Mission possible: Being on mission

How can women of faith be instruments of hope in changing times? There are amazing women who could lead in the 21st century Catholic Church. Indeed, the Plenary Council committed the Australian Church to enhancing the role of women in the Church overcoming assumptions, culture, practices and language that lead to inequality. This will require clergy and laity to rethink current models and structure of decision making. This presentation will look at the tradition of women in the early Church, explore an example of women's leadership in the secular world and consider what might be possible at a grassroots, Parish level.

Women in authoritative leadership roles is a continuation of the Church's tradition in the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels and the early Church. Jesus treasured the women in His life and prepared them for their leadership roles in the early Church, in particular His disciples include Mary Magadalene, first witness to the Resurection. Women have always been involved in Church since the First Century upholding teachings of faith. Women have always been active in education, missionary work, and social justice efforts. Vatican II created an opportunity for inclusion of women in shaping Church policies and doctrine. Building on the tradition, Pope Francis appointed women to senior positions in the Vatican affirming the importance of their perspective, authority, and creativity. Perhaps we are close to a tipping point where there are more appointments of women.

In the secular world, women are driving change and hold leadership positions in major corporations. Through this presentation, I will explain how a women-only leadership team has created listening for diverse voices and a compassionate structure to provide care for the stakeholders. From regular roundtable meetings to gentle one-on-one caring conversations, these women show compassion and care in a secular environment. This example is a different way that might assist the Church develop thinking around participation of women in leadership.

I will examine how our Church structures can learn from this example. In my experience as an insider of Parish life, the round table is not always the way decisions are made. I will propose that the model of Parish-in-Council is a legitimate next development in becoming a Synodal Church, already in use in some parishes. By enlarging the space of our tent, we invite women to contribute in a dialogical way to the running of our Parishes. This creates space for other possibilities and for women to lead in their local environment.

The fruit of the Synod is a stepping stone to launch a new way for women to lead. This presentation aims to be a beacon of hope by re-imagining what might be possible; an invitation to step into a new future as women of faith, letting our light shine.

Valerie Buono ID S00376059

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