

Dear Sister Nathalie Becquart,

We are a group of "older" women from several parishes in the southern suburbs of Sydney, NSW, Australia. We have accepted Pope Francis' invitation to respond directly to the Vatican, through you. We do this because lay people have difficulty being heard in the hierarchical structure of Australian Catholicism. Our submission is very brief as we think that is more convenient for you.

Our submission -

CLERICALISM - the basis of many problems. An educated laity needs no oversight by a priest. He does not "own" the parish, nor have the right or competence to judge individual conscience (example - contraception).

GOVERNANCE AND SHARED LEADERSHIP. Elected Pastoral Councils should not be at the whim of the priest. Councils need a role in decision-making in matters that concern both parish and diocese. All parishes need an AGM providing **TRANSPARENCY**.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE LAITY. A world-wide shortage of priests and still the role of the laity is ignored. Surely, lay people can perform Baptisms, facilitate marriage and conduct funeral services, as well as performing leadership roles in all aspects of parish life.

MARRIED CLERGY. Essential to connect priests to *real life*. Links to the issue of **Sexual Abuse** - a father of children would **NOT** "cover up" the crime. History tells us that the common reaction of clergy has been to "protect" their friendship group. **And the little children (continue) to suffer and suffer.**

ROLE OF WOMEN. Women's skills and knowledge are ignored. Women are "allowed" to take part in some aspects of church life (example - lector), but not allowed an opinion - so many wasted opportunities, so much wasted talent.

EQUALITY FOR ALL - Divorced, LGBTQI and other marginalised groups, should be **INCLUDED** in **ALL** aspects of church life.

DECLINING ATTENDANCE. The English translation of the Mass is awkward and clumsy. Older people remain out of lifetime habit. Younger people find no real relevance to their lives, **YOUTH** find attendance "boring" - dreary irrelevant sermons and dreary music (if any) - no connection to their lives. Sense of community of the past has disappeared,

THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND DOGMA. Early theologians philosophised about the meaning of Sacred Texts and interpreted them in the context of their **times** and their experience. It is absurd that these ideas of **men** from early times be turned into **Dogma** governing life at this time in this place. Make our theology relevant to the educated, science-oriented people of the 21st century.

Briefly - We need/we want INCLUSION, TRANSPARENCY, EQUALITY, RELEVANCE

We thank you for your time and would appreciate advice that this submission has been received and read. Our prayers are with you, Sister Nathalie, for the success of this enormous task that rests on your shoulders.