

5 October 2021

## Inclusion – 5 October 2021

### Blog by Francis Sullivan, CSSA Chair

Today's sessions enabled more participants to have a say. Passionate, heartfelt interventions on a range of issues so typical of a 'Catholic free for all'! It was heartening to hear members raise concerns over the participation of women, the outreach to new Australians and the missionary agenda for the Church.

However, what struck me most starkly were the voices that have been effectively silenced in the Plenary's Agenda. This was even more clear to me after our small group session of Scripture reflection.

As it stands, we are not being directed to seriously contemplate the plight of the LGBTIQ+ people in the Church. This raises distinctive issues that need attention. The experiences of 'rainbow' people in our Church have been fraught and still are overshadowed by discrimination, even exclusion.

The residue of the same-sex marriage debate still lingers, as do the unresolved pastoral matters of access to the sacraments, including the Eucharist. For some Catholics, this is a bridge too far and they resist any practical measures that would seem to 'change Church teachings'.

But, is this the heart of the Gospel? Is our Church practice consistent with the Gospel?

From my perspective, we have a lot to learn from wider society. The stigma and barriers surrounding LGBTIQ+ people have been rapidly dismantling in recent years as enlightened understandings are assimilated.

The respect for diversity in personal development and human relationships has led to more harmonious and healthy attitudes. The insistence on the non-discriminatory treatment of people based on sex, gender and religion has contributed to more inclusive authentic communities.

Yet, the Church runs the risk of leaving LGBTIQ+ people at the margins. Rather than meeting them there and bringing them into the fold with the promise of full participation, they remain 'off the agenda', left in the 'too hard basket'.

Like many practising Catholics, this issue is close to my heart through the experiences of my own family.

Whether they realise it or not, the tone and impact of the language of Church spokespersons and others declaring what they call 'Church teachings', is judgemental, demeaning and hurtful.

It is simply not enough to say that everyone is loved by God and then draw a line in the sand over the full participation in the faith community of our 'rainbow' sisters and brothers, daughters and sons, grandchildren and friends.

Francis Sullivan