for which it was commissioned by the Bishops Conference, the LSC report has been circulated widely and continues to be under their active consideration. Provided to the Plenary Council delegates, as the President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference stated, many of its recommendations are best considered during the Plenary Council and what will follow from the Council in each of the respective dioceses. As with his approach to Diocesan Pastoral Councils, His Grace has elected to resist ad hoc or opportunistic approaches to the report, and rather listen and reflect upon what emerges from these other forums in the first instance.

With regard financial transparency, I can advise that while the archdiocese meets all its mandated financial disclosure requirements under the careful oversight of the Executive Director Administration and Finance and Diocesan Finance Council (DFC), strategies to keep the diocesan community "informed concerning the financial situation of the diocese" are already under active consideration by those tasked at law with advising His Grace with regard financial matters. An appropriate balance between transparency and 'commercial in confidence' needs to be discerned, but already at a recent Clergy conference, priests did receive information on the financial situation of the diocese which seems likely to inform future reporting to the wider diocesan community.

Finally with regard the Catholic Standard, while we can all agree that it is "undesirable that differing views on the Church" by Catholics be funnelled through a less than sympathetic and discord driven secular media, it nevertheless remains outside the considered scope and purpose of the Catholic Standard to provide such a platform.

As you correctly observe, the 'Tasmanian Catholic' magazine did offer opportunities to voice differing opinions, especially through such devices as 'Letters to the Editor'. However, the glossy journal format proved unsustainable at many levels and the decision was eventually taken to return to the former Catholic Standard newsprint offering. There are other publications available in Australia and internationally which are more suited to the kind of content you propose.

I recognise that as a service of the Archdiocese, the present Catholic Standard which is provided free to its readers in parishes and schools across the diocese is understandably an enviable vehicle for communicating with the Catholic faithful. However, as our own diocesan archive will attest, the Standard has long been the principle historical Catholic record and source of information regarding official Church teaching.

In closing, given His Grace's heavy diary commitments, I trust that the information I have been able to provide here assists you with your immediate enquiries. No doubt His Grace's commitments will lighten somewhat post the Easter & Confirmation Season, the forthcoming second session of the Plenary Council and the Bishops Plenary.

As I know you appreciate from my brief visit with you last December, at the heart of the synodal path is the opportunity to share what we discern from our time in prayer and reflection under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who our Lord promised would lead us into all truth. Your investment in sharing the perspective of those faithful in the archdiocese who are in communication with Concerned Catholic Tasmania is I know deeply appreciated, especially so by His Grace.

Finally, I note from your letter that you "field regular queries" from members of the faithful but find that you lack the information to satisfy those queries. Please do not hesitate to encourage your enquirers to contact the diocese directly. I am sure that we will be well placed to assist.

Kindest regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael McKenna", with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Michael McKenna

Director, Chancery Services.