

# Catholics for Renewal Inc

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## A Small Voice, but No Votes:

### October Synod on the Family Remains a Clerical Affair

*11 September 2014* - A coalition of Catholic lay organisations has welcomed a Vatican announcement that women and married people will be invited to the Synod on the Family next month in Rome - but cautioned that the move did not represent any significant step towards real dialogue in the Catholic Church.

Yesterday the Vatican announced that 14 married couples, including 4 Australians, would join 240 mainly bishops and clerics at the Synod on the Family. However, only 'Synod Fathers' - that is, 192 bishops - will have a vote on formal proceedings. Only 25 women will participate, in a non-voting role.

Speaking on behalf of Catholics for Ministry (CfM), Women and the Australian Church, and Catholics for Renewal, Kristina Keneally acknowledged that the Vatican had taken a small step forward.

"We have been urging the Vatican to directly involve women and parents in the Synod. In that sense, we are pleased with the announcement yesterday.

"However, it is hardly a significant step forward. The 14 invited married couples seem to come from a narrow perspective, representing organisations that generally support existing doctrine – the very doctrine that has been soundly questioned in the recent survey of the people of the Church. In any event, lay participants will be significantly outnumbered by bishops, and will be denied any direct role in actual decision-making."

"I do not doubt the sincerity of faith of the select group of 14 married couples attending. But I do doubt that any of those lay people will raise issues that run counter to current Church teaching," Ms Keneally said.

Ms Keneally pointed to two issues – contraception, and the purpose of sexual activity in relationships – as examples where bishops and the invited lay participants to the Synod will not truly hear or discuss how the vast majority of Catholic families live their day-to-day lives.

"Natural family planning advocates dominate the small number of lay people attending. Meanwhile, a majority of Catholics in Australia and in many other countries have comprehensively rejected the Church's ban in artificial contraception."

Ms Keneally said that Catholics who use artificial contraception were not 'bad Catholics': "The celibate, ordained men putting the Synod together could have said 'Hey, there are lots of otherwise good Catholics ignoring what we say about sex, contraception and marriage. Maybe there's something we could learn if we talked to them.' Unfortunately that isn't what is happening at the Synod on the Family with this issue, or with divorce, or same sex relationships."

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*"(The Christian faithful) have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful." (Canon 212, 3)*

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Paul Collins, also a spokesperson for Catholics for Ministry, said the Catholic Church faces a structural challenge.

"The Vatican thinks its greatest issues are moral problems. Really, its greatest challenge is structural: as long as women, lay people and families are cut out of decision-making the Church will continue to be crippled by the clericalism and bad governance that wrought the Vatican Bank scandals and the child sexual abuse crisis."

"Sadly, the Vatican's decision on lay participation in the Synod on the Family only reinforces and continues the destructive influence of clericalism on the Catholic Church."

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