

## **Expression of Solidarity with LGBTIQ+ Catholics by former Members of the Plenary Council**

The recent Plenary Council was unable to generate a respectful discussion of the place of LGBTIQ+ Catholics in the Church. To remedy this omission several former Plenary Council members, after consultation, have written a statement of solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ community, and are now seeking the support of other former Plenary Council members. The statement recognises that an opportunity was missed at the Council to publicly value and support LGBTIQ+ Catholics, who provide so much service to the Church in Australia and to the wider community. It is simple but timely.

Those former Plenary Council members who have added their support by agreeing to sign the statement include lay women and men, religious women and men, and members of the clergy. The list below includes 41 names so far and remains open for further signatures. Some of those who have signed were approached individually and these direct approaches continue. But the task of individual approaches to about 277 Plenary Council members (*see below*) must, for practical reasons, be supplemented by general approaches. This has already been done through the good offices of Catholic Religious Australia, to whom we are extremely grateful.

The statement below, together with the names of those who have offered their support, was offered in the first instance to Rainbow Catholics Inter Agency for Ministry and to Acceptance in Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth. Their generous expressions of reception follow the statement below:

It reads as follows:

“As Australian Catholics who were members of the Plenary Council, we affirm the dignity, membership, and widespread contributions of LGBTIQ+ Catholics, and call on all Australian Catholics to do the same. The contribution and ministry of LGBTIQ+ Catholics who are lay, ordained, in religious or consecrated lives extends across education at all levels, in social services and relief of poverty-through, for example, Vinnies-in health services, defence of human rights, care of the environment, fostering parish life and liturgical practice, to name a few. Those who contribute in so many powerful ways to our Australian church and wider society and who maintain their Catholic faith and identity, despite the mixed and often hurtful messages they have received, should be in no doubt how much they are valued and appreciated by an overwhelming majority of Australian Catholics.”

Rainbow Catholics Inter Agency for Ministry, “which brings together networks of Catholics working in diverse ministries, education, advocacy for LGBTIQ+ Catholics and their allies in Australia, warmly welcomes this statement of support from members of the Plenary Council. Official church documents in Australia have a history of silencing and erasing LGBTIQ+ voices and realities, they openly or in masked ways, amplify exclusionary or discriminatory practices...Support from Catholic allies is essential in upholding the dignity, rights, and agency of LGBTIQ+ folk, thus enabling the possibility of celebrating the gift of LGBTIQ+ Catholics, their families, loved ones, friends and communities”.

Acceptance Sydney “has provided a ministry to LGBTIQ+ Catholics for almost 50 years, bearing witness to their struggles and their genuine desire to participate in the Catholic church and its message of love and mercy through God’s grace. We are comforted by the sincerity and support of members of the Plenary Council who have expressed solidarity in the above statement. May God bless.”

Acceptance Perth stated: "It is time for the Australian Catholic Church to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying and realise that LGBTIQIA+ Catholics have greatly contributed to many aspects of church life. We on the margins do not demand much-except for being welcomed, included, and affirmed. In other words-to be loved without exception. It is merely one of the two things that Jesus commanded all of us to do. It's really that simple."

Acceptance Melbourne "welcomes the expression of solidarity with LGBTIQIA+ Catholics signed by so many delegates to the recent Plenary Council. LGBTIQ+ Catholics are very much active participants in their faith communities and the wide range of ministries and other services of the Catholic family. We are not on the outside looking in, we are inside!

As well as being acknowledged and valued, important though that is, the Australian Bishops need to actively undertake a personal, pastoral and liturgical journey to translate this into a welcoming and affirming Church at all levels."

### **Signatories (as of 4 October 2022)**

Helen Belcher, New South Wales  
Virginia Bourke, Chair, Mercy Health  
Gerard Brady, Victoria\*  
Paul Cahill, Victoria\*  
Ian Cameron, South Australia

Peter Carroll, New South Wales\*  
Monica Cavanagh, New South Wales\*  
Brigid Cooney, Australian Capital Territory  
Mark Copland, Queensland  
Eveline Crotty, New South Wales\*

Ruth Durick, New South Wales\*  
Melissa Dwyer, Queensland\*  
Danielle Fairthorne, New South Wales  
Patty Fawkner, New South Wales\*  
Sally Fitzgerald, Australian Capital Territory

Madeline Forde, New South Wales  
Michelle Goh, Victoria  
Maeve Heaney, Queensland  
Mary-Clare Holland, New South Wales\*  
Peter Jones, Victoria\*

Felicity Knobel, Victoria  
Catherine McAleer, Queensland  
Angela McCarthy, Western Australia  
Tom McDonough, New South Wales\*  
Chris McPhee, New South Wales\*

Philippa Murphy, New South Wales\*

Paul O’Keeffe, New South Wales\*  
Peter O’Keefe, Australia Capital Territory  
Mary Ryan, Western Australia\*  
Francis Sullivan, Australian Capital Territory

Joe Taylor, Victoria  
Carol Teodori, New South Wales  
Trevor Trotter, Victoria\*  
Lucy van Kessel, Western Australia\*  
Stancea Vichie, Victoria\*

Claire Victory, National president, Vinnies  
John Warhurst, Australian Capital Territory  
Philip Watkins, Victoria\*  
John Woods, Australia Capital Territory  
Unnamed supporter, New South Wales

Unnamed supporter, Queensland

When signing the statement many additional expressions of support were added, which would have echoes in the wider Catholic community. These included: ‘Thank you for the invitation to this small but powerful act of solidarity’; ‘The statement really expresses the breadth of mission in which LGBTQIA+ Catholics are involved, and the significant reality that the community includes people who are lay, ordained, and from the religious communities’; ‘Please add my full support to the statement and of course gay and happy to be so’; ‘It is beautifully written. Happy for my name to be published and whatever more I can do to support’; and ‘I will joyfully sign’.

Almost all who have signed are happy to be named. Our strong preference is to publish the names of those who sign, but recognition as an “unnamed supporter” is also an option. We respect that decision. In either case their support is highly valued and appreciated.

We are now seeking additional supporters from among Plenary Council members. If you were a member of the Plenary Council and wish to add your support, please contact John Warhurst directly ([John.Warhurst@anu.edu.au](mailto:John.Warhurst@anu.edu.au)). John will be delighted to hear from you and to provide further information if necessary.

The statement will remain open for further signatures for some weeks, before eventually closing. At an appropriate time, it will be presented to Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and to each bishop who attended the Plenary Council.

### **A profile of the signatories**

With a few exceptions, the names of former members of the Plenary Council have been listed only with their State or Territory of location. The website <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/members/> has

more detailed information about their roles and background where relevant. An \* above indicates those who are leaders of religious institutes.

#### [Members and Key Roles – Plenary Council](#)

277 members (formerly referred to delegates – see the FAQ for the reason for the change) from across Australia have confirmed their participation in the two Assemblies of the fifth Plenary Council – in October 2021 and July 2022. These members are drawn from dioceses, eparchies, ordinariates, personal prelature, leaders of religious congregations and representatives of church ministries.

[plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)

John Warhurst is Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn. He was a member of the Plenary Council.

Max Stephens is a Melbourne academic with a long involvement in ecumenical and interfaith activities in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.