

From Catholics Speak Out Annual Report 2015

What has CSO achieved this year?

(1) Preparations for the Synod on the Family: Through late-2014 and on into 2015 CSO was engaged through the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) and in league with our colleagues in Catholics for Renewal, in trying to engage with the two bishops (Archbishop Mark Coleridge and Bishop Eugene Hurley) representing Australia at the Synod on the Family in Rome. A group met with Hurley in Melbourne in early April 2015 and ACCCR put forward suggested names and brief biographies of lay people with actual experience of family life, who might go as lay observers representing Australia at the Synod. This material was forwarded to the two bishops and to the synod secretariat via the papal nuncio.

Also a number of letters commenting on various theological aspects of the synod agenda were forwarded to the synod secretariat and to Pope Francis. While we were not successful in getting any of our names up, we did make our presence felt with Archbishop Coleridge and Bishop Hurley.

(2) Issues in Sandhurst Diocese: CSO member Frank Purcell has been engaged in an on-going dispute with Bishop Les Tomlinson of Sandhurst Diocese regarding: (i) allegations of a physical assault carried out at a Parish Finance Committee meeting with both the parish Priest at the time and the assailant refusing to participate in a mediation process; and

(ii) the apparent theft of Caritas money by a Parish Priest and his bullying and harassment of the money counter who discovered the misappropriation. Frank appealed to the Diocesan Committee for Professional Standards as provided for in *Towards Healing and Integrity in Mission* which includes matters of misappropriation of money, physical assault, bullying and harassment in addition to sexual abuse complaints. He alleged that Bishop Tomlinson ignored protests regarding the aborting of the appeal by the diocesan professional standards committee. So Frank then approached the National Committee for Professional Standards. Frank describes what happened:

“Over three years now we have submitted appeals to three levels of the National Committee for Professional Standards. All levels have denied our requests for an investigation into our allegations on the grounds that there

were no serious violations of professional standards involved. As the allegations involved acts of theft, assault, bullying and harassment, we find the decisions incredible. Surely what are accepted in Australian society as criminal acts have to be serious violations of clerical professional standards?”

Frank has now sought advice from an expert canonist and the matter is on-going. As Frank (and CSO) see it, the key issue here is the accountability of Bishop Tomlinson to the church community and the fact that the National Committee sees bishops as beyond the judgment of the Catholic community. CSO continues to support Frank in this effort.

(3) Conference in Ireland: Early in 2015 Paul Collins was approached by Father Ian McGinnity of the National Council of Priests with an invitation to be present at an international gathering of priests’ councils and renewal groups to be held in Limerick, Ireland from 13 to 16 April, 2015. Marilyn Hatton was also invited as Convenor of ACCCR by Futurechurch, a lay-led renewal organization in the US, to be present at the Limerick meeting.

Thirty eight people attended from all over the world, including four Australians (Ian McGinnity, David Timbs (from Catholics for Renewal) and Marilyn and Paul. This was an excellent opportunity to consolidate connections with other international groups with whom CSO had already worked in Rome at two conclaves (in 2003 and 2013) and at the first session of the Synod on the Family. It was also a chance to build connections with new groups. A number of key issues emerged, the most important of which was the role of women in all of the church’s ministries, including the ordained ministry. Attached to this is a copy of the press release issued at the end of the conference summarizing the issues discussed.

(4) International Conference in Philadelphia - Gender, Gospel and Global Justice (September 2015): Organized by Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW), of which CSO is a member and the Women’s Ordination Conference (WOC USA). Marilyn represents CSO on the WOW Steering Committee and was a member of the organizing committee for the conference.

In preparation for the conference CSO held a very successful fund-raising evening in Canberra to bring women from developing countries to the Philadelphia conference. It was held on 14 May 2015 at the Centre for Christianity and Culture in Barton, ACT with Paul chairing a panel with ANU Law Professor Hilary

Charlesworth, former NSW Premier Kristina Keneally and Marilyn. After costs, Aus\$2000 was sent to WOW to assist women from developing countries.

(5) Over 500 people attended **the actual Philadelphia Conference in September**. Australia had six representatives. Marilyn and Paul represented CSO, WATAC sent two representatives, Christine Carolan attended representing ACRATH and former NSW Premier Kristina Keneally chaired a panel (Breaking the Silence) of priests and ex-priests, including Paul, who have publicly supported women's ordination. The range and quality of the speakers was outstanding comprising feminist theologians, historians, writers and activists across many disciplines. The liturgies were prayerful and joy-filled with good musical accompaniment.

(6) **Name Change from Catholics for Ministry to Catholics Speak Out**: the main 'downer' of the year has been the problem of the Catholics for Ministry webpage. As I reported in an email on 31 December 2015 due to an oversight on my part during our recent period of moving house, I missed renewing and paying for the domain name and as such we lost ownership of the name.

(8) **Another issue CSO needs to face**: in common with most Catholic renewal movements, both here and overseas, we have found that it is very difficult to get new members or to motivate even committed Catholics to take any action with regard to church renewal. Perhaps people feel that Pope Francis will do it for us and many are working in their own communities and parishes and achieving great things. But we do need new members and our financial coffers are now running very low. So we all need to be active in recruiting new members.