

Submission to Plenary Council Stage 2

Our Lady Help of Christians Eltham and St Francis Xavier Montmorency

Twenty-six members from the parishes of Our Lady Help of Christians Eltham and St Francis Xavier Montmorency participated in an Open Meeting on 11 November 2019 called to consider responses to the discernment phase of the PC2020 process. The following submissions were noted from conversations in three groups at that Meeting and have been distilled to be posted as four submissions to the 1000-character limit site at the Plenary Council website.

1.

Encouraged by the Spirit, we, some of the People of God, entreat the Council, self-limited as it is, to heed the call of the Australian Church for renewal.

The Gospels resound with the call to a priestly ministry different from its present form. We should welcome not only celibate men but all, to share in the Priesthood of Christ, thus increasing ministerial resources and welcoming the charism of many currently excluded, particularly women.

Participation, respectful of the traditions of the past, would see involvement in every level of liturgy and governance for those People of God who seek it. Wider scriptural education would ensure a mature understanding of the Word of God for all.

Inclusion could see all welcomed, or welcomed back, to the Church and its Holiness. Widespread celebration of the 3rd rite of Reconciliation and evangelisation of those who see the Church as irrelevant...the young...the poor...the marginalised...the lapsed, would see Christ's presence extended.

Synodality – walking together as the People of God would see conciliar responsibility for evangelisation, governance, sacramentality and prayer rightly the responsibility of all.

2.

Our parishioners discern that the PC 2020 processes to date discourage hope that the Council will advance our Church towards greater synodality.

Specifically: the rules and procedures for the Council itself minimise deliberative contributions from the laity and seem to ensure continuing male clerical and, indeed, episcopal control in Church governance.

Therefore, we urge the PC 2020 organizers

1) to open up procedures and agendas in the spirit of Pope Francis' guidelines for the recent Amazon Synod. Regulations limiting synodality should be revised in the spirit of the description of the Church

as the People of God in *Lumen Gentium*, and in the light of the proposals from the International Theological Commission's "Sinodality in the life and mission of the Church".

2) to ensure that the Council fully consider the establishment of pastoral councils, with equal representation of men and women, to be required as part of normal Church governance at all levels of the Church.

3.

Dissatisfied with the themes and snapshot reports derived from the first round of PC 2020 consultations, our parishioners call on the Council to prioritize address to the most important issues they perceive confronting the Australian Church. These include:

1) **Unfinished business regarding sexual abuse** – especially,

- The need to adopt, publicise, and monitor codes of conduct to protect minors from sexual abuse by adults involved in all areas of Church mission.
- The need for full and open consideration of aspects of Church life contributing to the scandal of sexual abuse - the rule of compulsory celibacy, the organization of clerical training in seminaries, inadequate mentoring for young clergy.

2) **The ever-increasing absence of the young** from full participation in the life of the Church.

Without denying cultural and economic factors beyond Church control, we call on the Council to focus on Church educational and liturgical initiatives designed to involve the young and disaffected.

4.

Signs of how our Church might become more "joyful, hope-filled and servant" were discerned in our own and other parishes. Factors contributing to this vitality were perceived to include:

- Encouragement by our priests for lay-leadership in all areas of parish life
- The development of new lay-led areas of community service – e.g. care for the environment in the spirit of *Laudato Si*, and participation in movements for justice for refugees.
- The development of ties to Church communities in developing areas – e.g. the Philippines.

Extrapolating from our experience, we urge the Council to consider

- New models of Church leadership, to include especially lay women, based on pastoral success stories from our parishes.
- New priorities in Church mission, to include welcome to, and involvement for those presently alienated from or at the margins of Church life, including – victims of, or those disgusted by sexual abuse; Aboriginal Australians; dropouts among alumni of Catholic education.