

Features of the Future Church

Aim.

Set out the features of a church:

1. That relates practically to the socio-cultural context of the 2020s.
2. Is committed to dealing with the life-issues experienced by Catholics and offers effective solutions.
3. Responds to the cries of Catholics for ongoing reform and renewal, offering –
 - a. practical solutions to the issues that continue to cause pain and grief, spiritual and mental suffering, relationship distortion and disruption, loss of faith and depression, and
 - b. Inspiration and guidance for personal and community intentional, spiritual living.

We dream of a courageous, forward-looking, open and welcoming church that truly and unambiguously articulates and actualises the vision of Jesus.

Some areas of particular concern and opportunity for a kinder, gentler, more welcoming and caring church.

Specific groups. A genuine sacrament of unity welcomes everyone. There will be no unchristian discrimination.

- **Women's ordination.** Women have equal status, access and participation in all church functions. No discrimination on grounds of sex, gender or sexual orientation.
- **LGBTIQ+.** All LGBTIQ+ people will be totally welcome and included.
- **Divorced and repartnered Catholics.** The reality of relationship breakdown and re-formation with another is recognised and supported.

Well-founded positions. Positions adopted in times of poorer understanding of theology and human sciences are updated in the spirit of *aggiornamento*.

- **Authority.** The foundation of Christian life is in a relationship with Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit. Authority and responsibility derive from that relationship.
- **Basis of unity.** The basis of unity is a shared love of Christ and commitment to his vision and values. Love of God and care for others are the core values that bring people together. Power emerges from mutual concern and cooperation.

Sharing power. In a world where power is given and received through free and legitimate cooperation, democratic processes are the norm.

- **Governance.** Good governance, including such features as transparency, accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness, is characteristic of the church. Democratic processes, which do not mean party-political style divisions, enhance the mission, effectiveness and credibility of church structures.
- **Pastoral and Diocesan Councils.** These and similar councils have real decision-taking authority.

Safeguarding the process. Authentic ‘walking together’ is more fruitful when all issues are on the table, responsibility is shared and everyone feels, and actually is, included as they are.

- **Synodality:** Synodality means consultations, conversations in the Spirit and participation in taking decisions, responsibility and sharing authority/power.
- **Spiritual experience.** Spiritual experience is the common ground for all Catholics whether they engage with Church liturgies or live by their personal spiritual experience. Pope Francis’ *Motu Proprio, Ad Promovendam Theologiam*, (October 2023) was an unmistakable promotion of the sense of faith which emerges from personal experience.
- **Sense of faith of the faithful.** The sense of faith of people places believers at the centre of church life and ecclesial practices. It has a long tradition, specifically referred to by Jesus (‘Your faith has saved you’, ‘Have faith’), Augustine, Aquinas, John Henry Newman, Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan among many others. It carried Catholicism through the Roman persecutions, Irish penal times and now sustains it in Amazonia.

Being responsible. The legacy of Jesus is a gift to be shared by all, with all, for all. It has the potential to assist people, whatever their background or faith tradition, to be all they can be.

- **Leadership.** Many features of modern living are opportunities for the promotion of Catholicism. The church is at the forefront in providing strong, credible moral leadership that contemporary society is crying out for. It offers a vision and a future for our communities, our country and our world.
- **Eucharist.** The Eucharist is a generous medicine and food for the weak. It is offered generously and openly to all who seek it. In this context, all the baptised means all Christians. People of God means all people whatever their faith tradition or none. The church is an open door with a welcome for everyone.

- **Subsidiarity.** Decisions are made at the level where people are directly affected by the issues to be decided. Believers have a role in discerning the action of the Spirit in their lives and communities and have agency in relation to finding and implementing solutions.

Speaking clearly. The clearer we can articulate and communicate our message, the more likely we are to create communities of love and care – as well as be authentic ourselves.

- **Church, People of God, the Baptised.** Consistent terminology brings clarity to discussion e.g. differentiating between the church as organisation and as community of believers. Metaphorical language is powerful but often not sufficient for dealing with the complexity of modern living.

Conclusion

The church we envisage hears the pleas and responds effectively to the expressed needs, concerns, anxieties and hopes of ordinary people. It generates the impetus and energy required to restore integrity to Catholicism and reinstates the vision and values of Jesus as a credible lifestyle in the modern world.

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