



# GETTING BACK ON MISSION

*Reforming Our Church Together*

**CATHOLICS FOR RENEWAL**

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Cover image: He Qi's painting *After Resurrection* depicts Jesus' disciples – women and men – empowered by their new faith in the Risen Christ, setting out on God's mission to bring the light of the Gospel to the world. It also suggests today's disciples searching for a way to make the Church a true sign of the Kingdom in the 21st century

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**All proceeds from sales of *Getting Back on Mission* received by Catholics for Renewal will be directed towards the mission of Catholics for Renewal.**

**Is this the Catholic Church  
we want?**



*Cardinal Raymond Burke and acolytes (c. 2014)*

**Or is this the  
Church we want?**



*Pope Francis blesses a man as he washes inmates' feet at a  
Maundy Thursday service at Rebibbia prison in Rome (2015)*

# Endorsements

*I wish Getting Back on Mission well and hope this book helps navigate our Church's sacred pastors to the wisdom and action needed to get us out of this mess.*

– Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland.

*Getting Back on Mission provides us with a blueprint for the reformation of the Catholic Church so necessary for it to be faithful to the mission of Jesus. The bishops and religious leaders are called to listen to the laity and to implement standards of governance where accountability, inclusiveness and transparency become the norm and not optional extras. Only then will it have any chance of reclaiming its credibility among the faithful.*

– Rosemarie Joyce CSB, former President,  
Catholic Religious Australia, Marriage Tribunal Judge.

*Getting Back on Mission is an extraordinary work – a labour of love by Catholic women and men whose abundant faith in God's Spirit, steadfast commitment to the Gospel, and uncompromising dedication to intellectual and theological rigor can be found on every page of the document. This work reflects the exemplary manner in which a relatively small group of Catholics throughout Australia have pioneered a new way to exercise lay leadership, committing their gifts, talents, and expertise to the remaking of an institution torn apart by corruption and clericalism. This document is a model and manual for any Catholic who seeks to exercise lay leadership more effectively in their own region.*

– Deborah Rose-Milavec and Russ Petrus,  
Co-Directors, FutureChurch, USA.

*Those Christians hoping that their faith will appeal to their children have every reason to share passionate insights on Church reform so that the vessel might be more fit for purpose. Faith seeking understanding thrives when there is an openness to all that is best in a world which espouses primacy of conscience, democratic participation and transparent governance. Synodality, subsidiarity, and collegiality are the key. In Getting Back on Mission, **Catholics for Renewal** have provided a realistic, hopeful and authentically Catholic roadmap for the forthcoming Australian Plenary Council.*

– Frank Brennan SJ AO, CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia.

*Reading Getting Back on Mission by **Catholics for Renewal** – from the perspective of Ireland, where I live, and where our Church is facing similar challenges – I am enormously impressed by the clarity of its analysis of the problems we are faced with, and the list of recommendations, though challenging, are as necessary here as in Australia.*

– Tony Flannery CSsR, co-founder of the Association of Catholic Priests Ireland, author of *A Question of Conscience*, Londubh Books (2013).

***Catholics for Renewal** speaks for the wider church reform movement in correctly identifying the crisis facing the church and is right to point to the serious limitations of current church governance in Australia. Good governance has three essentials: accountability, transparency and inclusion. This new book is a most comprehensive compendium of necessary reforms for consideration not only by the Plenary Council 2020/21, but immediately by every church leader as a matter of urgency.*

– Emeritus Professor John Warhurst AO, Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn, and Member of Australian Bishops' Church Governance Review Panel.

*In one document, **Catholics for Renewal** has captured all the major issues confronting the Catholic Church in Australia. Although prepared primarily for the Plenary, the origins of this book are to be found in the hearts and minds of so many Catholics (mainly the laity) who over many years have refused to walk away from the Church, despite many understandable reasons for doing so. After years of rejection by the hierarchy, the Plenary (hopefully) provides an opportunity for their voices to be heard. It is a balanced and fair document, carefully and lovingly prepared by hearts and minds fully open to the ongoing revelations of our God. It speaks of and to God's Australian people today."*

– Michael Gill, Former President of the Law Council of Australia, Convenor for Voice of Catholic Australian Laity (VOCAL).

*This absolute mine of information calls on Australian Catholics to leave behind a clericalist, self-engrossed church and embrace a renewed vision that includes full lay participation with a faith inspired by Jesus and the gospel*

*message, while at the same time embracing the very modern virtues of equality and accountability.*

– Paul Collins, Broadcaster, church historian,  
writer and commentator on Catholicism.

*The Australian Catholic Plenary Council is of a piece with the participatory mode of governance Pope Francis wants generalised throughout the Church today. Getting Back on Mission can only do good in supporting that process with which Catholics in Australia have little experience in the Church. But as citizens of a democratic, pluralist society, we have the skills and experience to make a vital contribution to the Church in these times that require reform urgently, breaking out of the time warp in which much official teaching exists. I commend Getting Back on Mission to your consideration.*

– Michael Kelly SJ, Chief Executive Officer, UCAN Services.

*Some have blamed the appalling sexual abuse of children within the Catholic Church on the Second Vatican Council, the sexual revolution and the decline of Eucharistic devotion. Commissions of inquiry in the United States, Ireland, the Netherlands and Australia have found more worldly explanations in the Church's structures and canon law. Getting Back on Mission by **Catholics for Renewal** provides a program for reform of these earthly causes along the lines recommended by the Australian Royal Commission into the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Church will ignore it at its peril.*

– Kieran Tapsell, author of *Potiphar's Wife: The Vatican's Secret and Child Sexual Abuse* ATF (2014).

*The forthcoming Plenary Council 2020/21 provides a unique opportunity for Australian Catholics to reflect on their own faith journey, their relationship to Church, and the situation of the Church in relation to civil and canonical norms. The Church's governance needs careful review as recommended by the Royal Commission. **Catholics for Renewal** are to be commended for actively engaging in the process of reflection, analysis and engagement.*

– Susan Pascoe AM, former and founding Commissioner  
of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission,  
former Director of Catholic Education Victoria,  
Member of Australian Bishops' Church Governance Review Panel,  
Chair of Community Directors Council.

*Divide and conquer has been a favored strategy of Rome since the time of Julius Caesar and it is still used today by the Church. When a problem or issue emerges in one country or another, Rome simply dismisses it by saying it's only an American problem or it's only an issue in Europe but doesn't reflect the whole Church. Getting Back on Mission by **Catholics for Renewal** accurately reflects similar statements coming from Europe, the United States, Latin America and now Australia. These statements can no longer be dismissed as simply regional. Australia's very isolation has intensified its experience and has in effect made it the canary in the coal mine. As such Getting Back on Mission must be regarded as particularly cautionary for the future of the Church.*

– Gerry Bechard, Parish Priest, Ss. Simon & Jude, Westland, Michigan, USA; founder 'Elephants in the Living Room' blog on Catholic institutional blindness to clerical child sexual abuse.

*Want to know what the Plenary Council 2020/21 should be dealing with? Then read **Catholics for Renewal's** Getting Back on Mission. All the key issues, big and small, are listed with practical steps on how to deal with them – and with an eye to history, theology and Canon Law. The Plenary Council is a council of bishops, but the Church is overwhelmingly lay. The bishops should be pleased that so many are so keen for the Church's success as to produce this sophisticated document.*

– Eric Hodgins, a Senior Priest of the Melbourne Archdiocese, a 'retired Pastor Emeritus' who 'writes a bit'.

*For those interested in the Plenary Council 2020/21, here is a most comprehensive exploration of the issues that confront the Catholic Church in Australia today. Getting Back on Mission by **Catholics for Renewal** represents the reflections, thoughts and methodical research of many Catholics who contributed to the various stages of bringing to birth this important book. It covers issues of governance, lay participation, liturgical reform, inclusion of women, people of diverse sexualities, gender and marital status, clericalism, training and professional development of clergy and church leaders and much more. All Australian Catholics interested in the Church's future will find this book informative, challenging and essential to understanding the issues that should be addressed at the Plenary Council 2020/21.*

– Peter Maher, Editor of *The Swag* National Council of Priests Quarterly Magazine, former Parish Priest of St Joseph's Newtown in Sydney.



*Getting Back on Mission is a well researched document that is grounded in the larger Tradition of the Church and the contemporary reality of Australia. This insightful writing is exciting, creative, courageous and visionary in its scope and depth. As such, it deserves a thorough and thoughtful reading.*

– Rev. Jim Clarke Ph.D., Senior Lecturer in Spirituality, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, USA.

*I see the Plenary Council of the Australian Catholic Church as crucial to the future of our Church. The world needs the Church more now than perhaps at any time in its history. In order to meet this need, the institutional Church must get its house in order with the grace of God and the good will of the people of God. In “Getting back on mission”, **Catholics for Renewal** has provided invaluable guidance for the Church.*

– Kevin Mogg, former Episcopal Vicar for Social Services for the Archdiocese of Melbourne (27 years), founder of Catholic Social Services Victoria, former Rector of Corpus Christi Seminary for Victoria and Tasmania

*It took the world-wide catastrophe of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clerics and the discovery of the systemic cover-up and enabling by Catholic Bishops to force the People of God to finally realize that toxic clericalism still reigns supreme. Getting Back on Mission by **Catholics For Renewal**, Australia, is far more than an evidentiary document for the Australian Plenary Council to be held in 2020/21. It is a clear, concise, detailed, factual and prophetic examination of the distortions, failures and subversion perpetrated by the clerical culture. This historic work, inspired by the disastrous debacle of sexual abuse in the Church that was exposed by the Royal Commission, is far more than another cry for reform that falls on the deaf ears of the hierarchy. It is a glaring exposition of reality. It is a prophetic description of what has been, what is and what will be if the clerical establishment continues to run from this reality. Getting Back on Mission is both terrifying because it tells the truth and hopeful because it comes from believing, courageous and determined members of the People of God who are making the future happen.*

– Thomas Doyle, Doctor of Canon Law, former Dominican priest, internationally acknowledged expert in the canonical and pastoral dimensions of clerical child sexual abuse, expert witness before the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, received Priest of Integrity Award from The Voice of the Faithful in 2002.

# ABOUT **CATHOLICS FOR RENEWAL** AND THIS BOOK

## About the book

The core of this book is the formal submission of *Catholics for Renewal* to the Australian Plenary Council to be held over two sessions in 2020 and 2021. It is presented as a resource for the people of God in discussing their expectations of the Council.

The submission was researched and written in response to an invitation from the bishops of Australia to all Christ's faithful in Australia to:

engage in an open and inclusive experience of listening, dialogue and discernment about the future of the Catholic Church in Australia ... to get together with friends, family or colleagues ... to spend time thinking and talking about your experiences of faith, life and the Church ... and to respond to the question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*

The bishops also stated that it was important for the Plenary Council to hear responses from as many people as possible. Consequently, *Catholics for Renewal* recognised "a graced opportunity to renew the Church in Australia".

The submission was lodged on 6 March 2019 and immediately shared on the website: [www.catholicsforrenewal.org.au](http://www.catholicsforrenewal.org.au). Subsequently, John Garrett Publishing offered to make the document available as a book that could be of wider interest to all those seeking renewal of the Church. It was agreed that some new material and refinements should be included to support this purpose. Supplementary information, a foreword from Robert Fitzgerald AM, and discussion questions for each part have been included. The discussion questions are intended to

support our bishops' desire that the faithful "spend time thinking and talking about your experiences of faith, life and the Church".

Since 6 March, important data on the current state of the Church in Australia has been published by the National Centre for Pastoral Research concerning Mass attendance and the 2016 Commonwealth Census. To ensure that the book is as up-to-date as possible some of this new data has been added to the original text and tables and appropriately noted. Additional text and a new recommendation (2.10) regarding the Church's teaching on homosexuality have been included.

Also included are references to several recent developments which are relevant to the content of the book and ensure that it is as current as possible. We note the welcome decision of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, on 1 May 2019, to proceed with a national review of the governance and management structures of Catholic dioceses and parishes, as recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (and in the manner proposed in our Recommendation 3.2).

In keeping with a commitment to engagement of the people of God with the leaders of our Church, we have included as a supplement contact details for the Apostolic Nuncio, diocesan bishops, eparchs, ordinaries, auxiliary bishops, and Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. We hope that Supplement 1 will serve as a useful reference document for readers who are prepared to share their views with their diocesan bishop in particular, and thus contribute to a better articulation of the sense of faith of the faithful (*sensus fidei fidelium*).

## About the author

The author of this book is *Catholics for Renewal*, a group of committed Catholic women and men who call for a renewed Catholic Church that follows Jesus Christ more closely. The group established itself in 2011 and officially incorporated in the State of Victoria.

The first action of the group, in 2011, was to draft an *Open Letter to Pope Benedict XVI and the Bishops of Australia* stating that the

institutional Church had alienated many Catholics and had become disconnected from, and irrelevant to the lives of many Catholic children. The letter called for an open, transparent, accountable, compassionate and outward-facing Church, totally committed to justice, peace, ecumenism, dialogue with other faiths, and advocacy for the rights of the oppressed and disadvantaged while tending practically to their needs. It also called for an end to the Church's patriarchal attitude to women and asked every bishop to convene a diocesan synod to discuss how each local church might be a more authentic witness in the 21st century. Over 8000 Australian Catholics endorsed and signed the letter.

In 2012 the group called on the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to convene a Plenary Council in 2015.

*Catholics for Renewal* made written submissions to both the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations (2012-2013) and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2012-2017). It presented evidence at the public hearings of both inquiries, expressing particular concern that Church leaders had protected paedophiles, and worse, had thus exposed further children to sexual abuse. The focus of the submissions and evidence was reform of church governance and the introduction of mandatory criminal reporting of child sexual abusers.

In February 2017, the group drafted another *Open Letter to the Bishops of Australia* calling on them to "Please Listen and Act Now" on seven key areas exposed by the Royal Commission: clericalism, accountability, equality of women, diocesan synods, priestly formation, redress for abuse victims/survivors, and Vatican inaction on child sexual abuse, dysfunctional governance, and the selection of bishops. Some 4000 Australian Catholics endorsed and signed this letter.

The 2019 Submission to the Plenary Council is the group's most recent endeavour for the renewal of the Catholic Church in Australia. The book includes as appendices the earlier Open Letters whose signatories expressed support for many of the book's proposals.

## Acknowledgments

*Catholics for Renewal* wishes to thank Garratt Publishing for the generous and collaborative approach it has brought to this endeavour.

*Catholics for Renewal* particularly acknowledges the work of the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform comprising 13 separate renewal groups seeking urgent reform of the institutional Church. A statement from the Coalition calling for Church reform is contained in Supplement 4, a further indication of the extensive commitment by Australian Catholics to the need for Church reform.

We are grateful to Anne Doyle for her voluntary professional proof-reading of the submission text. Her eyes found things that those familiar with it could not see.

Special thanks go to the expert commentators who each wrote an introduction to a Part of the book: Clare Condon SGS, Marilyn Hatton, Elizabeth Proust, Bruce Duncan CSsR, and Peter Wilkinson.

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## Foreword

When I was asked to write this foreword by *Catholics for Renewal*, I was not asked to endorse the specific proposals, but rather to join with those who have generously worked, prayed, reflected and discerned a way forward for a revitalised and renewed Church. Like so many thousands around Australia, they have entered into the journey of the Australian Plenary Council 2020/21 with a genuine hope that a transformed Church can emerge. A new conversation has arisen within the Church and I hope a new dawn for the Church, both in this country and beyond, will slowly unfold as a consequence.

My personal hopes and aspirations for our church are deeply and profoundly grounded in what I heard, saw and experienced in the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. And so it is important to reflect on the truth revealed by those who came forward and the learnings from the evidence, research and deep analyses. More importantly, it should help inform how we must respond.

Child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, religious and lay people may be explained by a combination of psychosexual and other related factors on the part of the individual perpetrator, and a range of institutional factors, including theological, governance and cultural factors. The same theological, governance and cultural factors that contributed to the occurrence of abuse also contributed to the inadequate responses of Catholic institutions to that abuse. And they lie at the heart of the loss of integrity and legitimacy more generally, both within and outside the Church.

Many contributing factors collectively gave rise to personal and institutional failures including unhealthy clericalism, mandatory celibacy and inadequate selection, training and formation of religious

and clergy. The absence of professional development and ongoing pastoral supervision exacerbated such weaknesses. The absence of females and their participation in leadership roles is also very likely to have affected the responses to abuse once known.

Poor governance, inadequate leadership, and an unhealthy culture that preferences secrecy and the Church's own interests contributed to the collective failure of the Catholic Church. Conflicts of interest were not dealt with adequately, and incentives were not aligned with the stated values of the Church. The interests of children, and then later adult survivors, were not paramount or even adequately addressed until at least the mid 1990s.

Our response to what has been revealed rests as much in the Gospel as it does in the learnings of the Royal Commission. For in the Gospel it was the voice of the oppressed and marginalised that Christ used to declare a new order. It was through his engagement with the poor that Christ proclaimed the truth and the light. He admonished those who sought to maintain the status quo and those who fought to maintain the privileges of power and influence.

There is enormous pain in many parts of the Church. For clergy and religious, the revelation that some of their colleagues abused children is almost overwhelming. For lay people, the fact that trusted priests, religious and lay leaders, often friends and mentors, offended against children has been devastating. For many parents, the failure of their fellow parishioners to believe them and their children is deeply wounding. For survivors, the Church's cold indifference still hurts.

Yet, the Church risks further losing the trust and confidence of the people of God and the broader community, unless the lessons are learnt and governance is improved and renewal occurs. More specifically, the current governance arrangements are increasingly losing legitimacy with the Church's own community of faithful.

Reform of Church governance arrangements, even within current canon law, is vital if the Church is to be a relevant, responsive, sacred and transformative body in spreading the Word of God to the faithful and beyond.

Current Church governance, and some of the canons that underpin it, are based (intentionally or unintentionally) on a fear of the non-ordained, especially women, a fear of outside influence (even where that is good), an arrogant assertion of the position of the Church in the world, and maintaining the unique privilege of an ordained class. It too often dismisses open, transparent and accountable approaches in favour of secrecy, complexity and legalistic approaches. It shuns genuine participation. And there are strong forces within the Church that seek the *status quo*.

Good church governance must be based in hope not fear. It must arise out of humility not arrogance. It must, at its core, embrace the participation of all the faithful in order to regain legitimacy.

For me, good governance is essential to a renewed Church but is not an end in itself. It is an enabler for the fulfilment of the purpose and mission of our Church. It is intrinsically relational in nature, creating relationships between people, and between people and processes, to achieve a desired end within an institutional and societal context of norms and values.

Church governance should be based on a stewardship model that recognises that the organisation is governed for the benefit of promoting the word of God, for the benefit of the community of the faithful equally (without fear or favour) in the best interests of the people and community it serves, and recognises the interests of the broader community within which it is located.

The outcome of good governance is to drive good cultures, support good leadership and build trust in the institution. It allows the institution's purpose to be fulfilled responsibly with regard to both Church and societal norms. It will allow good practice to be infused with all that is important in our faith-filled mission.

But most importantly, it must promote integrity, legitimacy, and the just exercise of authority. Too much of current church governance concentrates on authority, too little on integrity and legitimacy.

We have the capacity to reshape our institutions and the Church at large:

- To create a Church that is genuinely safe for children and vulnerable adults and which acts in their best interests.

- To create a Church that is genuinely responsive to the voices of those who have come forward to tell their stories, express their pain and seek healing and hope in a better Church.
- To create a Church whose governance and leadership is competent, engaged and open to evidence, learning and improvement.
- To create an ongoing conversation with the people of God, and to genuinely invite them into the governance and leadership of the Church.
- To create a Church more truthful, transparent and accountable to the faithful and the community at large.
- To create a Church in which the community's trust can be restored.
- To create a Church authentically based on the Gospels and the revelations of Jesus Christ – one that seeks to heal not to hurt, to include not to exclude, to nurture not control.
- To create a Church that loves, that acts justly, and that walks humbly in the presence of God.

Along with so many others, the voice of *Catholics for Renewal* is a clarion call for renewal. I hope and pray that the Plenary Council 2020/21 will be an opportunity for the Church in Australia to explore the evidence, engage in open dialogue, and discern a new course for the Church. I remain encouraged by the transformative words of Pope Francis and live in hope that good words will be followed by good action. The time for resolute action is upon us. The time to govern out of hope not fear is now.

Robert Fitzgerald AM

(in a personal capacity only)

Former Commissioner, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

## Preface

Vatican II stated that “the Church, inspired by no earthly ambition, seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit”.<sup>1</sup>

The work of Jesus Christ was the proclamation and inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth. That was the mission which God gave Jesus and which Jesus passed on to the Church. *Catholics for Renewal* believes that for too long the Church in Australia has been ‘off mission’ and must urgently get back to carrying forward the work of Christ. We believe that God’s mission and the Kingdom of God must be the priority focus of the Plenary Council 2020/21. The Kingdom of God is one of Love, Justice, Compassion, Peace, Truth, Freedom, and Equality. The Church in Australia must be the sign of that Kingdom.

The Church in Australia currently finds itself in a real and huge existential crisis. The signs are everywhere: massive disaffiliation by baptised Catholics, falling Mass attendance and use of the sacraments, few vocations to the priesthood and religious life, bishops isolated from their people, many parishes merged and without priests, flagging confidence in the hierarchical leadership, and the massive fallout from disgraceful conduct of clergy revealed by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Recent events concerning two senior cardinals have added to the crisis.

**... Catholics for Renewal believes that for too long the Church in Australia has been ‘off mission’ and must urgently get back to carrying forward the work of Christ ... God’s mission and the Kingdom of God must be the priority focus of the Plenary Council 2020/21 ...**

The crisis was building for decades, but no single moment marked the point when the Church went ‘off mission’, and those who identified the crisis early on were easily dismissed as exaggerating or ‘crying wolf’. The depth of the crisis only came into full view with the revelation of the widespread criminal sexual abuse of children by priests and religious, and the systematic and secretive cover-ups of these crimes by bishops wanting to protect the abusers, contain the financial costs, and avert reputational damage. By then, the essential qualities of the Kingdom had been abandoned.

The extent of the tragedy, how it happened, and what remedial actions are needed were the subject of two major government inquiries: the Victoria Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations (2012-13) and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2012-17).

*Catholics for Renewal* made contributions to both inquiries, and our conviction was that a fundamental reason for the failure of the Church to be a credible sign of the Kingdom was, and is, its dysfunctional governance. Vatican II envisaged the Church’s governance to be collegial, synodal, co-responsible, and in accord with the principle of subsidiarity – recognising the “whole people’s supernatural discernment”<sup>2</sup>. In Australia, little notice was taken of any part of that call. Bishops continued to operate as independent monarchs, avoided synods, refused to establish the needed structures for effective co-responsibility, and routinely requested Rome to make decisions that should have been taken locally.

**...until the equality of women is recognised and accepted, the culture of clericalism and secrecy uprooted, and bishops made accountable to their people, the Church in Australia will never be the sign of the Kingdom ...**

We believe that the dysfunctional governance of the Church in Australia – and elsewhere – will persist until the key elements of good governance are in place: accountability, transparency,

and inclusion. We also believe that until the equality of women is recognised and accepted, the culture of clericalism and secrecy



uprooted, and bishops made accountable to their people, the Church in Australia will never be the sign of the Kingdom.

Good church governance demands synodality: a genuine listening to the *sensus fidei* of Christ's faithful. There are proper canonical structures for this – particular councils, diocesan synods, diocesan and parish pastoral councils – and until they are established in every diocese across the nation, without exception, the dysfunctional governance and lack of synodality will continue.

Much of the dysfunction also stems from a pervasive and pernicious culture and mindset known as 'clericalism'. It flourishes within the clergy, but is reinforced by a laity conditioned to defer to the clergy and to accept subservience. Clericalism was inculcated over a long period in the formation program for priests and religious, and became deeply ingrained; this has to be eradicated now.

Vatican II identified many fundamental rights and duties of Catholics, but most of the laity are unaware of their rights. To take up their proper role and responsibilities in the Church in Australia, the People of God need to know their rights and duties and to understand them. We believe a 'charter' of rights and responsibilities is due and should be developed and promulgated urgently.

**...whenever we gather,  
Christ is among us,  
and the Spirit stirs ...**

Most Catholics in Australia are now aware of significant failings amongst their bishops, and regular Mass attenders will know of the many deficiencies in parish ministry. We believe that these failings are holding back God's mission and are obstacles to the building of the Kingdom of God. We have sought to identify them and to recommend change.

While we are appalled by the crisis which has befallen the Church in Australia, and challenged by its enormity, we are not without hope that our Church can be renewed. For whenever we gather, Christ is among us, and the Spirit stirs.

*Catholics for Renewal* believes that the Plenary Council 2020/21 is a graced opportunity to renew the Church in Australia. We gladly accept our responsibility to contribute to that opportunity.

*... a realistic, hopeful and authentically Catholic roadmap  
for the forthcoming Australian Plenary Council...*

**– Frank Brennan SJ, AO**

**The Catholic Church has gone 'off mission'. The scandal and tragedies of clerical child sexual abuse and the cover-up by bishops is symptomatic of a deeply ailing church.**

*Getting Back on Mission* focuses on Jesus' mission for the Church; it exposes dysfunctional governance involving a grave lack of accountability and transparency, and the exclusion of the People of God – particularly women.

This is a contribution to the Australian Plenary Council 2020/21. Its purpose is twofold: to get the Church back 'on mission'; and to show how that can be achieved 'together'.

The reforms proposed are based on sound evidence and analysis. For Catholics wanting genuine renewal of their Church, this roadmap for change is a must-read and an essential companion book for the Plenary Council.

*Getting Back on Mission* is forward-looking and founded on trust in the Spirit – it is about hope.

**Catholics for Renewal** is a group of committed Catholics that has been advocating Church renewal for a decade. A legion of Catholics has supported its work involving surveys, open letters, articles, and public evidence at major government inquiries.

**Catholics for Renewal** believes that the Church will change only if individual Catholics take up the challenge and drive that change. Many renewal groups throughout Australia are doing just that.

*I hope this book helps navigate our Church's sacred pastors to the wisdom  
and action needed to get us out of this mess.*

**– Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland**

*... the Church as an institution is in question, by the state  
and by the People of God...*

**– Dr Hans Zollner SJ, leading Vatican expert in clerical child sexual abuse**



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