

An Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal

‘For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them’ (Matthew 18:20)

PO Box 4053,
Manuka. ACT. 2603

3 January 2015.
Most Rev. Mark Coleridge, DD BA DSS,
Archbishop of Brisbane,
The Francis Rush Centre,
277 Elizabeth St.,
Brisbane. QLD. 4000.

Dear Archbishop Mark,

We write to you as the elected episcopal representative of the Church in Australia at the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015. We welcome the Synod, and we are encouraged by Pope Francis’ determination to involve all the faithful, reflecting Vatican II’s vision for transparent, accountable and inclusive governance.

Pope Francis has called for a *communal search* in “re-thinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation” at the local level (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n33). He wants bishops to encourage and develop the means of participation with “*the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone*” (*EG*, n31). In supporting this communal search for the Australian *sensus fidelium*, we highlight some challenges and questions on which we would appreciate your response.

The first challenge is **evangelisation and inclusiveness**. The 2011 Census recorded 5.4 million Australian Catholics (ABS), yet the ACBC’s Pastoral Research Office found that only 662,000 (12.25%) were in contact with the Church through regular Mass attendance (*Mass attendance in Australia: A critical moment*, December 2013). The reflections of the 87.8 percent described as ‘drifting away’, often because of the doctrinal and pastoral issues at the core of the Synod, are critical and need to be heard. The voices of Catholics in rural areas, where parishes are being closed and the Eucharist is rarely available, must also be sought and heard. Do you intend to reach this wider Catholic audience in the communal search and synodal reflection?

The second challenge is **the *Lineamenta*** itself. This highly complex document is not readily accessible and most unlikely to elicit useful reflections. The survey devised by the Archdiocese of Melbourne is also unlikely to engage the faithful. Indeed, such complex matters require a facilitated process of discussion at the parish level. Do you plan a form of communal search that might garner a better response from the faithful?

The third challenge is what the *Lineamenta* refers to as ‘**missing aspects**’.

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Evangelisation and pastoral care of the family are particularly threatened by the Church's non-accountable system of governance that does not listen effectively to the faithful, with structures that can detract from a Christ-like culture. The Synod on the Family has not yet addressed these governance problems that impact all decision-making and which are a major cause of so many Catholics 'drifting away'. The Pastoral Research Office report *Catholics who have stopped attending Mass* (February 2007, Ch. 6) indicates that even regular Mass attendees may disappear from Church life unless new pastoral strategies with more accountable, inclusive and transparent structures and culture are developed and implemented. Are plans being developed to address these governance issues and appropriate pastoral strategies?

Pope Francis writes that women are "needed in all expressions in the life of society . . . (and) the presence of women must also be guaranteed in . . . settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures" (*EG*, n103). Yet the *Lineamenta* gives scant attention to the faith formation role of mothers and wives, and women's constrained role in the Church. Nor does it adequately recognise the heroism of those women raising and educating their children as single parents, or the scourge of violence against women in families. In Australia, 22% of all families with children under 15 years in 2004–2006 are one-parent families (ABS, Australian Social Trends, 2007), and 23% of all women in a marriage or *de facto* relationship have experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship (ABS, 1996). The Church's attitude to women's equality continues to undermine the status of women across the world, sadly legitimising in the minds of some offenders their unjust treatment to the point of violence. Will you seek to have these matters critical to the interests of women in families included on the Synod agenda?

The *Lineamenta* makes no mention of the damage done to families by the sexual abuse of children by clerics and religious, by the breaching of trust, and by the cover-ups by some bishops. This damage to families and its causes must be faced by the Synod, which has to confront a governance system and clerical culture that failed not only the abused children but their families as well, and worse, exposed further children to harm. Can you ensure that these issues are recognised in the ACBC's input to the Synod?

The final challenge is **a more representative lay presence** at the 2015 synod. The lay presence at the 2014 synod was positive, but not sufficiently representative of the diversity of families. Will you advocate for a large presence of men and women, mothers and fathers and gay parents at the Ordinary Assembly and whom will you consult for Australian lay representatives?

The *Lineamenta* urges episcopal conferences to "choose a suitable manner of involving all components of the particular churches" including academic institutions. We are disappointed that to date our academic institutions have not provided leadership in breaking open theologically many of the issues that concern couples and parents, such as contraception, cohabitation, and admission to the sacraments after divorce and remarriage. Catholics want to

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understand what lies behind the Church's teaching and practice on such issues, and the possibilities for change. Will you encourage these institutions to involve themselves much more in engaging a better-informed and more reflective faithful?

ACCCR is an alliance of lay movements across Australia seeking renewal of Christ's Church. Please know that you have the support and prayers of us all as you enter the doors Pope Francis has opened. We would appreciate your early response to our questions.

We are writing in similar terms to your brother bishop Eugene, also elected to represent the Church in Australia at the Synod.

Yours in Christ,

Marilyn Hatton

Convenor

on behalf of Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal (ACCCR)

Cc: [Rev Mgr John Kallarackal](#), Chargé d'Affaires, [Apostolic Nunciature](#)

The ACCCR Coalition includes Catholics for Ministry (CfM), Women and the Australian Church (WATAC), Catholics for Renewal (CathfR), Inclusive Catholics (IC), the Friendship Group, Aggiornamento, Australian Reforming Catholics (ARC), Cyber Christian Community. Each of the groups has its own focus and history, but all are united in the call for Church renewal.

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PO Box 4053,
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3 January 2015.

Most Rev. D. Eugene Hurley DD,
Bishop of Darwin,
2 St John’s Court,
The Gardens. NT. 0820.

Dear Bishop Eugene,

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