

The European Federation of Married Catholic Priests
A Letter to the Bishop of Rome

Dear Bishop Francis,

On the occasion of your being called to serve the community as bishop of Rome, we, the members of the European Federation of married Catholic priests, would like to offer you a warm greeting. We look to you for hope, for joy and for spiritual nourishment.

We wish to share with you a wonderful biblical image. In the book of Genesis, on the 7th. day of creation, the creator God ceased from the work of creation. God had seen that it was, not only good, but indeed *very* good. We have an image of that God, seated, rejoicing in the wonderful diversity of the universe and allowing it to grow and become what it can become.

“Diversity” turns our attention to how all of our thinking should be incarnational. Life can come to be and grow in all of its diversity only in the diverse soils which alter so much from locality to locality. What a splendid diversity!

Consequently, we ask that the governance of our church community be changed from a governance of power, which controls and limits, to a governance which supports, sustains and nourishes the life of faith in our worldwide community in all of its diversity.

Hence, we must look to develop what was touched upon at Vatican II, the concept of collegiality. The governance of our community is astonishingly over centralised. We must realise that it is impossible to micromanage a community which is universal in scope without stifling and killing off the very life which we wish to support. However, one has to add that the principle of collegiality is of little value unless it is constantly and strictly bound to the principle of subsidiarity. We are all obliged and called by virtue of our baptism to the service of the community and must be allowed to respond freely and willingly without being restrained by the upper echelons of the hierarchy.

Governance must also be representative of the community it serves. We have been thinking along the lines of growth and nourishment. In our families and communities what a wonderful contribution is made by the women in our community! Our thoughts turn to that lovely image from the Book of Proverbs, that of ‘Lady wisdom’, active in the created universe and delighting to be with humankind. We must immediately include women in the governance of our community. They are the incarnation of lady wisdom and have so much to contribute to our growth in the garden of God’s kingdom.

‘Lady Wisdom rejoices to be with humanity’. If we dare offer an exhortation: ‘Embrace all that is good’. Too long we have listened to the dreary and stultifying language of sin and sinners. Certainly we fall short of the glory of God. However, listen to parents and teachers. Until we help the young to build up their self image they will not be capable of good, creative work. While allowing the communities of our worldwide church the freedom to become what they can



become they have to be helped to see what is good in themselves, to build up a confident self image. The diversity of creation is indeed very good!

Forgive us if we offer another biblical image. In the Books of Kings Solomon can ask for whatever he desires – riches, wealth, honour. What he asks for is a 'listening heart' to do good for his people. Our governance has sadly all that was added to Solomon in terms of riches, wealth and power. Would that we had more simplicity! What we do not have is a listening heart because the people have no voice. When a prophetic voice speaks out at our lack of poetic vision, it is often brutally silenced. On the basis of the principle of subsidiarity we must allow the voice of the community to be heard. We must develop the democratic procedures and mechanisms which are required if we are to grow in the service of God's kingdom. Away with the cloak of secrecy and the total lack of transparency in the governance of our community!

We stand in a long tradition. Too often that is used to justify: "We have always done it that way and we will always do it that way".

Back to the image of the creator God who allows the universe to grow and become what it can become. Tradition is an organic growth and thus, while treasuring what has been good in the past, we must have the imagination and vision to boldly step out into the future, in step with the householder in Matthew 13 who takes out of the treasury of the kingdom of God "things old and things new".

Was it Newman who said – 'to change is to grow and to change often is to become perfect'?

Are we stepping out together to share a rich and wonderful future?

Brussels, 9th June 2013

