

Church in crisis: People of God are speaking, but not yet heard!

Newsletter 3, March 7, 2015

Hello Friend,



Church membership trends are clear, and in most of the Western world steeply downward. The Church is rapidly ageing as many young people walk away. To people of God committed to the teachings of Christ and wanting to help make the Church more Christ-like it's encouraging that Pope Francis advocates strongly what so many faithful **believe** to be the Church's necessary path to renewal. As people of faith we need to be forthright and to work collectively for renewal with all other people of God. To not do so would be to fail in our duty of faith.

The Church's dysfunctional system of governance- command and control, lacking accountability and inclusiveness, predominantly male with a culture that appears more concerned with reputation than Christ's mission and example - needs a fundamental overhaul to ensure a Christ-like focus listening to all the diverse people of the Church, the **sensus fidelium**. This need is tragically illustrated by the Church's at times immoral response to the disgrace of clerical child sexual abuse throughout the world. Present indications are that the Church, even Pope Francis' Pontifical Commission on the Protection of Minors, will continue a focus on process rather than examine the dysfunctional governance of the Church as an institution, governance that has allowed the Church, not just individual bishops, to tolerate and indeed effectively allow the sexual abuse of children. The institutional Church at all levels from the Pope down has failed to protect children.

Church history (see [Church Mutation](#)) like world history confirms that **renewal rarely comes easily and can only be achieved collectively**. Wise leaders understand that critics who are faithfully committed to the organisation's values are actually the best people to drive renewal.

Much **hope for wide engagement** was raised by the 2014 Extraordinary Synod on the Family, bringing some new life into the Church. However the Synod output, the Lineamenta, seemed to reverse the sense of openness and transparency that Pope Francis brought into that Synod, and worse still replaced it with a mechanism for effectively reaffirming the status quo. It runs the real risk of contributing to many more leaving the church, for much the same reasons that very many others before them have left, that the Church is inward looking and appears not to be truly listening to or understanding the lives of families today. Throwing further light on reasons for mass exodus from the Church, Catholics For Renewal member David Timbs publishes below the first of his four articles "The Great Disaffiliation, Part 1". Two immediate questions emerge from all of this:

What are the **consequences for the 2015 Synod on the Family of failure of the Lineamenta?**
What encouraging recent signs are emerging? Brief comments follow on both of these questions.



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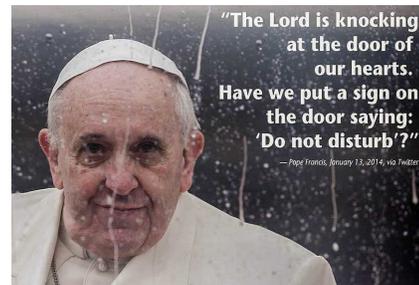


Lineamenta failure & consequences

Whatever the reasons for the failure of the Lineamenta to engage as intended, it's obvious from widespread negative reaction around the world that people aren't stupid. They understand Pope Francis's intent, and know that the Lineamenta doesn't serve it. Consequently some episcopal conferences have endeavoured to simplify the Lineamenta, and a raft of independent surveys that do respond to the spirit of the Extraordinary Synod have resulted. These are now well known and this Newsletter has joined with many other global renewal movements encouraging people to respond also to these alternative Questionnaires. Amongst these is the U.S. National Clergy group which has also developed its own Questionnaire. ***We continue to urge all to respond to the alternative surveys, already well publicised on our website and elsewhere.*** Each of these has been designed to help support Pope Francis and more comprehensively inform Synod 2015 delegates.

Some recent encouraging signs

In a News item of 10 January we reported The Australian Coalition For Church Renewal (ACCR) on behalf of Catholics for Renewal and other Australian renewal/reform groups wrote to the two Australian delegates to the October Synod 2015 about our Synod concerns. We have since received courteous and encouraging responses from Bishop Eugene Hurley and Archbishop Mark Coleridge, promising to ascertain and listen carefully to the views of their fellow people of God. We have already met with Bishop Hurley and hope to meet with both Bishop Hurley and Archbishop Coleridge shortly to discuss views expressed in our ***initial letter*** to them. In response to a global backlash against the Lineamenta several more dioceses in parts of the world have gone to greater effort to promote responses, and various cardinals have publicly indicated support for continuing the listening approach of Pope Francis. Whilst we have yet to see what happens as a consequence of Synod 2015 these indications together with the positive indications from Pope Francis offer further encouragement and hope for a future Church that is more Christ-like.



Looking back over the last few years, public inputs, including from Catholics For Renewal, have been instrumental to the Royal Commission and other landmark work around the world towards addressing the horror of child sexual abuse by clerics and religious. Looking beyond the 2015 Family Synod we will continue to seek diocesan synods throughout Australia leading to a national synod which will draw on the ***sensus fidelium*** of the Australian people of the Church, in accordance with the teaching of Vatican II.



The Great Disaffiliation, Part 1

Extract from a short paper by David Timbs, 1 March 2015

.....There are many explanations for this massive exodus from Catholic pews during just over sixty years. Beginning with this article and continuing until June, I will offer some analysis of what has become a disastrous situation for the Western membership of the Church and particularly for Catholics in Australia.....(Read David's full paper [here](#), or download a copy [here](#)). David Timbs is a member of Catholics For Renewal

News and Opinion Pieces

Extracts from the following may be read [here](#)

- Pope backs Cardinal Pell with new financial statutes
- Francis picks McElroy, known for mercy emphasis, to lead San Diego diocese
- US diocese asks parishioners to fund priest training
- A church for the poor, not a 'pure' church
- International church group enters synod fray with 'alternative' survey
- Pope Francis sends clergy off to management lessons
- U.S. National clergy group launches its own synod questionnaire
- Strong Catholic Families offers simplified survey for family synod
- Francis' theological spokesman Walter Kasper publishes new book on pope
- Brisbane Archdiocese to strengthen child protection policies
- Most US dioceses consult Catholics on family issues for fall synod
- Vatican event seeks to gently push Francis on women's roles
- Issue of ordaining married men in my diary, Pope reportedly tells Rome priests
- Pope Francis' reform of the Roman Curia is moving too slowly

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