



**WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE AGENCY SPOKE POWERFULLY –
THURSDAY, 7 JULY 2022**

7 July 2022

Blog by Francis Sullivan, CSSA Chair

Today at the Assembly the atmosphere was markedly different. So too was the program. The organisers had adjusted the process to make it more participatory and transparent. Members were given the opportunity to openly express concerns over the draft motions and suggest amendments from the floor. This would not have occurred without the events of yesterday that saw many of the women members stage an open protest by the decision of the bishops to effectively deny moves to witness equality of dignity between women and men in the Church.

And it is important to correct the record about those events. News reports incorrectly attributed the organising of a lunchtime meeting of members to discuss the morning's events and their implications to me and my friend John Warhurst.


To be clear, the women members organised for themselves not only a venue to meet at the lunch break but also to conduct a facilitated conversation and report back to the full Assembly the summary of those discussions. It was the force of their collective agency that spoke so powerfully throughout the course of yesterday and into the reconfigured program of today. So many members, including bishops and other clergy, mentioned to me how crucial yesterday's protest and demonstration of anger and upset has been to the potential success of the Assembly.

As we convened this morning the words of the daily scriptural reflection were not lost on anyone: Acts 2:2-4a:

'And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.'

The passion and energy that erupted through the heartfelt reaction of most women members has literally changed the dynamics and possibly the outcomes of this Plenary Council. Why? Because it will be women that will ultimately drive this reform in our Church. Left with their own decision the bishops seemed incapable of doing it. And it is becoming increasingly clear that women will no longer tolerate their unjust treatment.

If this Second Assembly does not rise to the challenge to ensure that women are treated and regarded with equal dignity and rights to those of men in the Church, then I think history will record yesterday as the day so many more gave up on there ever being the prospect that the Church's rhetoric of equality of dignity for all will ever eventuate.



Already the Bishops decision to vote down motions that would have advanced the equality of women in the Church have received international media coverage. A decision that is seared into the public's imagination. Only a decision of equal force can counter what now looks like blatant disregard for women's dignity and rights.

The bishops will have before them motions that effect participation in governance structures and even opening access for women to be ordained as deacons if Church law permits. There won't be a bishop in tomorrow's Assembly who will not have registered the import of their vote.

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