



GETTING REAL – WEDNESDAY, 6 JULY 2022

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Blog by Francis Sullivan, CSSA Chair

Well, things got real today! As the canon law prescribes, for Plenary Councils, only the bishops cast what, in effect, is a decisive vote. Everyone else casts a consultative vote. In other words, the bishops can overturn what the others have previously decided. The hierarchical Church in full swing!

Today, the bishops kicked an own goal. They voted down motions related to the equality of dignity between women and men. Motions that included the possibility of women becoming deacons if Pope Francis paves the way. Other motions would have recognised the power imbalance that impacts women and the cultural assumptions within the Church that lead to inequalities for women. Significant acknowledgements that have not been made before by the Australian Church. And it looked like they would not be made again anytime soon.

Thankfully, the reaction from the Assembly members was visceral. Many female members were visibly upset and angry. The bishops appeared non-plussed and then rattled. Why so still puzzles me. The fact that this Plenary Council process has spent years consulting women and men and then have an episcopal vote effectively eradicates the major section of the Plenary's deliberations on women and men defies logic. Yet that is exactly what was delivered and what sparked a spontaneous revolt.

By any count, the members of this Plenary Council are rusted on and loyal Catholics. They have committed to the Plenary process and have a considerable emotional investment in its success. That they were prepared to stand up to the bishops and protest speaks to the point at which we have arrived. Enough is enough.

The Canon law describes a plenary council as a meeting of the churches. It is not a meeting of the bishops. Well, today, that was made very plain as the members, particularly the women, drew a line in the sand. This Plenary is not about episcopal control and preferences. It is meant to be about the decisions taken by all the members. And those members have become very exercised that the voices captured through the 17,000 plus submissions and the dialogue and listening sessions, along with the feedback through the thematic papers, needs to be heard in the deliberations of this Second Assembly.

So far, the motions before the Assembly can at best be described as tame. They have been crafted to pass any episcopal muster. Inoffensive, cautious, and taking the important issues effectively nowhere. Clearly, the members don't wish to be associated with what has the potential to be a 'non-event'. Already the Council is not on the radar of the Catholic community. Delivering what would be 'business as usual' would be an embarrassment.

The protest this morning did stir the pot and force a change of plan. The bishops hurriedly convened a meeting that had the effect of postponing the day's work schedule and revisiting the previous day's



motions. The members were gracious enough to stay with the process in good faith even though the bishops did not reveal why they chose to vote down the motions that led to the fracas.

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