

Along the track

Reaching Out

A few weeks before he was elected Pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said at the funeral of Luigi Giussani, founder of the renewal movement known as Communion and Liberation, "Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moralism. Christianity is instead an encounter, a love story, an event." As Pope, he returned to that theme on a number of occasions. During this time of consultation for the Plenary Council, asking ourselves what sort of an event we are creating would seem to be a good starting point. What kind of a love story do we create in our homes, our churches, our parishes and schools? And is this the event we want?

A church that affirms what is good in our lives and helps us to build on it, a church that helps us to find where God's grace is at work in our lives, then encourages and supports that is surely one that helps us to encounter Jesus. We are all trying to search for meaning and purpose in our lives. Is our church one that goes looking to help us in that search rather than one that waits for us to return 'home?' We are already 'home' as we struggle to put bread on the table, to educate our children, to find joy in family life and find meaning and purpose in our own. It is time for mature conversation, for listening, for sensitivity to people's life situations, for new ways of reaching out to find where the Gospel is at work.

A church community that walks with people, not just those who are regular members but a church that seeks to understand the disillusioned, the cynical, the searchers, the anxious and the hardest of all, the indifferent is a gift to be treasured. So is a church that is not judgemental, one that is welcoming and intent on building community, intent on seeking to understand us and to understand why people may go elsewhere to find a welcoming community and to find meaning and purpose. Will our community be open and willing to listen to the reasons for their disillusionment?

Will those who come to our church find a vibrant, prayerful, community that walks with them regardless of who they are and where their life journey has taken them? Will they find an outward looking community that plays an active role in its community and raises its voice on behalf on those who have none?

Will those who come to our church find a church reaching out to them to join a movement for justice and change rather one that wants to recreate the past or preserve the status quo? Will they find a church that challenges them to connect with one another and to work for justice and fairness for all people. In the words of Ecclesia in Oceania, the Vatican document written for the Church in Oceania: *A Christian community is never meant to be just a comfortable place for its members. The Synod Fathers wanted to encourage the local communities to look beyond their own immediate concerns and reach out to others. The parish as a community cannot insulate itself from the realities of the world around it. The Christian community must be attentive to issues of social justice and spiritual hunger in society.* Ecclesia in Oceania #13

If Christianity is to speak to this spiritual hunger, if it is to be of service to the world we live in, this love story Pope Benedict speaks of must be real – something that people can see, hear and experience. This message of love, forgiveness and mercy are at the core of the Catholic faith.

And the last word from Pope Francis:

"We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities when so many people are waiting for the Gospel, It's not enough simply to open the door in welcome, but we must go out through that door to seek and meet the people."

Regards
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