



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

THE PRESIDENT

12 June 2020

STATEMENT BY ARCHBISHOP MARK COLERIDGE REGARDING THE REPORT *THE LIGHT FROM THE SOUTHERN CROSS*

In the days immediately preceding the recent plenary meeting of the bishops, the Implementation Advisory Group presented to the Conference the report *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia* prepared by the Governance Review Project Team who had worked hard to complete the document before the meeting. It was immediately evident that the report, with its 200 pages and 86 recommendations, was an important and substantial contribution. It was also evident at the meeting that the bishops had not had time to read and reflect upon the report in the way that it warrants.

The bishops were also aware of what had been stated in my letter in March 2019 to the Chair of the Implementation Advisory Group setting forth the terms of reference for the governance review. The letter said that “the final report should be addressed to the bishops; it should be finalised in consultation with the Conference; and any matters pertaining to the Holy See, Plenary Council or other parties should be conveyed to them prior to publication. Upon completion of the final report, the Conference reserves the right to first consider the findings and recommendations, before deciding upon the timing of publication.”

On the basis of this understanding, the bishops were happy to receive the report but expected that what was stated in the letter would be done before the report was finalised. Entailed in our decision to delay publication of the final report was a commitment to engage the bishops in proper consultation and to refer matters pertaining to the Holy See, the Plenary Council and others for consultation before the report was finalised.

What has been leaked to various media outlets is, therefore, an interim version rather than the final report. This is not to deny the strength and quality of what the Governance Review Project Team produced in a comparatively short time. The bishops are profoundly grateful to them for the service they have rendered to the Church. But inevitably, especially given the pressure to have the report in a form to give the Conference before its meeting, there is a need for some amendment and clarification at certain points. This is why the bishops have been asked to provide their feedback before 17 July. After this feedback has been received, the report will be amended. The amended version will then be published in late July or early August, accompanied by a reading guide. This version will be widely available, and people are encouraged to read the full report (and not just the recommendations) and to provide feedback to their local bishop to help him in shaping his response.

The bishops will continue beyond 17 July on the path of study and discernment which the report requires, heeding Pope Francis’ frequent reminder that true discernment requires patience. This path will bring them to the November plenary meeting when the bishops will decide upon their response to the report.

The bishops' meeting in November looks further to the assemblies of the Plenary Council which will now be in late 2021 and mid-2022. The Conference sees the report as an integral part of the Plenary Council journey, which is why it has been made available to those preparing the Council's *instrumentum laboris* (working document) and deciding the agenda. It will be up to the Plenary Council to determine what response the Church will make to the report as a whole; and given that the Council is the work of the Holy Spirit, it is the Holy Spirit who will have the final say. At the same time, as the report notes, there are recommendations which do not need to wait for the Bishops Conference or the Plenary Council, and individual bishops may decide to act in the meantime.

This statement is made in the interests of transparency and in the hope that the whole Church in Australia will be led through this process to a deeper experience and understanding of what it means to be a synodal Church, able to respond creatively to the extraordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves and build a future according to the mind of Christ (cf Philippians 2:2-5).