

ACI SUBMISSION DOCUMENT
TO THE
SYNOD ON THE FAMILY
2015

**Synod on the Family
Consultation**

Following Christ,
Changing Church

association
of catholics
in ireland



**Regency Hotel
Drumcondra, Dublin
Sat 21st March 2015
from 10-30am**

CONSULTATION WITH MEMBERS OF ACI AND
WIDER COMMUNITY OF CATHOLICS

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Introduction

The Association of Catholic's in Ireland (ACI) hosted an open forum in the Regency Hotel, Dublin on the 21st of March 2015. The aim of the conference was to facilitate dialogue and to develop submissions to the Synod on the Family from ACI members and from Catholic communities. The delegates travelled to the conference from throughout Ireland, from Belfast to Cork and many places in between. This report aims to capture the essence of the dialogue that ensued amongst the delegates. It presents their views on and responses to the questions posed in the Lineamenta. Dr. Margaret Nugent, (D.Ed) facilitated the open forum process and collated this report. This report represents the voices of the 50 delegates who engaged in deep dialogue on the Synod of the Family.

ACI formulated 8 themes that were considered important to address during the conference. The themes were taken directly from the Lineamenta. The 8 themes are outlined below:

- Marriage breakdown, social, economic factors, pastoral issues;
- The status of different 'second relationships' and access to the sacraments for those in 'second relationships';
- The annulment process, options for widening and simplifying the process;
- Issues surrounding co-habitation;
- Humanae Vitae and family planning;
- Same sex relationships, the sacraments, pastoral support;
- Possible pastoral responses to the identified problems and issues impacting on the various forms of 'family';
- Family and Faith: What support does the Family need in developing and spreading the Faith?

The key questions deemed appropriate to be addressed in this conference were drawn from Fr. Aidan Ryan of Ardagh and Clomacnoise who provided a summary of the questions for the *Furrow* magazine. The number references are taken from the Lineamenta. The questions are simplified.

- Q 10. How are people being helped to see the value of lifelong commitment in marriage.
- Q 11. How can people be helped to see how faith in God can enrich marriage and sustain couples in lifelong love.
- Q 22. How can couples that live together be encouraged to consider marriage.
- Q 31. How can couples that are recently married be supported
- Q 35. When are families most in need of help? How can they best be helped when life is difficult.
- Q 40. How can we support gay people and their families.
- Q 46. How can we help and motivate parents in passing on the faith to their children.

The themes and questions posed provide an overview of the context that was set for the day. The process adopted was Open Space Technology. ACI wish to hear the voices of the Catholic communities and the open space process allows the delegates to raise the issues that are important to them and to set the agenda rather than operating within a prescribed context. This prevented an overly formulaic and structured approach, and allowed delegates to air their concerns without boundaries. The aim of this process is to support the work of the Synod on the Family, make observations as to the governance and decision making capacity of the synod and address relevant themes that were not mentioned in the Lineamenta. The following sections of the report present the responses to the themes and questions that were raised by ACI at the outset. It describes the additional topics that were raised by delegates and debated in workshops. It provides an insight into the priority setting of the themes.

Personal Narratives

A number of personal narratives were written and shared by delegates to set the context and ambiance of the day. The narratives are shared here in order to provide a glimpse into the personal responses to the Synod on the Family. The narratives bring alive, for the reader who was not present at the consultation, the impact that the decisions made and the language used in the Lineamenta has on the lives of people directly affected by it. The names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Matthew's story

When invited to speak today, I received some email correspondence outlining the purpose of the day and a short brief regarding this ten-minute talk. The brief was to speak about my lived experience, (as a gay man), of church in the context of current teaching, of surviving on the margins of the church because of my particular personal circumstances. Let me begin by saying that I am most definitely not 'on the margins' of the church. I am very much at the center and at the heart of my church. I am an equal member of the Christian community. However, the church or should I say the institutional church might like me to be 'on the margins', in fact they might wish for me to go away altogether. My lived experience of church is interesting, at times complicated, but always deeply fulfilling and rewarding. I was raised in a very traditional devout catholic family. The Catholic Church was part of our home. My father was a reader in the church, later a minister of the Eucharist. Local clergy were regular visitors to our home. My parents were and are religious people, people of faith, faith that was passed onto me as a very precious gift. From the age of 16 I felt called to the priesthood, to cut a long story short, I finished school and at the age of 18 entered the seminary, seven years later I was ordained. I ministered in this diocese for eight years, when at the age of 32 I came out to myself as a gay man. From here my lived experience of church changes. I took time out from ministry to try and reconcile being a minister of a church that was so negative and opposed towards

gay people and being a gay man. After two years I made a deeply painful decision to leave ministry, for I could not find such reconciliation. In the years since leaving ministry I have reconciled my faith and my sexuality, of being a member of the Catholic Church and of being gay. While I have had time to come to my own personal position of faith, of reconciliation, of being both gay and catholic, others may not have had the same opportunity to travel that journey and the questions I am asked more than any other are; 'How can you be gay and be a practicing catholic'? Quickly followed by; 'why do you even want to be part of a church that clearly does not want you'? These questions are asked in equal amounts of shock, alarm, amazement and intrigue. And it is asked by both gay and straight alike. Before I try to answer these questions for you, let me briefly explore where these questions are coming from. Firstly, shock that any self-respecting gay person would want any contact with the Catholic Church is, in my opinion, coming from a place of either personal hurt or, disillusionment with the church. Many gay people have been, are currently and dare I say will continue to be, particularly in light of the forthcoming referendum, deeply hurt and offended by the institutional church. We have heard words like 'intrinsically disordered' and the 'evil' of homosexuality peddled out in church documents over the years. We have heard hate and bile being preached by Christians and, we have experienced personal rejections in our local parish churches. The people, who ask these questions, have a sense of justice, of right and wrong. They see the wrong being done to gay people; they just know it is unchristian, unjust. Within the gay community it can be difficult to 'come out' as a practicing catholic; just as in the Catholic Church it can be difficult to 'come out' as being gay. So here is how I try to answer the question of being gay and catholic. Being gay is part of what makes me who I am. It is not a condition, not a decision; it is as intrinsic to me as any other aspect of what it is to make up this person. Being catholic is also part of who I am; it is as inherited as is my DNA. It is the tradition of my family for generations. It is the faith I was born into, nurtured in, and welcomed into. It is the faith I have grown up in and grown into. It is as a person of faith how I give witness to my values and beliefs. It is about belonging, celebrating in public the faith and spirituality I share in common with other fellow Catholics. Being gay or catholic need not be exclusive of each other. I believe God made me as I am. I am

taught this through my study of catholic teaching. God does not make mistakes. I am as cherished and loved by God as infinitely as there are grains of sand on all the beaches of the world. I am created in the image and likeness of God. I am a full member of the Catholic Church by virtue of by baptism. I was not, nor is any person, child or adult, asked during the rites of Christian Initiation, baptism, Eucharist or confirmation; are you gay or straight? Being gay or straight is not a precondition of membership of the Catholic Church. So why are so many people, lay and cleric, within our church so opposed to gay people, like me, being fully accepted or welcomed into our church as equals? How is it that a fellow catholic can deem it acceptable or even Christian to hold such discriminatory views? Being involved in Gay Catholic Voice Ireland, I have met and listened to gay men and women speak of their personal hurt, of their sense of betrayal and of their anger at being discriminated against by local clergy, fellow Catholics, church members, by statements and speeches from our Bishops and by church teaching. I have personally met gay people who have been asked to leave the parish choir when it was discovered by the local curate that the individual was gay. Others have spoken of not being allowed put their name forward for the parish council elections. Others of being refused the sacrament of reconciliation – an oxymoron if ever there was one! Others of being refused the sacrament of the sick, of being refused the Eucharist, the list is endless. Two years ago, for World Youth Day, a group of young people were travelling to Brazil. One of the group was a young gay girl. Her friends knew this and it was a non-issue for them. Yet they collectively made a pact that if the priest found out and refused to allow her to go on the trip, they as a group would all step aside in solidarity with their friend and not travel. I have to ask: Why should a young catholic teenager, who is engaged with her local parish, have to experience such a stressful situation? Why should she have to live in fear of being ‘found out’? What must it be like to feel you are not accepted by the very community of people, her church, whose Christian calling is to love your neighbour as yourself? I look forward to the day when being gay is a non-issue within our church. When we, our Christian community, are mature enough and secure enough to welcome all people into the loving care of God in a non-judgmental, non-discriminatory way, when we, gay people, are loved, cherished and equal. As a person of faith, as a member of

the Catholic Church I will continue to work for this day. I will lovingly challenge my fellow Christians, and church leaders to become more Christ-like and welcome all people without discrimination or prejudice. Today I hope, during the discussions that follow this presentation that you will explore and understand how hurtful it is for me as a gay man to witness and experience such abhorrent behaviour within my church. However, I know we are not on the margins, we are the church.

Martha's story

AN EXPERIENCE OF BEING IN A MIXED MARRIAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

AND WHAT THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH CAN DO TO HELP

I married Mark in 1986 – almost 30 years ago. He was divorced, so we couldn't get married in a Catholic Church. We were married eventually in a Presbyterian Church – by a minister, who couldn't have been kinder.

There were numerous challenges in our marriage such as: The Wedding itself (where, when, who etc.), Baptisms – (we were blessed with 3 lovely children) and of course, their education. We tried to achieve 'parity of esteem' but this was hampered often by sectarianism, including my own.

What was the nature of this sectarianism? Well as I grew up, I was given the impression that of all the religions in the world Christianity was the best and of all the denominations in Christianity, Catholicism was the best. Really, I believed that God was Catholic and probably Irish Catholic. (by 'Catholic' I mean Roman Catholic).

Related to this, I recently came across a book by Archbishop Desmond Tutu "God Is Not a Christian" – a wonderful work, a real joy.

If you have ever seen the children's programme 'Grandad in my pocket', where a young child carries her Grandad around in her pocket – you may have thought as I did, "how ridiculous, everyone knows that could never happen". How much more ridiculous is it that the Catholic Church often acts as if it has 'God in its pocket'.

My husband and I tried hard to make things work though and we really thought that our eldest daughter Elizabeth's First Holy Communion had been handled well. We were blessed with a very sensitive priest, who invited inter-denominational parents of the children to come up, if they wished to, with their child at the time for communion. Elizabeth received and then the priest said a lovely prayer of thanks, whilst holding Mark's and my shoulders, with Elizabeth

in the middle. However, recently, Elizabeth told me that she was feeling very sad that day because Anna her younger sister, a very 'girly' girl, was very envious of Elizabeth's simple white dress. Even though she herself had a very nice dress, it wasn't a special white one. I had unwittingly told her that because she was brought up Presbyterian, she would not have a similar ceremony. So we had two sad little girls that day. Elizabeth couldn't have cared less about dresses and wished Anna could have it. No doubt it seems a small incident of no consequence – but it was important to our little girls. I had made a mess of things. In many ways I deeply regret being so obedient to the 'Church rules' over the years and wish that I had put my family first.

Confirmation was an *awful* experience for our family. My husband was in very bad form that day and for years I blamed him for spoiling that special occasion. However, when I look back, the preparation course was most insensitive and the ceremony itself was not better. No word of welcome for the many Protestant parents was said– no acknowledgement was made at all of their contribution and generosity. No wonder my husband was unhappy.

At school we received teaching on the rules of the Catholic Church and at the time, it seemed reasonable to exclude certain groups and individuals from the Eucharist. However, I have discovered that when it is myself, my husband and my children who are excluded – that is much harder to understand or accept. The Church teaches us to revere and love Christ in Holy Communion, then, for one reason or another, it pulls all that away from us – somehow we must learn to cope with that loss without any pastoral assistance.

Often, though, what causes me pain around exclusion from communion is the lack of understanding or compassion I hear from Catholic friends. "But sure you can go up to receive a blessing". If you have never experienced going up for a blessing then you will not know how it feels. You have to go up in front of a group of people who have just received communion and you have to cross your arms across your chest, to me it felt like I was a leper with a great big bell around my neck declaring "unclean, unclean" to all and sundry. I have been

brought up as a Catholic – I was among friends and family, how much harder must this be for someone brought up in a different denomination?

Young Catholic women are often put under pressure to have a Nuptial Mass by their families. It is deemed by them not to be a 'proper wedding' without Holy Communion. This means that the couple having just been 'joined together' by God, were being immediately separated at a very important part of the ceremony, making it a theological nonsense, with one sacrament contradicting the other. Even if the wedding was not part of a Nuptial Mass, the couple is separated each time they would subsequently attend Mass. Whilst the Catholic spouse would most likely be welcomed at Protestant Communion – as, in my experience, the practice of 'An Open Table' is common practice in many of the main Protestant denominations in Northern Ireland.

St Paul is vociferous in his complaints about lack of hospitality at time of communal worship. He declares in 2 Corinthians 11:17 and 20-21:

¹⁷ In the following instructions, however, I do not praise you, because your meetings for worship actually do more harm than good. ...

²⁰ When you meet together as a group, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. ²¹ For as you eat, you each go ahead with your own meal, so that some are hungry while others get drunk.

So what can Catholics do? Perhaps we can learn more about what Protestants believe about Eucharist. The following is an excerpt from the 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (B.E.M. Document) which was produced by the Faith and Order Commission for the World Council of Churches in 1982. It was the result of over 50 years work. I was amazed to find that Catholics and Protestants were in such close agreement. We should also remember that the term 'transubstantiation' was thought, at the time of its adoption, to be inadequate to describe what happens at the celebration of the Eucharist and that a better term should be found at a future date:

29. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ gathers, teaches and nourishes the Church. It is Christ who invites to the meal and who presides at it. He is the shepherd who leads the people of God, the prophet who announces the Word of God, the priest who celebrates the mystery of God. In most churches, this presidency is signified by an ordained minister. The one who presides at the Eucharistic celebration in the name of Christ makes clear that the rite is not the assemblies' own creation or possession; the Eucharist is received as a gift from Christ living in his Church. The minister of the Eucharist is the ambassador who represents the divine initiative and expresses the connection of the local community with other local communities in the universal Church.

What recommendation/s can be made to the Bishops? Well, I suppose that the vision of an open table for the entire world would be my top request – no matter what denomination, what sexuality, what marital state, what religion – or none – all should be free to receive God's free gift, without hindrance.

Failing that I would suggest that special permission should be given to many groups of people including to the Protestant spouse in a 'mixed marriage' and their children.

These recommendations require permission and that means having to wait for lengthy processes to be completed. In the meantime, might it be possible to create 'para-liturgies' which do not involve communion? This suggestion can cause a degree of discomfort or even shock when made to some Catholics. However, I believe that it need not. There are already 'The Stations of the Cross' held on Good Friday and monasteries hold many worship services every day that do not include the Eucharist. These para-liturgies could be very beautiful and meaningful. They would offer comfort not only to Protestants but to many Roman Catholics who experience the very real pain of exclusion.

In my recently adopted church, which is part of the universal church, 'All Souls non-subscribing Presbyterian Church', we have services such as: an annual Holocaust Memorial Service and Interfaith services; an annual 'Pride Service' that is well attended. (Our minister is the only clergyman (to my knowledge) who walks openly in Belfast Pride. He is the recipient of the warmest of warm

welcomes!). We also have memorial services for people who are Transgender. We are very blessed each week with the participation of couples and of individual members who are gay as well as 'straight'.

Is it time to take God out of our pockets and release the creative talents of most congregations and individuals for this purpose?

I greatly admire the work of ACI and wish you every blessing with your work. Thank you for your time and attention.

NB It is a joy to acknowledge the role that Christian Meditation plays in my life. It has been a great source of comfort and strength – transcending as it does all dogmatic differences. I owe the World Community of Christian Meditation (www.wccm.org) a colossal debt of gratitude. Thank you WCCM!

John's story

Annulment, divorce and remarriage:

Hello my name is John and I have been married to Ruth for the past five years. I was previously married to Ann and we have three grown-up children.

I married Ann in 1982 and we separated in 2005. Our marriage noticeably became increasingly difficult from about 2001 onwards. We went twice to ACCORD for marriage counselling. Ann didn't want to take part in the process and wanted to end the marriage. I heard about Retrouvielle and asked her to take part in it. She decided that she didn't want to do that. Ann applied for a legal separation and we separated in 2005. I left the family home to go and live with my brother.

I met Ruth online in 2008 we fell in love and decided to get married. Ann and I had an agreed divorce in 2009 and I became engaged to Ruth in autumn of 2009. I had applied for an annulment in the Church in early 2009. I found the annulment process to be painful and difficult, not a confessional process as described by my area Judicial Vicar but an Inquisition. I applied for the annulment on the grounds of incapacity on my part as I had had quite a difficult upbringing and had been subject to sex abuse by two priests, as a child and as a teenager. I didn't mention the sex abuse during my talk at the ACI meeting. The annulment was not granted by the regional tribunal and as I felt that the sex abuse and the effect it had had on me was not been taken into consideration I appealed it to the national tribunal who in turn also refused the application.

It is plain that my marriage to Ann has ended. I don't like to use words like "Failed ", " Ended in Failure" or " Broken Marriage" as they stigmatise people. Until recently marriages mostly ended because of the death of a spouse now the greatest cause is that the relationship ends. Ruth and I are active members of our Church. I considered leaving and joining the Church of Ireland however I

have been a Catholic all my life and am not for leaving even though I have been subject to sex abuse and witnessed the inadequate response of the hierarchy to sex abuse.

The hierarchy needs to respond with compassion and caring to the end of marriage in today's world. The Orthodox Church has done so and it's possible to get a church divorce and get remarried. In some cases more than once!! Ruth and I are committed to our Church. We go to mass regularly and sing in our church choir. Our faith is important to us. We receive Holy Communion and will continue to until we are publicly denied from doing so. My commitment is that we have a church that welcomes to the Sacraments all of the Baptised regardless of their sexual orientation or marital circumstances.

Ruth's story

I grew up in a traditional catholic family and went to a Loreto boarding school for my secondary education. I left school with a deep, committed faith and belief in God. This was tested in numerous situations in the next couple of years and at 25 I choose to leave the church because of the apparent hypocrisy I perceived. I continued to search, attending Quaker, Church of Ireland, Hindu services etc. I returned to the church at 45 following a personal development course in London and I am now a minister of the word and the Eucharist.

I was 55 when I met John and I had never been married, John had been separated from his first wife (initiated by her) for three years and the marriage had been in trouble for about 7 years. His wife had gone to two sessions of Accord and was not willing to continue on with the process. The marriage appeared to be irrevocably over at that stage and his wife was in a relationship with another man and agreed to a divorce.

I believed that the relationship with John was a gift from God and I had no reservations in making a civil marriage with John. He has three adult children with whom I have a very good relationship which is I believe supportive of all of us. Unfortunately because of the current rules of the Catholic church I was consequently prohibited from the sacraments of reconciliation, marriage and the Eucharist. My Bishop told me that I would not be stopped from going to communion but I was not invited, however I continued to receive in spite of this. Another Bishop likened a separated woman with children in a second marriage who came for communion when the children were making their first Communion as a brazen hussy who stuck her tongue out to receive communion.

While the behaviour of the Institutional Catholic Church and the bishops does not particularly interest or upset me, the reason I became involved in the Association of Catholics in Ireland was so that other people would not have to experience this treatment. I found most of the priests to be very sympathetic with the exception of a Polish priest who refused to give the Eucharist to a

couple in my community who were hosting a station Mass. Now my relationship with God is independent of priests, bishops or even the wonderful Pope Francis. I believe the laity and I are the Church.

I also believe the institutional Catholic Church should recognise that marriages do end and allow people to remarry as happens in the orthodox Catholic Church. I believe withholding the Eucharist should not be used as a punishment for perceived bad behaviour.

Miriam's story

Luke and I are married for the past 12 years. We have 4 children; two children we had together Rachel 10 years and Anthony 8 years. Colm; age 21 and Bridie aged 18, who I had with Sean in my previous marriage. Luke is their step- father. Luke and I are practicing Catholics we have brought up all 4 children in the Catholic faith. They have received all the sacraments. However, we live in a contradiction within the church as the church does not recognise our marriage. We are not, according to canon law, permitted to receive communion yet we are both active in the church and have even lead out on the "Do this in memory of me programme" for our daughter Rachel in preparation for her communion. We are currently involved in the same preparation programme for our son Anthony.

We both feel unsupported and prejudiced against by the leaders of our church. However, we have reflected and prayed about this and are peaceful in our belief that we belong to the church, that the people are the church and we do not allow current rules about our marriage and status in the church to deter us from practising our faith and our traditions. Hence we continue to take an active part in the church's activities and we continue to receive communion until we are publically refuse.

Let me give you a quick synopsis of our story

I was married to Sean from 1988 to 1997. We lived in the USA for 6 years of our marriage. We had 3 children together. Noreen our first-born who died in her first year, then Ronan and Bridie. When Bridie was one year old and Ronan was 4 yrs., Sean had a relationship with Mary and decided to leave the marriage. I was heartbroken at the time. However, through a journey of self-development I accept that we grieved differently for Noreen. For my part, I became overly responsible for the children, I felt Sean was not a responsible father and was making him wrong; the fun was gone out of the marriage. Having done this work I was able to take responsibility for my part in the breakup of the marriage and completed this with Sean.

Sean has stayed in the relationship with Mary they have got married and have gone on to have a daughter together. They have lived in Scotland for the past 10 years.

I met Luke in 2000, we fell in love and after 4 years together we decided to marry. Luke had not been married before. Luke asked two priests to do a blessing of our marriage however while they attended our wedding they did not want to go against the bishop's wishes as their bishop had publicly stated that there should be no blessings of these types of marriages. We did not give up on our desire to make a commitment to each other as man and wife before God. So we ended up having a very meaningful spiritual ceremony facilitated by a group of Mercy sisters. We also had a state ceremony in the registry office.

Both Luke and I have a strong faith and both our families are steeped in the Catholic traditions. Shortly after our wedding I became pregnant and I applied for an annulment of my first marriage. I underwent a rigorous interview in Galway, unfortunately the day after this interview I had a miscarriage. My father, bridesmaid and Sean were interviewed. The annulment was refused.

This made me very angry as at the time I got the news of the refusal I had just recently given birth to our daughter; Rachel and was hoping to have her christened and to get married in the church at the same time. My faith was tested as it had been before when my child died and my marriage failed. I came to realise that I do not need to have the marriage annulled as Sean and I were married, we had 3 beautiful children together and then the marriage failed. I have since developed a deeper understanding of spirituality and of God and the personal relationship I have with God.

Both Luke and I believe that couples like us should be allowed to get married in the church and that we should be treated by the ministry the same as everyone else. We are a Catholic family and need to be treated equally in the church. Jesus welcomed everyone into his church he did not identify particular "sinners" and deny them the benefits of his blessings and teaching. He said "Let he who has not sinned cast the first stone". By the official church taking a stand on not allowing me to receive communion you are symbolically throwing a stone and judging me. By not recognising our marriage you are not recognising our children as part of a Catholic family.

I ask you to reflect on our story, to challenge your assumptions and beliefs, to remember that love is the key message of the New Testament and to take this opportunity to make brave decisions to ensure an all-inclusive church for our children. Thank you for listening

Open Forum

The next step in the proceedings was a call for delegates to raise an issue that they feel passionate about. The issue must be one that they are willing to take responsibility for and on which they would convene a workshop. A number of people came forward. The issues raised are outlined below:

- **Inequality and the distribution of economic resources: The role of the banks including the Vatican bank;**
- **Patriarchy and gender: Oppression of women in the institutional church;**
- **Make up of Synod: Democracy in the church, votes for women and married couples;**
- **Education and training of Priests on marriage and the family;**
- **Primacy of conscience undervalued;**
- **Jesus said 'Love one another as I have loved you;**
- **Preparation for mature and responsible sexual development.**

The themes were placed on the wall alongside the original 8 themes drawn from the Lineamenta. At this point the delegates were invited to sign up for the workshops that they were interested in attending and contributing to in the afternoon session. They then went to lunch and to took the opportunity to network. When the group reconvened in the afternoon, they chose the workshops that they wished to attend, and moved around several workshops' as was their prerogative within the open space technology process. This was interesting for two reasons. It illustrated clearly the themes and issues that people are interested in and passionate about. It indicated clearly the themes and issues that drew very little interest, or that was felt were of little concern to the wider Catholic community within the constraints of a Synod on the Family comprising only Bishops and Cardinals. The issues that fall into the later category were 'cohabitation' and 'Humanae Vitae'. The feedback that emerged in the discussions at the workshops was recorded on prepared sheets and flipcharts and is outlined in the next section. Members of the steering group of ACI facilitated the workshops.

Summary feedback from the workshops

Title: Inequality and the distribution of economic resources: The role of the banks including the Vatican bank.

Main points of the discussion:

- Trickle down economics does not work. Unless we share our wealth with the poor we are stealing from them.
- Families do not have enough to eat. Primary schools having to organise breakfast clubs in schools before school starts.
- Young people are lost to negative equity due to high mortgage during the Celtic Tiger era. We are all involved and responsible from the lowest to the highest in not paying our due share in tax if we can get away with it. (tax evasion and tax avoidance)
- There is a Lack of compassion- if we follow Christ we should show compassion.

Recommendations for action:

- Church should stop talking about abortion, sex and contraception and concentrate on inequality, love and compassion, and responsible citizenship;
- Church should appeal more to young people -walks, pilgrimage and physical activity;
- Basic level of accommodation should be available to everybody and that the government deals with the problems of the rent allowance so that people can top up their rent allowance;
- Concentration on economic growth rather than distribution - the church should point this out;
- Do not support goods that are produced by cheap labour and child labour;
- Education- the church to give the lead with regard to social inequality that exists- all Christian church could unite in this - ecumenical.

Title: Patriarchy and gender: Oppression of women in the institutional church.

Main points of the discussion:

- The set up of the synod shows the church to be disconnected from the body of Christ. Our church is made up of 50% women, yet no woman has a vote. Therefore it excludes more than 50% of the church.
- It shows lack of leadership, true authority and catholicity- it shows a church removed from the Gospel.
- The Cardinals are disconnected from the Body of Christ -not catholicity.
- A giant ego. Totally irrelevant to the majority within the church.
- Synod lacks authority as it excludes women. Bishop should be invited as guests at the family synod.
- Need not to get the message and the messenger mixed up.
- Our church is not where people are.
- The hierarchy is afraid of women.
- Mary was pregnant before marriage

Recommendations for action:

- Cut off money to church.
- Support ACI and other reform groups.
- Call for a meeting of the universal church (Vatican 3) made up of :
 - 80% laypeople (50% men, 50% women)
 - 10% religious (50% men, 50% women)
 - 10% clergy/hierarchy

Title: Make up of Synod: Democracy in the church, votes for women and married couples.

Main points of the discussion:

- Synod lacks authority without woman having any vote and therefore it cannot be taken seriously. Please appoint women and married couples with votes A.S.A.P Pope Francis!
- Also have married priests, both male and female who bring experience of marriage to their ministry;
- Invite back into ministry priests who have been forced to leave because of marriage;
- Women and married persons should train priests for ministry of marriage and the family;
- Women and married persons should develop the courses for training priests for ministry regarding marriage and the family;
- Marriage is like 'in the desert experience'. If you haven't gone through it you won't know what you're talking about. How can you write about it - married love/ sexual love - if you haven't experienced it;
- The need for ongoing education post ordination is highlighted;
- Where is the 'love' in the document?

Title: Preparation for mature and responsible sexual development.

Main points of the discussion

- Ethic of responsibility should underpin teaching.
- Sex should be taken out of religion, it is too prescriptive, it would be better placed within health and education programmes
- Young people would laugh at the idea of church teaching on sexuality because of 'feet of clay' and fear of 'losing the seed'
- Lack of education in sex leads to pornography where exploitation is mistaken for love
- A group discussion in class encouraged a gay person to come out.

Recommendations for action:

- Start within the family, which can be difficult. Some schools have good courses. Reflect before you act, actions affect others.
- As a society we want/demand and we get, without responsibility for one's actions. There is a lack of respect and loss of the sacred in instant relationships
- Authority instruction without lived experience
- We need communities of experience to guide people not leading with rules, there is no dialogue, it is not reaching out to people
- Less rules, let people know the boundaries

Reflection by an ACI member from the Diocese of Down & Connor.

A reflection:

SEXUAL MORALITY - WHERE LIES THE SIN?

A new spirit of pastoral inclusion may be hindered by a fear of blurring the boundaries between sexual morality and immorality. This need not be the case. Surely the boundary marker for sex becoming sinful is when people, either themselves or others get hurt, either physically or emotionally. In other words when it involves:-

- Promiscuity (sex should be fun but not casual, i.e. between multiple partners or strangers);*
- Unfaithfulness (adultery, dishonesty)*
- Exploitation (misuse of positions of power, the sex trade and pornography);*
- Abuse (domestic abuse, rape, pedophilia).*

The Church can do society a great service by highlighting and tackling these wrongs. But it does it a disservice when it assumes these wrongs to be intrinsic to, or primarily concerned with relationships other than those validated by the Catholic church, i.e. couples that are gay; divorced and remarried; cohabiting; or mixed, etc.

So my message to the Synod of bishops would be – some refocusing is required if you are to engage credibly with the complexity of family life as it is, rather than as you expect it to be.

Title: Humanae Vitae and family planning

Main points of the discussion

- Shocked that institutional church is still promoting Humanae Vitae;
- The large majority of the church in Ireland has rejected the teachings in Humanae Vitae on artificial birth control;
- This teaching has hugely damaged the church and strongly contributed to the huge exodus of young people out of the church;
- We call on the synod to remove the section on artificial birth control from humane vitae;
- Teach responsible parenthood;
- Accept that the Billings method does not work for the majority of women.
- Catholics who have read the history of the Pontifical Commission established in 1963 to study the issues of 'Population, Family and Births' are fully aware that 'political' interference by a few senior church figures 'at the death' resulted in the minority view over-turning the majority view. This further undermines the credibility of a Humanae Vitae, a policy document that has fundamentally damaged the Roman Catholic Church over the past 50 years.

Title: The annulment process: Proposed options for widening and simplifying the process.

Main points of the discussion

- Difficulty with the term “annulment” - is it possible to say that a marriage didn’t exist? Getting an annulment shouldn’t necessarily mean saying the marriage never existed. The situation is that a marriage has ended not that it never existed;
- “Dissolution” /”instead? “Termination of the marriage contract”;
- Would better marriage preparation work to reduce the number of annulments?
- Is it the role of the priest to recognise the symptoms that might bring about an annulment?
- Transparency is required in the process;
- A neutral meditation service should be offered to help people through the process.

Title: Co habitation

Main points of the discussion

- Co habitation is a normal part of modern relationship development;
- The language in the Lineamenta suggests otherwise;
- The institutional church needs to recognise and support couples in loving relationships.

Title: Various forms of the family.

Possible pastoral responses to the identified problems and issues impacting on the various forms of 'family'.

Main points of the discussion

- 1st lists of types of families;
- Single parent families (language should not be used it is derogatory);
- Widows/ widowers;
- Divorced and remarried-stepchildren and adopted. Interfaith (Hindu, Buddhist, Christian) co habitating. Gay couples and families, inter-church families, mixed marriages (faith and no faith)
- Building community, more events;
- No exclusion from sacraments – open table;
- Promote experimental inclusive services e.g. www.allwelcomeatmass.ie
- We suspect that our options will not be listened to and we need reassurance that they are i.e. recent listening project report no mention of role of women. Views were filtered out.

Recommendations for action:

- More caring attitude to be encouraged towards all family groups;
- Joint pastoral care for inter church marriages;
- New Irish catechism is not reflective of complexity of modern families;
- If not full open-table dispensations for certain groups- gay people, divorced, protestant partners in Inter-church families and their children, then development of alternative worship services;
- Children in Integrated/state schools should receive pastoral support.
- Communion should not be used as punishment or reward;
- General Pastoral Strategy rather than “Behave, Believe, belong” change to “Belong, believe, behave”;
- Attitude of church should be based on example of Jesus in the scriptures. He was open, welcoming and loving to all;

Title: Same sex relationships: The sacraments and pastoral support.

Main points of the discussion:

- How can we support gay people and their families?
- Equality: Christianity should be exercised as Christ would;
- No pastoral care for LGBT people;
- Institutional church needs to listen;
- Support parents of gay people;
- No support for gay people who want to participate in church-we heard stories of gay people being asked to leave their church choir;
- Language used about gay people is objectionable;
- Provide facilities for masses/liturgies for LGBT people;
- At mass 'all are welcome here' Group called 'All are welcome here' organise a monthly mass for LGBT people;
- Discrimination against gay people in school employment if against the ethos of the school;
- Comparison with how left handed children had their hand tied behind their back 50 years ago and how we look back now in amazement;
- Families are withdrawing from the sacraments because their children are being discriminated against by the church:
- Support stable loving committed relationships without discrimination;
- Provide proper education for people about Christian values;
- Obligation to speak with LGBT people and people in same sex relationships to inform and provide a basis for pastoral care;
- There is no LGBT input in the last synod, it should be included in the next one;
- The church has gotten it wrong before, Galileo, Limbo, etc. so it can alter its views. How long before it revises its views on homosexuality?
- Legitimacy of personhood of people must be respected;
- Church seems to regard the single celibate life as the ideal.

Title: Second Relationships: The status of different 'second relationships' and access to the sacraments for those in 'second relationships'.

Main points of the discussion

Background:

- Second relationships/marriage breakdown is not a premeditated choice;
- All in the family are victims, the couple, the children and the extended family;
- Poverty –can cause deprivation of relationship.

Pastoral approach:

- Be glad that people want to be part of the church in the current climate;
- Importance of language: breakdown, failure;
- Death is the end of marriages – historically;
- Consequences- live alone for rest of life when marriage fails;
- “Silent divorce” (a living hell).

Options:

- Options are limited if not in a second relationship to:
 1. Living alone for life,
 2. Annulment- can be a dishonest process and not a solution
 3. Live with the poverty of loneliness and or desertion.
- Greek Orthodox Church offers a second chance.
- There can be emotional maturity when entering a second relationship.
- Full membership of church is required for people in second relationships.
- Don't forget the 'deserted partner'
- Children are innocent victims
- Relationship-the importance of education in relationship, given by experienced practitioners not celibates.

Take a pastoral approach

- Emphasis on a committed relationship;
- Full membership of the church for those in second relationships;
- Follow a process of dialogue where 'good faith' and commitment are established;
- Leave it to the couple's conscience: what does the couple want?

Reflection

Is church an obstacle to the relationship between the couple and God?

What would Jesus say? How would he respond to the couple's needs?

Written submissions

Delegates at the conference were encouraged to send in written submissions to the Association of Catholics in Ireland following the consultation. The following submissions were received:

Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies (Lineamenta Q 40)

5.1. An aspect missing from Sections 54 and 55 of the Lineamenta is any reference to LGBT couples.

5.3. Pastoral care of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) persons, those who are single and those in relationships, with/without children, and their families of origin, especially their parents and grandparents, begins with dialogue and sacred listening to all those involved; listening to their lived experiences, their understanding of God and grace in their lives. This dialogue and sacred listening will point the way towards developing forms of pastoral care that are appropriate and helpful towards LGBT persons and those nearest and dearest to them. Without such engagement in dialogue any pastoral care will fall by the wayside. Phrases such as ‘objectively disordered’, ‘intrinsic evil’ and refusal of Communion to those known to be in an LGBT relationship are a block to such persons either receiving or offering ministry within our Church. Understandings, perceptions and language need to change to enable these persons to know themselves as equal, welcomed and valued members of God’s family. Gay Catholic Voice Ireland (www.gcvi.ie) has regularly offered to the hierarchy their availability for such dialogue.

Child Clerical Sexual Abuse

As we are preparing for the second session of the Synod on the Family, I have grave misgivings about the whole process. I speak as a committed catholic woman married for 35 years who is also a mother, a theologian and a spiritual director.

Faced with the revelations of child clerical sexual abuse and accused of covering up, many bishops here, in Rome and throughout the world excused their actions and inactions by stating that they were on a learning curve: How could they be expected to know about the extent of the impact of sexual abuse and rape on children? We repeatedly heard talk of a more humble church, a listening church ("church" really meaning church authorities).

Now, how is it that on other matters of sexuality the same bishops (exclusively male and officially celibate) appear to believe that they are the authorities, the experts, on the subject? They are the only ones with a vote at the Synod on the Family.

We are also repeatedly told that "church teaching" on sexual matters cannot ever be changed. But the historical records show plainly that church teachings on all kinds of issues have changed. For example, slavery and torture are no longer seen as compatible with Christianity.

At the heart of the child clerical sexual abuse scandal is the issue of power, its use and its abuse by church authorities. Regretfully, power, abusive power, is also at the heart of how this Synod on the Family is being conducted.

At the last synod session, where were those whose sexuality and lives are being discussed, about whom decisions are being made, and who are not present, have no voice and certainly no vote?

Where were the couples that are using contraception to plan their families?

Where were the couples who have divorced and remarried and are now excluded from many sacraments?

Where were the lesbian and gay Catholics, living on their own or in committed long term loving relationships? Where were the cohabiting couples? The list of the excluded goes on and on. Doesn't the church need to hear their witness, their experience? Doesn't the Holy Spirit speak through them?

A defining feature of the child clerical sexual abuse scandal has been the marginalisation and silencing of the victims by church authorities. The institution and its perceived preservation, certainly that of its leaders, came first, the child victims and their families last. They were sacrificed.

Today, to preserve the institution and its "unchangeable sexual teachings", how many Catholics are being sacrificed, made to carry unbearable burdens, denied the "Good News"?

We are told that bishops should speak openly and frankly at the synod, without fear. What about all of us, Catholics, outside the synod? What about the theologians, the priests, religious, lay ministers who have been and are silenced, censored, threatened with excommunication, forbidden to teach, exercise their ministry?

Synod on the Family – a few reflections

1. To respond to the preliminary reflection in the Lineamenta requires a grasp of the content of the Relatio Synodi, a lengthy document in a language that is foreign to most lay people. All the reflections in the Lineamenta require reading of lengthy paragraphs. A simpler document would be more user friendly and might elicit more responses.
2. Many questions are based on an 'ideal' concept of marriage and family life, divorced from the realities of everyday life – pressures of work, making ends meet, etc., etc. – in the social context of the 21st century. Younger adults are more concerned with issues of social justice and equality than with the Church's teaching on issues of personal morality. Hence the urgent need to include married couples, couples from broken marriages, cohabiting couples and young adults at the synod. They must be listened to and be involved in all the discussions of the synod, otherwise we will get a document based on the understanding of celibate men with no experience of marriage and its living out in everyday life. Jesus replaced the love of law by the law of love and I would like this to be the guiding principle in all discussions at the synod.
- 3 Co-habitation has become acceptable in society and has become the practice for many people. I would like to see a pastoral care programme developed which would help co-habiting couples to move towards a permanent commitment and eventually a church blessing.
- 4 Use of contraceptive methods is here to stay. The Natural Family Planning methods are the ideal but are found to be difficult for many couples. I suggest that young adults and couples preparing for marriage have access to a programme which gives them an awareness of all aspects of contraceptives: how they work, side effects, use of methods that are abortive, etc , as well as the NFP methods, to enable them to take a responsible decision around the use of contraceptives.

- 5 Marriage breakdown is a reality and calls for a compassionate approach. Jesus excluded nobody from table fellowship with him, he invited all, the lame, blind, outcasts, publicans and sinners. Why then, does the Church exclude people from receiving the Eucharist, and mostly these are people who are trying to lead good lives and need support.

- 6 Homosexual people need a sensitive and compassionate approach. Where homosexual unions are concerned I have a problem around health issues. I am aware of the forthcoming referendum on same sex marriage here and it has been legalised in some countries. The church needs to respond to this situation in a compassionate way and reach out in support to these families while supporting its core value of heterosexual marriage.

- 7 In his talk on Sunday 15 Feb 2015 to the cardinals gathered in Rome Pope Francis emphasized reaching out to those on the margins. Just one quote: "The way of the church is not condemning anyone eternally; to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart. The way of the church is precisely to leave her four walls behind and go out in search of those who are distant, those on the 'outskirts' of life". I sincerely hope this attitude will permeate all the discussions at the synod and be reflected in the document that ensues.

Synod Preparation in the dioceses of Ireland

Priests confirmed with regret that it has not been on their agenda ...they were very busy and found it difficult to find the time. We agreed that we, as ACI, would offer our support and assistance to the priests and the parish community to be of any help we could in the holding of that discussion. We feel that ACI is a candle in the darkness even though numbers are small we are started. It is a beginning.

Issues around which Families need the support of Church and Society in this 21st century

We recognise the need for inclusion and belonging between the different generations within family. We see:

- The need for inclusion of those lacking family, of non traditional families- single parent, same sex families and families from other cultures and other religions;
- The injustice and inequality experienced by some families living in poverty and the disabled being denied basic rights;
- The serious impact on families of greed, financial malpractices, sexual abuse and its cover-up.

We see the need for:

- Communication and Relationship within the Family;
- Having time together-sharing, listening, discussing, celebrating;
- Keeping channels open between generations through sharing joys; failures, communicating interests, sharing problems of bullying, physical and psychological abuse;
- Family meal as an important communication forum;
- Forgiving and not refusing to discuss.

We see:

- Promotion and respect for human dignity and family as a priority.;
- The need for education for good communication at family, parish and community level;
- Family as a place for experiencing love, Faith formation, ongoing education, moral values and respect;
- Divorce, in many cases, from the perspective of the person suffering in a marriage that is beyond endurance;
- The need to promote Eucharist as a community celebration of life with Jesus among us, table fellowship, celebration of the Word in receiving and responding, two way communication rather than listening passively;
- Same gender unions from the perspective of the dignity of the human person;
- The need at parish, diocesan, national and international levels to contribute to bringing about such change in Church teaching, decision making and practice that no family is alienated, marginalised or excluded.

Communication & Relationship of Family with Wider Society

- The discussions on the Family challenges could be applied to the Church Family and could encourage a more open, non judgemental and sharing policy on communication between the People of God;
- Some of the positive developments in family life over time include growing respect for women and women's rights as illustrated in the social concern over the difficult decision in the recent case of the brain dead women and her unborn child. This case also illustrated the difficulty of conflicting rights. 'Q.7 & Q.4'
- We deplore references to 'the Synod Fathers' on Family Life, Mothers excluded.

- We also recognise as a positive development in child rearing, the prioritising of love over discipline which enables growing in self esteem and self confidence. Lineamenta Q.7 & 4.

- Discussing the Lineamenta we felt the document in its present form is not likely to be read by many people as its abstract language does not make for easy reading. It lacks immediacy with its frequent use of abstractions suggesting a distancing from daily family life. Some elements of the questionnaire leave little room for exploration, especially those presenting static/fixed Church doctrine or dogma.

Comments from ACI in the Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin.

The question number below refers to the question from the Kidare and Leighlin Diocese adaption of the question format and the related numbers in the brackets refer to the original question numbers from the Lineamenta.

12 (20) The Church should withdraw the "revised" Mass Missal translation (2010) that came into force in 2011 and immediately allow the use of the preceding Missal or as a temporary solution allow the use of the 1998 translation of the Missal produced by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy.

The "revised Missal" 2010 is unintelligible and in no way can be seen to "help all people see that no-one is beyond God's mercy". The language used in the Missal distances people from God's message of mercy, as people cannot hear God's message in the obscure words of the Missal.

24 (25) Parents can be helped in their educational mission by the Church withdrawing the "revised" Mass Missal translation (2010) that came into force in 2011. The Church should immediately allow the use of the preceding Missal or as a temporary solution allow the use of the 1998 translation of the Missal produced by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. The current "revised Missal" 2010 because of its obscure language is of no "help to parents in their educational mission in transmitting the faith to their children",

Howth Parish Reform and Renewal Group

The Howth Parish Reform and Renewal Group met on the 2nd March 2015 to discuss the Synod on the Family and the ACI members of the group forwarded the following comments for inclusion in the report.

- The Synod should be open to looking at changing the interpretation of church teaching and rules on issues such as access to the sacraments for:
 - separated Catholics living in committed second relationships
 - Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and transgender people. We were all created by God. Homosexuality is not a 'sought after' or an acquired condition or a 'tendency' - to use the unfortunate term of the Lineamenta questions.
- Life can be compared to a marathon race with people spread along the course in different states of exhaustion and distress. The church needs to accept people for where they are on the 'course of life' and support them in their struggle. Open the 'field hospitals' and help to bind the wounds of the injured and limping 'runners' rather than criticise them for struggling to finish the race.
- Trust people of 'good faith' to use their discernment and conscience to shape their spiritual lives and relationship with God. Welcome and facilitate the prodigal sons and daughters if they seek to 'return to the fold'.
- Some elements within the church tend to treat people in some family situations like 21st Century lepers – 'unclean, stay away', you are not worthy to share the Eucharist with the rest of the Christian community. What did Jesus do in similar circumstances?
- Pope Francis has described the Eucharist as a support and nourishment for the sick, not a reward for the strong amongst our community. Who has the right to deprive a person of 'good faith' access to this essential, spiritual nourishment?
- The church provides little or no support for young married couples after the 'hype' of the marriage ceremony. Parish communities [the lay faithful] are better equipped to address this void than priests.

- The shortage of priests in Ireland [and elsewhere] is fast becoming a crisis. The crisis requires that issues such as celibacy and women priest be re-examined and not dismissed 'out of hand'.
- Humanae Vitae is a discredited teaching that [while ignored by many] has done irreparable damage to the credibility of the church over the past 50 years. Surely it is time to leave family planning to the conscience of responsible couples. Sexuality is an integral component of a mature relationship and is not solely a means of procreation.
- The mission of the church is to promote the message of Jesus with the emphasis on Love, Mercy and Forgiveness. This mission is not compatible with assessing the lives of peoples on the basis of 'black and white' rules [most of us occupy the grey areas] and checklists of 'Dos and Don'ts'.
- As adult members of the Christian Community we must look at ourselves and ask the question are we living out the message of Jesus? Are we recognisable to others as Christians by the way we treat one another and the marginalised in particular?

Closing reflections and summary.

In summary, the open forum on the family, hosted and organised by the Association of Catholics in Ireland provided an opportunity that few present felt was available to them within their own diocese. For this reason people travelled from all parts of the country to engage in this consultation process. There was an overwhelming sense that the Synod does not listen to the body of the church, and that nothing will change. The language used in the Lineamenta reflects the deeply rooted discriminations towards people whose lives do not reflect the ideal life that is espoused by the Institutional church. Gender oppression continues within the church. The lack of representation of married people at the Synod suggests that it lacks authority on family matters. Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people are completely excluded from the Synod on the Family. The overwhelming need for post ordination education of priests is highlighted.

The people gathered raise a very important question to the Synod on the Family: Where is the love in the Lineamenta? They say that the attitude of the church should be based on the example of Jesus in the scriptures. He was open, welcoming and loving to all.

Reflections on the day

“Thank you for an excellent day. I was surprised how fruitful it was and how beneficial it felt, despite the weightiness of the subject matter. And it certainly made up for the failure of my diocese to provide any forum at all for the consultation process”.

“A very worthwhile event, particularly as many parishes did not provide the information nor opportunity for the laity to respond to the Pope’s invitation”.

“Hugely beneficial were the contributions from the speakers who set the scene by telling us about how their lives are affected by the attitude of the church to their particular relationship situations. How brave of them to share their personal stories with us. Thank you to each of them”.

“I agree in particular about the courage of the people who spoke publicly about their own personal and family situations. I am sure they have done a great service to the many in our own country who are living with the challenges of one or other of the situations covered in the presentations on Saturday. When you reflect on what we heard from the presenters [and others] at the ‘open forum’ it reinforces the need to call for meaningful representation of the lay faithful at the 2015 Synod when ‘far reaching’ decisions on family life are likely to be made. The total exclusion of any representation of women from the Synod decision-making process is a fundamental weakness that will serve to undermine even the positive Synod outcomes. The Synod needs to hear directly, from ordinary women and men, the real, often painful, lived experiences of people struggling with family life and avoid the adoption of rigid, dogmatic solutions which are not suited to dealing with varied and complex family problems”.

Federico Moramarco: One Hundred and Eighty Degrees

Have you considered the possibility
that everything you believe is wrong,
not merely off a bit, but *totally* wrong,
nothing like things as they really are?

If you've done this, you know how durably fragile
those phantoms we hold in our heads are,
those wisps of thought that people die and kill for,
betray lovers for, give up lifelong friendships for.

If you've not done this, you probably don't understand this poem,
or think it's not even a poem, but a bit of opaque nonsense,
occupying too much of your day's time,
so you probably should stop reading it here, now.

But if you've arrived at this line,
maybe, just maybe, you're open to that possibility,
the possibility of being absolutely completely wrong,
about everything that matters.

How different the world seems then:
everyone who was your enemy is your friend,
everything you hated, you now love,
and everything you love slips through your fingers like sand.