



CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

Catholic women given hope for change... maybe

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Australian Catholic bishops have agreed to the possibility of a greater role for women in the church in a significant incremental first step in responding to the call for reform in the church, Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn says.

In a dramatic about turn at the church's Plenary Council yesterday (Friday) after more than a third of bishops had earlier in the week blocked the gender equality move, a clear majority of the bishops gave their support to a proposal to consider the possibility of women deacons.

"This must be seen as an encouraging step forward from a group of men who wield ultimate power in the church and have resisted any effective recognition of ministries for women in the past," the chair of Concerned Catholics, Emeritus Professor John Warhurst AO said.

"This development has also demonstrated the need for reform in the church's governance. The dissenting bishops yielded to the views of a clear majority of laity and non-bishops, backed by a silent protest of 60 members inside the assembly. If it had been business as usual the bishops' original stance would have prevailed.

"The refusal of a small number of bishops earlier to support a greater role for women in the Australian Catholic church threatened to stymie steps towards long overdue reforms to bring the church up to date.

"Now we have some hope that the Australian church can move towards meeting the ideal of gender equality accepted in other parts of society.

"This by no means a new idea. St Paul wrote in the Bible 2000 years ago: "There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

"I believe that the Australian plenary decision will only serve to stir calls for the church here and worldwide to overcome deep discrimination against women," Professor Warhurst said.

At the church's Plenary Council on Friday 8 July, a clear majority of bishops supported a move that, should the universal law of the Church be modified to authorise women deacons, Australia's bishops would examine how best to implement it in Australia.

The motion also included a call for new opportunities for women to participate in church ministries

“The outcome is not yet a strong endorsement of women deacons and fails to reflect the view of many Australian Catholics that their bishops should be actively advocating at the Vatican to advance the role of women,” Professor Warhurst said.

“This is particularly important when so much done in the name of the church is achieved by women. That’s not just in supporting parishes but also throughout Catholic schools, hospitals, nursing homes and social service where women staff far outnumber men.

“As it is in many parishes in remote, rural and regional Australia, women are filling many of the roles short of full deacon and even priestly duties, so urgently needed given the scarcity of priests.

“The absence of any individual or collective explanation from the unidentified bishops initially opposing change highlights the need for more transparency. Their silence on this issue only adds to grounds for believing that there is no coherent rationale for keeping women out of senior positions in the church.

“The authorities of the church at the Plenary Council made much of “listening to the spirit”. Fortunately, the spirit may have been heard just in time,” Professor Warhurst said.

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