

SUBMISSION TO THE YEAR OF SYNODALITY

Background:

One of the key themes of the Year of Synodality is “Participation “and I am acutely aware that this submission represents the views of a person who already participates in the life of the Church rather than one who has had reason to leave it.

I support the ‘Parish’ as the basic organising unit of the Church because it functions in a practical way to facilitate our worship and prayer while simultaneously making possible the other great desire of Australian Catholics: fellowship and community.

I believe that the future Australian Church will draw on each person’s gifts and talents, regardless of gender, ordination, marital status or ethnic background. The Church will be led by representatives of **ALL its people** and the laity will, over time, join the clergy to co-lead the Church’s operations.

I have focused on the Pope’s three seminal themes:

Mission:

We need:

1. An “arms wide open” church, welcoming all and excluding none.
2. Enhanced, equal roles for women across the Church.
3. Focus on social justice as the heart of the Church’s teaching and action.
4. To care and act for the whole of God’s creation (*Laudato Si and Fratelli Tutti*).
5. To embrace the spiritual and temporal practices of our first Nation’s sisters and brothers.

Participation:

We need:

1. Improved, effective and open governance with the sharing of power with the laity.
2. Reform of the recruitment and training of the clergy. Encouragement of older vocations, return to full vocation of married priests, optional celibacy and practical training in managing a parish.
3. Removal of impediments to full participation in the sacraments for divorced people and unmarried couples.

Communion:

We need to:

1. Repair our relationship with young people and listen to and act on their spiritual needs.
2. Ensure a just and equitable response to the damage suffered by victims of sexual abuse by clergy and religious and the placement of that behaviour in a criminal context.
3. Insist on effective liturgy and music suitable to the time, place and people.

Specific recommendations for action cover:

Inclusion:

All people of faith and good will should be welcome to worship and fully participate in the life of the Church. With no exceptions. From this place of inclusion and welcome we can see that caring for all creation, the new imperative, is a rewording of Christ's instructions to love our God with all our hearts and minds and to love one another. The Australia Bishop's social justice theme for 2021: *Cry of the Earth – Cry of the Poor* beautifully reflects our understanding that everything is connected. This wholistic vision of God's creation is not partisan, political or selective.

Governance:

Many Catholics have turned away from the Church because of the actions of the very people who promised to protect it and lead us to God. It is now a matter of trust. As all baptised children of God, I believe that we would be a better, stronger church if the clerics and laity would share the burdens of leadership and responsibility, trusting each other to bring their best talents and energies to the task.

Parish Pastoral Councils and Youth Councils should be required in every parish because of the trust and unity they build. However, consistency and power need to be addressed. A National Pastoral Council (NPC) for each nation and a Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) for each diocese would provide a platform for parishes, and especially the laity, to have a strong contribution in helping the Church grow in the future.

Role of Women:

The faith and energy of Catholic women underpins the majority of church life but their roles are circumscribed and their talents lost. The universal Catholic Church must change its theological belief that woman is "complementary" to man. She is **equal** with him – and it's time we were clear about that.

I suggest that there be a mandatory 50 per cent representation of women on all representative bodies of the Church, including parish councils and the proposed diocesan and national pastoral councils, Women of the church should be encouraged to take leadership positions by mentoring and training, paid for by the Church. Women's roles within the Church should no longer be controlled or circumscribed on the basis of gender.

The Clergy:

Men of all ages should be strongly encouraged to join the priesthood, not just those in their late teens. This would be amplified by permitting priests to marry if they wish. It is appreciated that such a decision cannot be taken lightly, noting the financial and doctrinal challenges, but it is important to the future of the Church and cannot be ignored.

In the meantime, those priests who left their vocations to marry should all be invited to once again take up their priestly duties in full communion with the Church. I also support the question of women priests being put back on the agenda in Rome.

In the absence of sufficient priests, the Australian church, with advice from its lay Councils, should share more of the priestly pastoral role with the parish laity. There are always laity in every parish who want to extend their call from God but are restricted by clergy guarding their territory.

Revision of Seminary Training

Our priests, many of whom entered the priesthood young, frequently do not have the necessary life skills to run a parish. To assist and support our priests, they need training at the seminary and professional development in:

- Public Speaking and Homily preparation
- People Management and Psychology;
- Media Management;
- Small Business Management and Administration;
- Self-Management, including how to look after their physical and mental health.

Marriage and Divorce:

The Church should undertake detailed research to discover how to bring the sacrament of marriage into the modern age and make it a desirable option for young couples.

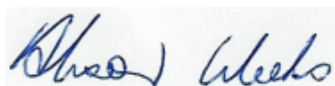
However, when a Catholic marriage ends in divorce, the parties are abandoned and ostracised by the Church. This is not fair or just. Couples and individuals too often find themselves divorced from their partner **and** from the Church. No person should be barred from the sacraments on the grounds of divorce.

Conclusion:

The pandemic has hurt and damaged so many people. Killed and isolated millions - and cost billions. There is a new impatience in my parish community. All are tired, pressured and worn out. They turn to their faith with relief and joy but how they practice and participate has changed. For example, many people attend Mass on Zoom, not because they are lazy, but because they are afraid. We need to adjust.

All these new challenges make the need for reform within the Church even more urgent; we really cannot wait. The clergy cannot do this task on their own and I urge the Australian Church to embrace the power and strength of true unity amongst all the people of God. Welcome everyone, work with everyone, trust everyone.

Yours in Christ



Holy Spirit Parish
Gungahlin
28 January 2022