

Sense of the Faithful website

<https://www.senseofthefaithful.org.au/>

10 December 2020

Dear Delegate,

We write as a group of ordinary Catholics committed to the renewal of our church, and to the full recognition of the voices of the laity, priests and religious in our communities in that process. Along with over 200,000 others, we have participated in the Plenary Council activities since the early days and will continue to do so.

By this letter, we thank you for your willingness to serve on behalf of the People of God. We encourage you to continue on the path of genuine renewal, guided by the Holy Spirit and drawing inspiration from Vatican II and from Pope Francis.

We understand the complexity of the task before you, and the need to listen attentively to the Spirit. The People of God – laity, priests and religious – have great hope invested in the Plenary Council, but cynicism is growing as time passes. Substantive outcomes from the forthcoming Council are vital.

There is a wide diversity of views among Australian Catholics on many issues, and we must respect every view. Nevertheless, through our widespread consultations we have come to believe that there is a distinct *sense of the faithful* about the nature and urgency of renewal in this country. We have set up the website www.senseofthefaithful.org.au to articulate and explore this shared view.

A vast wealth of information was contained in the 17,457 submissions made to the Phase 1 discernment process, and in the Phase 2 submissions. The six Working Groups, representing all sections of the Church, carefully considered this material in their own discernment process, to produce the six valuable Working Group reports. We carried out an analysis of the recommendations of these reports, finding that a small number of concerns dominated their findings. The details of this analysis are available on the website.

Based on our understanding of the sense of the faithful, we respectfully suggest that outcomes from the Council in five areas are particularly important:

- (i) Pope Francis stresses that *conversion within the Church starts by responding to the needs of others* rather than by looking at ourselves. We need to turn our focus to the suffering world, both here and abroad, to climate change and to learning from our indigenous peoples.
- (ii) *Clericalism is at the heart of the Church's failures*, as evident in the sexual abuse crisis. A rapid move to humble leadership exercised in a truly synodal way is critical.
- (iii) Within the People of God there is deep concern that *women be given a full and equal role within the Church*. We understand the broader complexities of this issue for the Church, but the Council must produce real progress and not just more words.

- (iv) There is also a strong demand that *the Church become much more open and inclusive*. We need to find ways in which the LGBTQI, those divorced and remarried and many other groups who feel excluded can return to full participation in the life of the Church.
- (v) Many of the changes needed require *new forms of governance* within the Church. We are all fortunate to have the inspiring report *Light from the Southern Cross*, and a measure of the success of the Council will be, in our view, how fully the Council implements its findings.

The message of Jesus is not reaching the young and many other sections of the Australian community. In our view, the key response lies not in new programs directed at young people and other groups but in restoring the Church to a humble community pursuing the mission of Jesus to meet the needs of our world. Such an example will inspire many to join with us in pursuing this mission.

We are hoping to launch a discussion page on the sense of the faithful website to encourage an exchange of views on this issue. We hope you can find the time to follow the debates, and participate in it to the extent that you feel appropriate.

We recognise that you and your colleagues have a big task, but you embark on it with the backing of millions of Catholics, both in Australia and throughout the world. Australia is often asked to play above its weight, and our COVID-19 response showed that we can indeed do so. The Plenary Council 2021 is a great opportunity for the light from the Southern Cross to shine for the global community.

Be assured of our support and prayers always,

Yours sincerely,



Anne Marmion,
Chair

On behalf of the Editorial Committee¹
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