

6 October 2021

## The Journey – 6 October 2021

**Blog by Francis Sullivan, CSSA Chair**

Today more than any other, brought home to me that we are just four days into a 9-month journey. The Councillors are becoming more familiar with the listening process, and probably if they are like me, more patient in how resolutions and final motions will be developed. As it happens the Plenary Council President, Archbishop Tim Costelloe, made it clear that final motions will be voted on in the next Assembly listed for July 2022. He encouraged the drafting of resolutions now. So, the heat is on to craft some tangible proposals or miss out on advancing issues that the Steering Group will in turn sift.

This is where the rubber hits the road. Obviously, the Steering Group is key and so too are the criteria they will use to assess whether a resolution can be morphed into a formal motion. Issues of Church law, doctrine and pastoral practice evidently form the basis of that determination. I hope this doesn't mean that proposals to amend, even change Church positions will not be discounted outright. We need to test a range of issues within the full Assembly: increasing influential participation of women, expanding inclusion of the laity in governance, stripping our culture of the toxic influence of clericalism, and overtly bringing about our communion with LGBTIQ+ people. To do less than these things means we would have failed.

I could not let the day pass without mentioning the devastating reports of the Independent Commission into the sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church of France. An estimated 216,000 children suffered abuse and the French Church was described as showing 'cruel indifference'. As one Councillor and friend said to me today, he struggled to breathe after hearing the reports.

It can sound trite, but here we go again! The French bishops ask for forgiveness and promise to act. It has a familiar ring to it. We must act with resolve and definitively. We must resist any temptation to 'put the scandal behind us and move on'. That is too defensive, too self-protective, too institution focussed. Unless those who have been abused and those who have been traumatised by this scandal can experience real atonement from the Church, then the scandal has not been properly faced.

Tomorrow the Council will have a special plenary concentrating on the hurt caused and the abuse perpetrated by the Church. On behalf of us all, the Plenary Council needs to speak loudly and compassionately to those we know have been victims and to those who silently look from afar. And actions speak the loudest.