

VI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Proceedings of the fifth day:

The moderator introduced the programme for the day and the President declared the Assembly in session.

The minutes of the proceedings of March 16th and 17th were approved following the confirmation of the readers that they were correct.

Fr Derry and Maria Domke were nominated by the GCC as the contact persons with the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Consultation Process; they outlined how the invitation had been received and the methodology followed in inviting responses from the NCCs. Fr Derry emphasized that engaging in the Consultation was an enriching experience both from a personal level and also for the Pallottine family.

The responses received from the NCCs were grouped under four key points or areas:

1. When you think of your experience of church, what brings joy?
2. When you think of your experience of church, what brings sorrow?
3. When you think of your experience of church, what brings hope?
4. When you think of your experience of church, what brings fear or anxiety?

It is necessary to preface this presentation with mention of the Covid-19 pandemic and the effects which were felt at all levels of church life and of the UAC; the effects of illness, death and bereavement and a distancing from personal involvement in church life were common to all. However, some positive effects of the pandemic were also noted as almost all sought ways to communicate and be close to others spiritually and personally and through use of digital media.

The responses to the first key area emphasised the joyful experience of celebrating the Eucharist, the joy which comes with Adoration, the Rosary and other moments of spiritual formation. The church community is experienced as a welcoming one, where we journey together with one faith and where we experience support, trust and deep friendships. Our sense of belonging to the Pallottine family leads us to greater awareness of assuming responsibility and our mission to be apostles who share the journey with others and who live in communion.

In the responses in the second key area different experiences of sorrow were expressed: the history of sexual abuse and the inadequate response of the Church which sometimes seemed to be indifferent and lacking in compassion for the suffering of others. A crisis of leadership was mentioned, a breaking down of structures, abuses of power and authoritarianism. Other issues are: a failure to take into account the talents of women in male dominated contexts; the scarcity of priests in the western world and in particular in the Amazon region; and that serious consideration be given to the possibility of married men exercising priestly ministry as this has already been authorised in some situations.

The responses grouped in the third key area gave us some glimmers of hope starting with the Synod itself. It is hoped that it will lead to a growth in listening, in a more open dialogue in an authentic striving to live as disciples in order to give a new face to the Church, a Church which is close to the people of God. There is a growing participation of laity in the Church with a greater awareness of their vocation. As the Pallottine family we wish to live the spirit of Pallotti wherever we are, growing in our readiness to accept the other as a companion on the journey. It was also noted that the Church is growing exponentially in other parts of the world. There is hope that there will be open dialogue and a readiness to support those who are in irregular marital situations, those who are marginalized and the LGBT.

The fourth key focused on what brings fear or anxiety in our experience of Church and one of the principal fears or causes of anxiety for the Church in Ireland and Australia is whether the Church will be in a position to offer church service and access to the Sacraments given the lack of vocations. In this situation hope was expressed that consideration be given to married priests and a greater use of permanent married deacons. There is also fear that there will be further revelations of scandals in the Church which undermines the credibility of the Church. Fear that this Synod will not bring any change in the Church as there seems to be many closed minds and hearts. Instead of looking ahead there are some in the Church we seem to be looking backwards, an example of this is those who seek the old Latin rite Mass.

Fear that the spirit of Shepherds like Pope Francis will be side-lined and his vision of the Church be replaced by a restrictive vision of the Church. The slow pace of dialogue in the Church and with society and the failure to pass on the faith to new generations is another source of anxiety.

The members responded to the presentation of the synthesis and the presenters were thanked for their work and many observations were made. One common response was the hope that this Synodal Path be embraced in our NCCs and that we commit ourselves to growing together in listening to one another and in accompanying one another. Furthermore, it is our hope and our wish that we can all make every effort to respond to the needs of others putting into practice that which Pallotti passed on to us as an apostolic mission in every era.

The president of the NCC in the Czech Republic, Tomas Rusnak, then gave an on-line report of the NCC. He shared some of the history of this NCC and how they live the UAC in Pallottine celebrations and in Divine Mercy devotions.

The members of the Assembly then turned to a discussion on the suggestions, recommendations and proposals which were presented during the Assembly.

The session concluded at 14.30.

We gathered in the chapel of the Sisters for our Eucharist at 17.30.