SOME THOUGHTS FROM VOCAL

**ARRRC: WORKING TOGETHER**

**WHAT TO DO**

* Together
* Here
* Now

We have been gifted with an almost unique opportunity in the history of the Catholic Church in Australia. Most of the time we see the challenges, the difficulties, the unfairness, the hurt.

We try to do what we can with our gifts. But that disheartened mood, that hurt which so many have carried for so long is reopened regularly by those who represent power and authority.

So easy to just walk away. Time for the next generation to make what they might of it all, if anything. Too old; too tired; fresh minds might do better.

Then again, what’s coming from some of the “fresh minds” is as big a worry as the words actions and inactions of those with power and authority.

And we are reminded that the Catholic world is watching from places and countries where reform minded clerics and laity see us as “the lucky country”. It’s not easy.

**NOW IS THE ONLY TIME WE HAVE**

Many have put a lot of time and love and prayer and gifts and energy into their preparation for this time. I am a newcomer encouraged by you.

I really think that whatever else you thought you were doing over decades, the reality is that you have prepared for today.

The 19 member organisations of ARRRC and the memberships are the tip of an iceberg, Catholic and not, whose Australian world desperately needs the fruits of this Plenary tree. We have a world with many troubles.

We all gather on Zoom (previously in person) because we are focused on particular things, often injustices which we have experienced in one way or another. The experience might be our own or that of others. Nevertheless, we have been called to employ our giftedness in its cure. And that cure is the words and example of Jesus Christ. That is the essence that makes us one.

And one within a universal community of likeminded and inspired people.

In many places (in Australia and beyond), our companions feel isolated, alone, rejected, estranged, without pastoral support from their communities, laity and clergy.

We are so lucky we have each other. And that carries a price, an obligation. We are able to do what so many others can’t. Every day, good people, hanging onto the institutional church by their fingernails, let go. We all know them. Good people abandoned in their struggle to walk the path of Jesus Christ. Where is the love?

**THE AUSTRALIAN PLENARY**

The agenda is huge; too big; unmanageable; full of ambiguity; secret agenda’s; technicalities; canon law etc. etc.

It is hugely influenced by the sexual abuse scandal of the Catholic Church in Australia and the issues identified by the Royal Commission.

Many clergy and laity alike are shackled by fear, unable to open up to the Spirit, the heed the words and example of Pope Francis to open our hearts and minds, to discern, to take time, to set the truth.

And many of us have our pet topics and priorities.

**HOW TO MAKE PROGRESS TOGETHER**

I was a teenager in Catholic school at the time of John XXIII and Vatican II. I remember the excitement of it all and the next ten years or so as I moved into University and a few Catholic organisations. In my recollection, I can’t separate this feeling from that created by the election of JFK.

And now I experience a similar feeling with Francis I.

I believe that the pace and direction of reform in our universal Church is a reality. It may not be at a pace that satisfies all or a direction that, as yet, is completely clear. Will it ever be.

But the wind is stirring. In Australia, we need to pick the direction, set the sails and join the crew.

The priorities of change indicated by Pope Francis are clearly not attractive to much of the ordained leadership of the Australian church. Where is the realignment of resources and priorities?

Aligning the Catholic Church in Australia with the emphasis and priorities and words and actions of Pope Francis as expressed in his major encyclicals and beyond would be a great start in the path we must walk.

**A CHANGE OF APPROACH**

So instead of pulling together a list from our submissions thus far to the Plenary, and using it as a future agenda for ARRRC, what we could do is identify our Agenda in the words and priorities of Pope Francis.

That does not mean abandoning anything in our seperate organisations or as individuals. It does not mean that we don’t advocate for other changes from our organisations or by way of personal submission.

What it does mean is that we commit ARRRC to an initial program, in the context of the Plenary, of REALLY aligning the Church in Australia with Francis. The attractions are obvious; if we can’t achieve that objective, we won’t achieve any.

We can state it simply.

*TO REMAKE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA AS A FRANCIS CHURCH*

**WHAT DO I THINK OF AS EXAMPLES OF A FRANCIS CHURCH.**

The starting point is somewhat obvious. It’s to implement and contemporise Vatican II 60 years on.

For the more specific others and in no particular order 9 and not comprehensive):

1. Prioritise for the Australian church the core messages and methods of the encyclicals and letters of Pope Francis including Laudato Si, Fratelli Tutti, Amoris Laetitia and Evangelli Gaudium. And the messages in “LET US DREAM”
2. Embrace
   1. Synodality
   2. Subsidiarity
3. Reject clericalism in all of its manifestations.
4. Focus on and advocate, teach and prioritise for all of the people of God in Australia to live mercy at the margins/ periphery; this includes changing our Church to be one which is and is seen as genuinely welcoming all people and caring for our common home.
5. Open the Church to encourage and enable all people to live and use the gifts God has given them including lay leadership.
6. Recognise the changed needs for pastoral and ordained leadership of the Church and Catholics generally in Australia and find Australian solutions (in a similar way to the Amazonia Synod and its documents)
7. In everything, put first the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ.

So maybe for the greater good of all, we can reprioritise to take the most achievable first steps in the REFORMATION of the Australian Catholic Church.

**THE EXAMPLE OF OTHERS**

Over Christmas, I read a short book entitled “ Parting Words”; it’s about the lessons from the remarkable life of Benjamin Ferencz.

I quote from a part of it.

“ *When I embarked on my crusade to create an international court, I was perfectly aware that I was not likely to see it working perfectly in my lifetime. It takes more than one lifetime to reverse something that’s been glorified for years. But just the awareness that I could make an improvement, that I could push the rock a little further up the hill was enough for me. There are three lessons I hope you’ll take from this:*

***ONE:*** *Something can be worth doing even if you’re not around to see the end result or reap the rewards. It is a noble goal to want to do something that other people will benefit from, and it should be natural to want that for our successors. I don’t just mean after you leave this life, I mean after you leave a job, or a governing body, or a school.*

***ACT IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE WHO WILL INHERIT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE***

***TWO:*** *No person is an island. You cannot do it all*

***TEAMS, COMMUNITIES, FRIENDS ARE KEY TO OUR ONGOING AND HOPEFULLY EVERLASTING SUCCESSES***

***AND THREE:*** *Don’t be distracted by speed. Remember the Tortoise and the Hare fable*

***NOT EVERYTHING GOOD CAN BE ACHIEVED QUICKLY AND BEING FAST DOESN’T GUARANTEE SUCCESS.***

*Quests for change don’t exhaust me. Don’t let whatever you care about changing exhaust you either if you feel the reward is worth it. The hope of changing people’s minds about war has kept me going for almost seventy-five years.*

*How long change takes depends on how long the thing you’re changing has been in place. It was always going to be difficult to turn around in one human lifetime something which has been glorified for centuries ”*

**TO CONCLUDE**

To be effective, one of the things we need is a key message acceptable to all and easily understood.

*TO REMAKE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA AS A FRANCIS CHURCH* is one such message.

Yes, the devil may be in the detail. We don’t start with or be stymied by the detail. The image grabs the imagination, warms the soul, unites us, gives us an agenda and challenges much of the opposition.

What do you think?

*Michael Gill for Vocal*

*New Year’s Eve 2020*