

## **A MERBEIN PARISH CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2015 SYNOD ON THE FAMILY**

To Bishop Paul Bird CSsR  
Bishop of Ballarat

Dear Bishop Paul,

Please convey our appreciation to the Holy Father for his willingness to open this important debate.

While the Church must continue to be the rock in terms of our values and beliefs, their expression must take account of a rapidly changing world.

To do otherwise threatens irrelevance and exclusion.

That said, our contribution to this debate is necessarily compromised by both the time frame for responses and the predisposition of some questions.

Those limitations compel us to focus on just three issues which we respectfully submit go to the heart of the debate in general.

### **1. Children are best nurtured in a loving and caring family**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Families take many forms and it cannot be argued that mixed marriages or “irregular unions” are incapable of providing love and care. (we struggle to understand the definition of the terms, “irregular unions”, “mixed marriage,” and “natural marriages”)

The Church should seek to define families in ways which accommodate and include a diversity which reflects the customs of present day society.

Throughout the centuries the customs of celebrating marriage has changed from generations and in the customs of various cultures.

Families throughout the centuries have changed, and to steadfastly hold to a particular stereo type is to ignore this reality.

Children have a right to grow in a loving and nurturing family. God is love.

Children who experience violence, threatening anger and servitude in family life become the victims of neglect, fear and unhappiness.; and often continue that pattern of learned behaviour in adult life.

### **2. Most marriages have the ability to fail. In some cases failure may be the only way of protecting vulnerable and defenceless members.**

Adherence to the notion of “indissolubility” is blind to reality and potentially a sentence which can exclude hurt and suffering souls from the family of God.

A loveless and sometimes violent relationship cannot be called a marriage. When a “marriage” has ceased to be a marriage, the persons should not be excluded from full communion within the Catholic community. (Jesus told us, “Come to me you who labour and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest.”)

Effective, supportive and respectful counselling from our Church leaders should replace judgemental exclusion.

**3. If the Church through its ministry is to be fully understanding and effective in its support for families, it ought not deprive its front line servants of a full family experience.**

We learn about families by growing up in families.

While electing to be single and celibate does not disqualify individuals from effective and meaningful service, compulsory adherence to such a life will necessarily present barriers for many.

Empathy and understanding are products of a lived experience and it's difficult to see how someone without a partner and the responsibility of offspring can completely understand the needs of families in crisis.

**4. REPRESENTATION AT THE SYNOD:**

It is our hope that people from various experiences of marriage and family life will be given a voice at the Synod.

Group Response:

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish.

Merbein.

February 2015.