

Contribution and presentation by Andrea Dean President of Women and the Australian Church (WATAC)

1. *How would women in your region visualise ecclesiastical structures that foster accountability and transparency?*
2. *Due to their infantilisation, the majority of laity in the Church have been silent and complicit in upholding the corrupt power of clericalism. How do you see a change in this situation?*
3. *If women in your region envision a new way of being Church, what would it look like?*

1. In the Australian Church there have been some positive examples of ecclesial structures that foster accountability, transparency, and inclusion.

Here are two such effective examples.

In 1986, Archbishop Leonard Faulkner, Archbishop of Adelaide, in consultation with the priests and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, made the decision not to follow the usual process of appointing an Auxiliary Bishop to assist him in the leadership and governance of the Archdiocese. Rather, in the spirit of the theology of Vatican II and the ministerial identity of every baptised person as priest, prophet and king, he chose a collaborative team approach to lead and govern the Archdiocese. This collaborative team consisted of a priest as the Vicar General, a woman religious and a lay woman to minister together with him, in what he called the Diocesan Pastoral Team.

This structure operated successfully for nine years. The collaborative team met weekly for shared decision making. Each member had a 'portfolio' or areas of responsibility. Simultaneously parish councils, regional councils and a diocesan pastoral council operated to involve people in collaborative decision making.

In 1991 a consultation in the Diocese of Townsville on restructuring parishes established that the basis for parish restructuring was "That all Christ's faithful share responsibility for the life and mission of the Church". An adult partnership model of church leadership was promoted in which participation depends on mutuality, a constant giving and receiving, and friendship rather than domination or manipulation.

Three practical models were proposed

1. a traditional model with parish priest
2. pastoral leader in partnership with a priest (where a pastoral leader had administrative and pastoral responsibility with a priest providing support through some pastoral work and sacramental leadership)
3. team structure (which took longer to implement as diocesan staff worked with a parish for six months before the parish chose a team of four or five people)

On Palm Island, an indigenous community, the guiding ideals were to be

1. self-ministering
2. self-managing
3. self-sustaining

Working with the local elders, three people were selected for formation for leadership and eventually a team of three led the Church on Palm Island. (Uncle Bill Coolburra, Auntie Gertie Massey and Uncle Ralph Watson: use of Uncle and Auntie is a sign of respect in Aboriginal communities) With this promotion of indigenous leadership, a cultural inclusion to the baptism liturgy occurred. As well as anointing the baby with oil and baptising with water, the baby was 'warmed' by holding the baby close to a fire and then the limbs and joints gently rubbed "into life" by the members of the family.

Tragically, each of these effective examples collapsed when new bishops were appointed to these dioceses.

2. Silent and complicit

While there are laity who may appear to be silent and complicit, allowing clerical leadership to dominate, they endeavour to 'stick with the Church' and make an impact wherever they can. For example, in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn where there are a total of 25 parish councils, there are 15 women who are dynamic, elected leaders of the councils.

Other women give generously for many years but out of exhaustion, frustration and exclusion move to the fringe of the Church or walk away completely.

The Catholic Church has traditionally tied governance and administration to ordination. I see a change in the culture of clericalism with the release of a new constitution (Preach the Gospel) for the Roman Curia. With this document Pope Francis has ensured that the church in the third millennium will increasingly be led by lay people.

The constitution specifically states that the Curia reform "must foresee the involvement of laymen and women, also in roles of governance and responsibility" (Sec. 1, Art. 10). The constitution also emphasizes synodality, envisioning greater collaboration between bishops and lay people.

The new constitution says that the communion the church is called to "gives the church the face of *synodality*; a Church, that is, of mutual listening 'in which each has something to learn. The faithful people, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: each listening to the others, and all listening to the Holy Spirit'" (Sec. 1, Art. 4).

3. New way of being Church

The report *Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia* which was commissioned by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and released in May 2020.

Light from the Southern Cross is a significant title for the report because the Southern Cross (a constellation) features heavily in the Dreamtime stories that hold much of the cultural tradition of Indigenous Australians passed down for thousands of years. The Southern Cross, since early in the 19th century, has been emblematic of an Australian sense of belonging; a shared sense of co-responsibility and a constancy of purpose. It is the central feature of our national flag.

In the scriptural tradition the firmament and the stars are symbolic of darkness and light; of the Creator's love and concern for humanity and of the God's guidance.

The report emerged from the revelations of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by members of the Church, especially by its ordained clergy. (2013 to 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse) This abuse has damaged innocent victims, and wounded families and communities. It has impaired the mission of the Church, especially the claim of the Christian community to represent a life-giving God. In addition, the widespread failure of the Church's authorities to respond with justice and compassion to the survivors of that abuse has led many members of the Christian community to sever their link to the Catholic Church.

The report acknowledged "The Church needs 'real social and cultural transformation' with tangible repercussions for the life of the faith if there is to be a restoration of trust and credibility in the human face that guides its mission. That is an acknowledgment that the Church, itself, should be open to reform so that it can proclaim its mission in this 'new stage of history' in which 'fundamental and rapid changes' abound."

Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia made 86 recommendations ranging from the appointment of Bishops to record keeping diocesan synods to collaborative ministry and parish finance councils. Taken together these recommendations provide a detailed framework for the renewal of the Catholic Church in Australia. The report is publicly available.

Rather than focus on the recommendations I'd like to draw your attention to the concepts that *Light from the Southern Cross* proposes as the guides for the renewal of the Church are informed by Scripture, Tradition and the successful experience of governance of Catholic health, education and social services agencies and bodies in the broader community.

A new way of being Church will be guided by

- Subsidiarity
- Stewardship
- Synodality
- Dialogue
- Reflection and discernment
- Leadership

As well as

- Governance
- Integrity
- Accountability and transparency
- Risk management
- Ethics and culture
- Consultation
- Inclusiveness and participation
- Communication
- Relationships.

This new way is not at all difficult because we know that where courageous and collaborative leadership has been exercised in the past, such as in Adelaide and Townsville, accountable and transparent ecclesial structures emerge.

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