

2015 SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Response by Mercy Associates, Ballarat. February 7, 2015 – involved were 9 Associates; four women and two men.

The group could not affirm the document

Q/ What did we AFFIRM in the document?

The group found the document to be canonically driven and was presented in language and a format that was too complicated.

- We stress the need for a document that is in language easily read by the ordinary lay persons, and also that is user friendly, suggest multiple choice questions.

A broader representation of people from diverse situations is desired in planning the document, for example, a married woman, a mother of children from a broad age range, a single mother and a single father caring for children.

Q/ What do we have difficulty with?

- Language; not easily understood by the average person
- Strong emphasis on canon law
- Narrow definition of marriage and the family
- Marriage is viewed in legal terms. Wish to emphasize that what is at the heart of a marriage is love that is nurturing, forging, and that reaches out to the community.

What is suggested for improvements in the pastoral role of the Church?

- To create an “open door: welcoming atmosphere that encompasses people in various types of life situations
- Plan times to celebrate the friendship, the acceptance, and the love that is already among the people
- Create parish groups with a specific focus and are facilitated by trained leaders
- A parish focus on educating and training parish leaders
- Maintain close links with local agencies, especially church agencies, that provide resources for enriching marriage and family life.
- Establish an outreach plan that contacts and welcomes people not in touch with parish life

What are the ideas for ACTION in our community?

- Recognise the SPIRIT at work in the domestic church – listen to the people of all ages and those outside the churches. Harness the power of the people within the church
- Hear the voices, the problems, the yearnings, the hopes, of those both inside and outside the church and establish help and faith and life enrichment groups

- There is need to re-write the definition of the family, this has not been done in the recent statement by the Australian Bishops. We yearn for the openness that Pope Francis preaches.
We are longing for a church of the people.

There has been much sustained hurt in many families over generations because of a disregard of family violence, of a legal approach to separation and divorce, of sexual abuse by clergy, of a judgmental approach to homosexuality, all of these hurts exist in our church community and rarely are they addressed.

A definition of marriage within our church community, we suggest, includes Christians living together in love (God is not present in a marriage where there is a lack of love, and especially violence). Nurturing each other and enriching lives.

Concern was expressed at the confusion for the people caused by the backward steps taken by recently ordained priests and the example of numbers seminarians receiving communion on the tongue and refusing the chalice.

Concerned also about the presentation of the Gospel message with emphasis on a judging./punishing God. The God of love and forgiveness is too often not mentioned.

We (Mercy Associates) think there is need for a parish outreach that will encompass and heal these families.

Definition of the family

There has been a massive change in the definition and lived experience and attitude to marriage and family life

Acknowledgment of this change is not evident in the Synod document and the consultation, therefore, it is outside the interest of the people in our parishes, This, unfortunately, widens the gap between church and people.

We read in the recent Sunday reading from Paul to the Corinthians the model for us in which he was the messenger of the Gospel of salvation and fulfilment
We are the disciples who must bring the good news to the broken hearted, to those who are enslaved, to those who are weak.

According to Paul, we are the ones who will then share in the blessings of this good news.

We are looking for a document that opens our minds and hearts to the riches of the message of God and at the same time challenges us to make that message live in our lives, in our parishes and out beyond the doors of the church.