

## **Synod on the Family, Rome**

### **CCRI Forum October 2014**

#### **Women in decision-making in the Catholic Church: within the context of Evangelii Gaudium.**

Thank you for inviting me to talk to you about women in the Catholic Church, and particularly about women in decision-making in the Catholic Church.

I do so, as a woman of faith, a wife, a mother and grandmother as well as a health professional, a person of compassion, and as an activist.

I mention where I speak from because my life experience informs my view of issues for discussion at III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops : the Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the context of Evangelisation.

The views I express, together with millions of other men and women, are not likely to get much airing in a Synod of 250 celibate bishops. Half the world, the half most affected by these issues, are absent.

The topics raised in the synod include:  
contraception, divorce and remarriage, same gender marriage, premarital sex and in vitro fertilization.

We understand that responses from the laity to the preparatory document for the Synod on the Family questioned the Church's authoritarian teaching on all these issues.

One would expect then that the Synod in discussing these issues of concern to the faithful would be ensuring representation of husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, and same sex couples. We all know that this hasn't happened and even after considerable lobbying from the faithful we have a few observers chosen from a particular segment of our Church rather than representatives from a broad range of views.

The fact that women and men from across our Church have had no say in who represents them and that they are so underrepresented in a Synod that is making decisions about teachings that are absolutely central to their identity and lives, suggests that an exclusive and misogynistic culture of `clericalism` pervades our Church.

This culture of `clericalism` stands in stark contrast to Pope Francis's Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in which he urges us to work for peace and reduction and prevention of poverty.

His emphasis is on the gospel message of love, mercy and justice and invites us to engage with change and have the courage to say `yes` to inclusiveness, renewal, equality, dialogue and creativity.

And he also emphasizes the need to include women in decision-making and to draw on our gifts, recognizing our equality in baptism in Jesus Christ. So while the door to ordination is closed now, having women in decision-making would be a step towards opening the door to women's equality.

Pope Francis's Exhortation has given the `sensus fidelium` hope and has opened many minds to the possibilities of change but it is time to look at the **structures** that have caused such dysfunction in our Church.

Pope Francis understands that the `clerical culture` has been destructive to our Church. This culture which took hold in the 11C, has developed through an exclusive male priesthood and real absence of women's influence. History shows that from Christ's time onwards for nearly eleven centuries over a thousand years, there is concrete evidence of men and women ministering co-operatively and respectfully. Not just scattered references; ... if you do the research, and scholars have, it permeates our historical and archeological records. John Wijngaards (<http://www.womenpriests.org/wijngaards/website>).

Gary Macy's excellent book: *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination* makes accessible bibliographic references to and quotations from, both the original sources as well as secondary sources to support his claims and interpretations.

He states: `the effects of the Gregorian revolution were devastating, quoting McNamara, *it aimed at a Church virtually free of women at every level but the lowest stratum of the married laity.*` He notes that Allen concurs...`*women were reconceived as a quintessential danger to*

*men, irrational, unclean, sinful, passive and physically weak victims who tempted men to violate them` Macy P.126 2008.*

Father Ed Campion, former Professor of History, and Sydney Catholic priest in a presentation about `clericalism` in April this year, described how as the male ministry became more and more dominant in worship, their privileged status correspondingly grew until by the eleventh century the clergy were starting to develop a separate entity in society.

This growth accentuated the division between clergy and laity, giving the clergy power over other Christians.

`Clericalism` started to emerge and it was about privilege and power.

Pope Francis at Para.113p of the Exhortation says very clearly that *`Jesus did not form an exclusive and elite group`*.

`Clericalism` operates to exclude women and maintain inequality for women in the Church.

In terms of world peace and poverty, women and children are the most poor and the most effected by violence in our world. Women's equality is integral to world peace and prevention of poverty. There is plenty of data from our international NGO's like WHO, IMF, OECD that reflect this.

Universally the Church's stance on female inequality in decision-making within our Church (which is so influential in our world) works to legitimise other unjust treatment of women to the point of violence across the world.

The Catholic Church has the opportunity now to set the example for other faith groups and reduce violence and poverty for women and children, by starting to dedicatedly work for equality for women.

A balanced representation of women in decision-making would start to change this `clerical culture.` Women would bring new perspectives to the relationships between nature and culture, symbolism and ritual. This would lead to positive inclusion and a cultural transformation in addressing Church issues as well as world peace and poverty.

Pope Francis recognizes this when he says in Para 103 P.81

*`The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill*

*sets which they, more than men, tend to possess..... I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for more incisive female presence in the Church. Because “the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the of life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace” and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.*

In terms of women’s representation many of you would be aware that International Movement We Are Church IMWAC has written on two occasions to the Vatican for which they have never received a response. The first letter requested the Vatican to include women to lead Curial offices. The second was to ask that prominent women including Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland, a mother of three, with an MA in Canon Law and a Licentiate in Canon Law from the Gregorian University to attend the October Synod.

In August, we in Australia wrote again, on behalf of members of the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal ACCCR (which includes seven groups who are working for Church Renewal in Australia) as well as on behalf of IMWAC and Women’s Ordination Worldwide WOW.

In this letter, we reinforced IMWAC’s earlier suggestion of inviting Mary McAleese, but also added Kristina Keneally, former Premier of New South Wales, Australia, mother of three, with a Masters Degree in Systematic Theology. Both were prepared to represent mainstream women at the Synod.

We suggested that their involvement could be a first step to change the present imbalance in institutional culture and that we hoped it could lead to an ongoing international initiative to appoint prominent and appropriately qualified women from other countries particularly Asia, South America and Africa to some sort of group that could assist Pope Francis and the Vatican in implementing cultural change.

We also asked that the Vatican respond through our Papal Nuncio Archbishop Paul Gallagher. We received a response from the Vatican on 2 September 2014:

The letter simply said `he appreciates the thoughtfulness and interest which prompted you to write` we were not sure who the he was, it was not signed the title The General Secretary was typed on the bottom.

My first thought was has Pope Francis seen it? probably not, but the fact that we got a response, did reflect to some extent the messages Pope Francis is giving his bishops. I have written another letter in the spirit of Mary McAleese who like many a parent, speaking to their children said:

*`If I am yelling, it is because you didn't listen when I said it nicely`.*

We want to keep the discussion going on this initiative because such an international initiative would be a strong vehicle for creating cultural change in the Vatican.

So we all be watching carefully what comes out of this Synod and be ready to speak out on the media.... with a strong message about structural change, **women's participation in decision-making is not only a justice issue, it is a crucial governance issue.**

The Vatican ignoring and refusing to respond to the laity like this, creates a consciousness of oppression.

Jan Morgan quoting Brueggemann speaks of such a consciousness and of a false consciousness in her book, *Earth's Cry: Prophetic ministry in a more than human world*, 2013. *`False consciousness means a position where truth cannot be spoken, where deception and self-deception exist in the dominant form of a culture. Public institutions uphold a perception of denial, exhibit inability to critique their own life, and lack the capacity to acknowledge failure. The condition (created) is apathy, one in which pathos is forbidden. Numbness the embargo on `cry` is the desired mindset.`*

She notes: *`this consciousness characterizes those with power and the condition of those enslaved by the power of `silence`. This silence operates in `two direction simultaneously. Those being oppressed need to be kept silent, kept from protesting, kept from crying out. The oppressors need to silence criticism by denial of any criticism of misuse of power.P.75 Morgan 2013.*

This rings bells for me and I am sure for you and many of our bishops and priests.

She states that: *'The prophetic task... is understood, precisely as one of penetrating numbness, awakening passion.'* P.74. Morgan 2013.

Our renewal task is to penetrate `the numbness` and `to awaken the passion.` Many others are speaking out and acting against the effects of `clericalism` and for renewal.

Mary McAleese says *'We have to assist our bishops and priests to unlearn and self critique`.*

Joan Chittister says: what will we do if we are dismissed again!!!

Fr Roy Bourgoise: says once you know (about the Church's treatment of women), you have to break the silence.

Dr. Patricia Fresen former Dominican nun: says if a law is unjust, change it, if you can't change it you are duty bound to break it.

Canon 212. states : Christ's faithful have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the church.

Within the prophetic tradition *'The Israelites cry is a cry for help. Something is not right . The situation is one of oppression. (Exodus 1.11). Some human beings hold power over others, using it ways that disregard others.'* (P.73.Morgan 2013).

It is time for a primal cry from all of us, this can't go on and we can't keep waiting.

The laity has to act now and lead on renewal and women's participation in the Church, the stars are aligned in way they may not be again for a hundred years. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* is almost provoking us to rise up. This together with the awareness and warning created by the shocking child abuse, are triggers to change this `clerical culture' that is so destructive to women and children and all in the Church and evangelization.

We have to use the media and technology to get our message across:

**`Women's participation in decision-making in the Catholic Church is not only an issue of justice, it is an issue of good governance,` We want Pope Francis to hear and understand how important this is.**

Marilyn Hatton  
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