

Flashes of Insight: Signs of hope that Synods hold for women.



Synods, seen by Pope Francis and many to be inclusive, have the possibility of becoming exclusive. The signs of hope that Synods hold for women and those within the Church who want to see change may deliver the opposite. The warning comes from involved and committed Catholic women in a conversation on Flashes of Insight. Saying that synodal discernment is neither easy nor fast, it leaves the question open to how much time and effort people will have to give to a process that perhaps seems to be better suited for church professionals. The women warn the non-

involvement of people may have the inverse effect of opening up the Church, implying it may return the Church walled garden albeit built by a minority view.

Through groups, she is associated with in Australia, Auckland theologian and lecturer Jo Ayers is watching the Australian Plenary (synod) develop. From her involvement with these groups, she questions how inclusive the process is and suggests that excluding people from the conversation will have the significant potential to further alienate, perhaps the majority of Catholics. "There is a lot of discussion and struggle about the agenda for the (Australian) Plenary and who will be the members who make the decisions". All four women on Flashes of Insight are hopeful and want to see change. While they acknowledge and accept that change is upon the Church, a niggling thread remains throughout the conversation about how much the Synods are in the hands of 'ordinary Catholics'? Australian pastoral worker, theologian and school chaplain, Elizabeth Young RSM admits the 'ordinary Catholic' question is a good one. She says there has been a diversity of view as to how much the Australian plenary processes have filtered down to 'people in the pews.' She acknowledges there has been a considerable amount of hard work done by a lot of people who have been working to promote the Australian Plenary at a 'grass-roots' level. However, she admits the coverage has been a bit patchy. She says some people are feeling very distant, it is a process that is happening far away and leaving them wondering how they can get involved in it. Describing the Australian Catholic Church as a "blokey culture at the top", Flashes of Insight host, Joe Grayland asks whether Synodality, the Australian Plenary is just another process that will end up in nothing. Fiona Dyball a theologian involved in Liturgy and faith formation with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference disagrees, saying change is upon the Church. "We have to change and how we change is through relationships with people that we don't know". She says it is important to look around society and see a change in attitude. Dyball says the change will not happen overnight, that change is hard and long, but that it is happening. She says she admires the work of the religious orders who functioning as catalysts and are picking up on this change and helping lead the way inside the Australian Church. needs of their particular societies. Admitting waiting for the obvious, the 'tipping point' is "exhausting", but remains optimistic and hopeful.