

Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform

THE FUTURE OF CATHOLICISM IN AUSTRALIA

Sr Joan Chittister OSB

(www.joanchittister.org)

Joan Chittister is one of the most influential religious and social leaders of our time. For 50 years she has passionately advocated on behalf of peace, human rights, women's issues, and church renewal. A much sought-after speaker, counsellor and clear voice that bridges across all religions, she is also a best-selling author of more than 60 books, hundreds of articles, and an online column for the *National Catholic Reporter*.

Joan's address will combine practical proposals and visionary ideas around the themes of synodality, subsidiarity, inclusivity, transparency and accountability. She will relate her presentation to local and overseas contexts, such as the Plenary Council process and submissions, Vatican II documents and the words of Pope Francis. The signs of the times indicate we are at a critical moment with potential for creating a better future for our Church in this country. Joan's proposed visit to Australia for several public addresses in 2020 was quickly booked out.

Joan's presentation will be followed by small group (breakout) discussions, a plenary session and her own closing/summary comments. Archbishop Mark Coleridge, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference supports the Convocation and will send his greetings to Convocation participants.

Convocation Aims.

- To promote a vision for the future of Catholicism, informed by the lives of ordinary people, particularly in the context of the forthcoming Plenary Council;
- To give a voice to Catholics, promote critical thinking and build personal confidence through sharing ideas and perspectives, particularly in the light of Vatican II and the leadership of Pope Francis;
- To address the role of women in the Church and gender balance in decision making and ministry;
- To promote justice with special regard to LGBTIQ+ people;
- To explore Church teachings that hinder participation by Catholics;
- To identify areas needing improvement in accountability, transparency and inclusiveness;
- To initiate and support lay movements for renewal and reform;
- To assist the bishops of Australia in understanding the priorities and concerns of the faithful.

The sense of the faith of the Catholic people of Australia yearns for greater inclusion of all, more involvement of the laity, and a greater role for women. These issues were among the four most widely discussed issues in the Plenary Council submissions across all dioceses.¹

An open invitation

All people seeking Church renewal, lay, religious, clergy, bishops, members of other churches or none and community groups, are invited to join us in this significant gathering. The convocations will be open to everyone with no registration or participation fees.

¹ Wilkinson, Dr Peter, Analysis of the Church's report on submissions by diocese. *The Swag*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Winter 2020, pp. 15-16.

Participants will be able to log in individually or meet in face-to-face groups in various locations in Australia or overseas. The convocation will be conducted as a zoom-type conference facilitated by the Australian Catholic University (ACU). Because of the time difference between the USA and Australia, this convocation will be at 9.00am AEST.

This will be the first of three convocations, being convened by the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) as part of our journey to the Plenary Council and beyond. Others are scheduled for 26 August and 4 November 2021, before and after the first Plenary Council assembly.

Click www.acccr.com.au for the ACCCR website for more on Joan, her writings, background to the Convocations, church renewal and ACCCR or contact Kevin Liston: E. Auscathcoalition@gmail.com Ph. +61 411 197 829.

This is an important initiative. We are expecting it will receive positive attention throughout the Catholic Church and more widely, attracting numerous and diverse participants, especially for the first Convocation with Sr Joan.

Andrea Dean

Peter Johnstone

Co-conveners, Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR)

8 April 2021

'At every crossroad, every one of us has three possible options: The first choice is to quit a road that is going somewhere we do not want to go. We can move on in another direction. We can distance ourselves from the difficulties of it all. We can leave the mission unfinished.

The second alternative is to . . . crawl into a comfortable cave with nice people and become a church, a culture, a society within a society. We can just hunker down together and wait for the storm to calm down, go by, and become again the nice warm womb of our beginnings.

The third choice is to refuse to accept a moral deterioration of the present and insist on celebrating the coming of an unknown, but surely holier, future. The third choice is to go steadfastly on, even if we are not sure what we will find at the end of it. . . . The third choice is a choice that demands great courage. . . . And courage is a prophet's road. The prophets had a choice. So do we.'

Joan Chittister. *The Time is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage*, (Convergent, NY: 2019).

Appendix

The members of the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) are:

- Australian Reforming Catholics (ARC)
- 'Be the Change', New Zealand
- Cardijn Community
- Catholics For Renewal (C4R)
- Catholics Speak Out (CSO)
- Communities of the Way
- Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn (CCCG)
- Concerned Catholics Tasmania (CCT)
- Concerned Catholics Wagga Wagga (CCWW)
- Concerned Catholics Wollongong CCW)
- Cyber Christian Community (CCC)
- For the Innocents (FtI)
- Inclusive Catholics (IC)
- Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry (RCIA)
- South Australian Catholics for an Evolving Church (SACEC)
- Toowoomba Catholics for Church Reform (TCCR)
- Voices of Catholic Australian Laity (VOCAL)
- Women and the Australian Church (WATAC)
- Women's Wisdom in the Church (WWITCH)