



Quarterly magazine of the National Council of Priests of Australia

# The Swag

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## NCP CONTACTS



**Chairman**

**Rev Patrick Sykes**  
103 Fernleigh Road  
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650  
P: (02) 6925 2111  
chairman@ncp.catholic.org.au



**Secretary**

**Rev Jamie Collins**  
3 Memory Street  
Harristown QLD 4350  
P: (07) 4636 1737  
secretary@ncp.catholic.org.au



**Treasurer**

**Rev Brian Mathews**  
14 Cockburn Road  
Jamestown SA 5491  
P: (08) 8664 1056  
treasurer@ncp.catholic.org.au



**Committee**

**Rev Lenin Thenamirtham MGL**  
1087 Whitehorse Road  
Box Hill VIC 3128  
P: (03) 9401 6371  
committee2@ncp.catholic.org.au



**Committee**

**Rev James Clarke**  
150 Yarra St  
Geelong VIC 3220  
P: (03) 5222 1977  
committee1@ncp.catholic.org.au



**Editor**

**Rev Peter Maher**  
Unit 30, 63-69 Bonar Street  
Arncliffe NSW 2205  
P: 0439 460 779  
editor@theswag.org.au



**Executive Officer**

**Ms Sally Heath**  
sally.heath@ncp.catholic.org.au



**Administrative Officer**

**Mrs Christine Moore**  
christine.moore@ncp.catholic.org.au



*Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples are respectfully advised that this publication may contain the words, names, images and/or descriptions of people who have passed away.*

### NCP NATIONAL OFFICE

PO Box 295, Belmont VIC 3216  
74 Fryers Rd, Belmont VIC 3216  
P: (03) 5244 3680  
national.office@ncp.catholic.org.au  
www.nationalcouncilofpriests.com.au  
www.theswag.org.au  
www.catholicdirectory.com.au

### ALL SUBMISSIONS TO:

E: editor@theswag.org.au

### ALL ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:

E: national.office@ncp.catholic.org.au

### DESIGN

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### ABOUT THE NCP

The National Council of Priests (NCP) is an Australia-wide organisation of Catholic Clergy (Bishops, Priests and Deacons) and Associate Members (Lay, Religious and Seminarians) who join together to support each other in their ministry in the Church. Founded in 1970 in the Spirit of Vatican II, the NCP is committed to the fraternity and further education of clergy and to representing clergy in the public forum. *The Swag* is published quarterly (March, June, September & December) by the National Council of Priests of Australia as a service to Catholic clergy of Australia, and through them to the Church and the wider community.

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## Paddy Sykes



Greetings to our readership as we are faced with yet another challenging period of lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions. Even though these lockdowns are affecting so many individuals, families, communities, businesses and faith communities – public health safety is the number one priority. I am deeply grateful to the men and women who are testing the community for COVID-19, who are contact tracing, who are caring for COVID-19 patients in our hospitals and intensive care units and who are administering the all-important vaccines. We remember in prayer especially those people who have died of COVID-19 and their families and pray that the measures we are all taking will limit the damaging impact of this insidious virus.

As an ABC tragic, I recently watched a most fascinating four-part series *Ms Represented with Annabelle Crabb*. Annabelle, a delightful and engaging journalist looks at the place of women in our Federal Parliament. If you haven't watched it, I thoroughly recommend it.

Episode One, *Getting There*, begins by pointing out that in 1894, South Australia was the first western democracy to allow women to vote and to be elected to parliament – and it all happened by accident! Having the right to be elected to parliament and being elected to parliament are two different things. In March 1921, Edith Cowan made history when she became the first Australian female parliamentarian and it took another four decades before a woman was finally elected to Federal Parliament. Women seeking pre-selection were told they were either too young or not married and if married, were questioned about whether they were going to have children. What women wore, attracted more media attention than the policies they were pursuing for the good of the country. Even in more recent times, two women titans of Australian politics, Bronwyn Bishop and Julia Gillard, had many attempts at pre-selection before finally being elected.

Episode Two, *Being There*, focussed on how these early women were often in parliament by themselves which was very challenging. Women's views and opinions were not treated with respect – they were just not heard. Men would articulate the same opinion as what the woman had expressed and claim it for themselves. There was huge pressure for women to conform to the way men did things. Workplace culture was not monitored and women who called out bad behaviour in politics were victimised. Women were ignored and patronised.

Episodes Three and Four explored how women have made a difference in the parliament. The abortion debate was conducted by an all-male parliament who didn't consult women on the issue

of women's reproductive rights. The *Sex Discrimination Act* of 1983 changed the opportunities open to women. The story of the drug RU486 in Australia is an interesting example of ethics and power in Australian politics. The numbers of women in the parliament, quotas and the possibility of women leading the country were all touched on in these episodes.

As I watched the four episodes, I thought the program had so much to teach the Catholic Church about how we have valued women and their possible contribution to the life of the church.

As women have struggled to get a place around the conversation table and have been sidelined and overlooked in the parliament, so too have women in the Church.

As the rights of women in our society were determined by the men of the parliament, so too have men determined the rights of women in the church.

We have had both a female Prime Minister and a female Governor General and the number of women in parliament has grown considerably due largely to the work of affirmative action by the ALP. Has this been mirrored in the Church? While Pope Francis and others are appointing women to important positions in the Church, how does it stack up to the advances made in Federal Parliament?

The Catholic church still has a long way to go in being recognised for its valuing of women and for using their abilities in the life of the Church and the world.

As we look to be a more inclusive church, parliament and society, let us listen carefully to what our brothers and sisters in our community and world are saying to us

*Shalom,*  
Paddy. ☺

## NCP Elections

**NOMINATIONS ARE HEREBY CALLED FOR CHAIRMAN AND TWO COMMITTEE POSITIONS**

- Paddy Sykes will complete his term as Chairman at the end of 2021.
- Brian Mathews will complete three years of a possible six year term and Jim Clarke will finish after completing Greg Barker's term.
- Nominations for all positions close 30 September 2021.
- Contact the NCP Office for a Nomination Form.



# The limits of synodality in a polarised church



PETER MAHER

The public debate within the America Bishops' Conference about who is worthy to receive Communion aimed

clearly at the Catholic President of the United States and politicians is not so significant in itself as individual Catholics and their faith communities will surely fathom these things with good Catholic pastoral practice and conscience as earlier statements by bishops and successive popes have recommended. But it does stand as a striking symbol of the state of the culture wars in countries like America and Australia.

About two thirds of the U.S. bishops voted to pursue a document to look at this issue revealing a strong element among the bishops seeking to roll back the reforms of Vatican II, as this seems to their objective.

Listening and dialogue which characterise the synodal approach of Pope Francis, means an openness to change and learning. It means rethinking the architecture of

mission and evangelisation. Is it catechetics and doctrine or is it launching out into the deep with Jesus in the back of the boat? Are we willing to be evangelised by those on the periphery as preferred in the gospel – the First Nations people, women, asylum seekers, people living with a disability, LGBTIQ+ people and the poor?

At the upcoming Plenary Council, the way we dialogue will be critical to its success in reshaping the Australian church in a way which adequately responds to the crisis of inequality and discrimination, the many thousands of submissions to the Plenary Council and the Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Abuse. Many Catholics have entered the process of discernment in good faith and with the encouragement of Pope Francis' call for synodality. There is huge danger that many will be further disillusioned and alienated by a non-synodal approach where their voices are ignored or erased.

But if synodality means spiritual conversation and dialogue with space for multiple voices but no critique of which voices need take preference, it will be little more than a talkfest that fails to initiate, develop or provide suggestions for making relevant and essential changes in church life and its dialogue with the world. If consensus can't be reached, does that mean we settle for doing nothing because the Spirit hasn't spoken clearly enough? How do we discern the Spirit's movement in the church? What are the guiding principles for thought and action? It can't be just opinion of the majority or 'business as usual' in the light of no consensus.

We have a tried-and-true process in the Cardijn method: see, judge and act. This method enshrined in the last 100 years of Catholic Action, Vatican II and numerous church documents suggests that study based on the life experience particularly of the poor, women, First Nations, the marginalised, workers, the erased and voiceless will result in action that is gospel inspired and produces strategies for justice and love.

The key elements of the method are to privilege the voices of the excluded; study and discern the wisdom of their experience, the gospel and Catholic Social Teaching

and to take action on behalf of the oppressed and silenced. So far from listening to multiple voices with equal weight, the Cardijn method listens to certain voices with prejudice so we get just outcomes, not majority views, or worse still, groups who win by wielding power, whether that be clerical power or claiming 'tradition' (the recent past practice) trumps all.

Synodality, seen as a listening process that simply allows articulation of views, runs the risk of further silencing the very voices crying out for justice. A robust synodality will contest opinion and ideas of the majority or those in power with the lived experience of the voiceless, those discriminated against and the disempowered.

We, as people of the incarnation (knowing God through the human form), must now respect and value voices and bodies with a preference for the those often excluded: the poor, women, First Nations, LGBTIQ+ and many more. In gospel terms these are our first teachers and evangelisers. To ignore them or to allow the dominant voice to remain the only voice is to ignore the Jesus method of eating meals with and being transformed by outcasts.

In this edition of *The Swag* there are many thoughtful writers discussing the crisis in the church in Australia. How will we approach the Plenary Council, reshape parishes; include women and minorities; address the failure in leadership and pastoral care; prepare priests and find new ways to deliver sacramental ministry? It is answers to these questions that will be the gauge of the success of the Plenary Council. ☪



**The Swag  
Summer Edition**

Closing date for letters and articles is  
**Monday, 25 October, 2021.**  
Please email submissions for consideration to:  
[editor@theswag.org.au](mailto:editor@theswag.org.au)  
Articles: 700 words  
Features: 1,400 words

**SPECIAL GIFT in this edition**

There are links to three free books in the book reviews. John Crothers novel *The Better Good Man*; John Braniff's *Their Grey and Scarlet Eminences*. How B A Santamaria and George Pell worked to stifle and overturn the reforms of Vatican II., and Stefan Gigacz's *The Leaven in the Council*; Joseph Cardijn and the Jocist Network at Vatican II. All three, offer great reading – fiction, memoir and fascinating church history.

# Are Catholics truly being represented in the process of synodality?

JOHN WARHURST

John Warhurst, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University, the Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn and a member of the Plenary Council, suggests the appointed members of the Plenary Council may understandably be confused as to what their role is and who or how they are to represent. Reprinted with permission *Eureka Street*, July 21, [www.eurekastreet.com.au](http://www.eurekastreet.com.au)



The First Assembly of Australia's Plenary Council is only two months away, but uncertainty still remains about the role that its 282 members will play. Not just about what work they will do but what conception of the role they will bring or will be imposed upon them by the authorities.

Their designation has changed from delegate to member, freeing them somewhat from the expectation that they will be tied to the views of their diocese or other 'sponsoring' body.

But it has not resolved some perceived role confusion both among the members themselves and within the wider Catholic community. This confusion has important consequences.

My member formation session last month was told, in the context of discussion about the part that connection with the wider Catholic community would play in the assembly, that the Plenary Council Assembly should ideally be a community but not a bubble. I was struck by this description because it nicely encapsulates the possibilities.

There is a sense in which the membership should bond together to do its 'job', but not to the extent of shutting out the general community.

This leaves room for individual members to be a bridge to the broader Catholic community and raises expectations that the Catholic people have a right and duty to communicate with them.

My impression is that the Plenary Council organisers have always leant

towards a narrow vision of the assembly. Members have been advised that they have no responsibilities beyond official PC duties.

The PC authorities have also not tried to take obvious steps towards encouraging connections between members and the community. For instance, they have not provided public contact addresses, such as email addresses, which would enable the community to contact PC members directly.

They have also allowed several members to continue in their role although they have left their dioceses temporarily for travel or study. This breaks the desirable link to community as they are no longer present among 'their people'.

The representative role may vary according to the different types of members. Many are ex-officio because they hold positions in dioceses, such as bishops and vicar-generals. Some are there because they are leaders of religious institutes. Lay members were mostly chosen from within dioceses. Some others were chosen from agencies and commissions, like the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council.

The origins of all members probably bring with them some expectations that, in an unspecified way, they will connect with and 'speak for' those who put them there. But the expectation is vague. There is also a general expectation that the assembly collectively 'represents' the composition and diversity of the church in Australia.

Within the existing constraints of Vatican rules for plenary councils this has been done to some extent, but it will not stop legitimate arguments about the representativeness of the assembly. The laity are clearly under-represented, but certainly a wide range of Catholics, by any measure, will come together in early October.

There are different kinds of practical consequences which flow from this role confusion. Representation is always a fraught concept anyway, as members of

parliament know too well. There is endless debate about what the idea means, both ideally and in the real world. Are representatives casting a personal or conscience vote or are they beholden to a higher force, such as the community/electorate/political party? Ideally members should play a mixed role.

## Representation is always a fraught concept

The members themselves, many of whom are in full-time employment or study and desperately busy, are torn between extensive personal preparation through reading, prayer and discernment and listening to the wider Catholic community. Some have invited the community to contact them.

The interested part of the Catholic community, admittedly a minority, is now also reaching out to its PC members. This is being done by some dioceses, parishes, religious institutes, official and unofficial groups and individuals. This is an admirable development.

The last months leading up to the assembly may once again generate a flurry of concrete proposals as suggested by the PC when it published the agenda questions.

The final aspect of community representation to think about is how difficult it will be within the assembly itself as specific ideas circulate quickly in detailed form. There will be a clamour of voices seeking attention so members will have to focus. This period is when members will rely more and more on each other and their personal intellectual and spiritual resources or on a few close friends or mentors who can be consulted informally and quickly.

The opportunities for previously written formal submissions to make an impact will be overtaken for the time being by free-flowing informality.

Once the First Assembly has finished the nine months until the Second Assembly will revert to a more measured pace when the Catholic community has a chance to reflect on what has happened and to give its initial verdict on what has emerged.

These will not be fallow months, but rather an opportunity for general principles to be revisited and for priorities either to be reiterated or, in some cases, to be rethought. ☪

# Climb every mountain: Sr Joan Chittister OSB

JIM MULRONEY SSC

Columban priest, Jim Mulroney SSC, Essendon VIC, summarises the key points of a talk by Sr Joan Chittister OSB (pictured) to the Convocation sponsored by the Australasian Coalition of Catholic Church Reform on May 2, 2021. Reprinted with permission from the Columban eBulletin – Vol 14 No. 5, Jun 15, 2021 ([www.columban.org.au](http://www.columban.org.au)).



The climb through the mountains that Sister Joan invites us to is essential to our preparation for the Australian Plenary Council scheduled for October this year. In an address to some 3,000 people tuned into a digital conference on May 2, she began her reflection on *The Future of Catholicism in Australia* with a quotation from St. Benedict encouraging us to “listen and attend to the ears of the heart.”

It is compassion and emotion that ultimately connect us to this world, a world which she points out is a long way from that of just three or four decades past. She points to a basic shift in the demographic makeup, making it so clear that God is speaking today in many tongues and through many cultures.

Everything has changed, she says, and “everything must grow up, religion too. It must be much more than obeying rules.”

In introducing Sister Joan as a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in the United States, the president of the Australian Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, described the purpose of the Council as an opportunity to listen; to each other and to the Spirit; to which Sister Joan added tuning in carefully to the world around us.

She described this as an invitation to find what stirs the heart and then to act on its stirring, as only the laity can help our struggling Church to relocate and touch what is sacred in the changing society it exists to serve.

## An age of transition

Sister Joan believes the Church has entered an age of transition. One age is dying. She does not believe this reflects past failure, but rather past success, as every dying age is giving birth to a new one.

But birth does not come easily, nor does it happen by osmosis. A miracle may be needed, but one of human making rather than divine intervention, the fruit of the work of human hands, good or bad depending on the response to the challenge.

She lists the eight mountains of the bible: Sinai (Horeb), Gilboa, Olivet, Moriah, Carmel, Hermon, Gerizim and the Beatitudes as heights we must scale. Some we have already climbed, but we may be struggling to hold our grip on their slopes. Others we have yet to attempt.

Sinai saw the birth of the Ten Commandments. It has been ascended by some with profound devotion, developing a deep appreciation of the goodness of God, while others that climbed with them faulted, bogged in a swamp of rules set around the context of sin, leaving a spirit engendered failure and a rigidity that both assisted and stunted the development of spirituality.

Gilboa is the mountain of transition. It played host to the death of the great defender of Israel, King Saul, but paving the way for the ascension of David to the throne with his delight in the ways of the Lord, whom he approached with joy in song and dance.

This too is a mountain we have climbed. We have opened our hearts to the Lord and to the people, as evidenced in our parishes, education systems and social services. But these are a creation and a gift of a past success, no longer to be defended at the expense of singing and dancing with the Lord in a new way.

## The mountain of renewal

Renewal involves letting go of much that was sacred in the past, as Israel let go of its security king to embrace a more life-giving monarch, we too need to let go of the past and open the Church for all – laity included, women and men alike, to contribute.

Sister Joan then comes to Olivet, the scene of the crucifixion. This is a mountain we have climbed, as witnessed by those who tend to the most needy in our world. This is how we have been Church in the past, but are struggling to sustain.

Olivet is a most important mountain, as it reminds us the Church must be the people to whom we reach out, demanding from us a fundamental dedication to stand with the poor; the refugee, the homeless, the persecuted, weak and despised. This requires more than generosity, it demands dedication and determination.

Moriah, the mountain of faith where Abraham was challenged, is one we have not climbed. It challenges us to question, to question what we never questioned before. It is the mountain where we abandon past presumptions and security to move into unknown areas.

Our old age and hesitancy to question are stifling our ability as a Church to bequeath. Catholics have felt needs that must be articulated clearly to our leaders. They need to become public issues, as if no one speaks, no one can listen.

We do not have revolutions in our Church, we discern and follow the Holy Spirit, a journey of several processes.

It is our leaders who called for this Plenary Council and our leaders must listen, but the laity must give them something to hear.

Sister Joan cites important questions regarding the participation of women in the Church that must be asked; women as ministers of grace, not just consumers. There are basic moral dilemmas that have become disconnected from the public discourse of our Church and its insertion in the affairs of the market place are often more obstructionist than constructive.

‘We condemn the killing of the unborn,’ she says, ‘but neglect the born.’ We condemn the mother, but not the creators, purveyors and users of ever more destructive and deadly weapons.

Even the nuclear largely escapes our moral scrutiny. Decisions not to speak or not

to act can be predicated on anticipated unfavourable reaction, rather than serve the weak and deprived. The next mountain reminds us of this.

### The spiritual mountain

Carmel, the mountain of choice between the rules and development of our spirituality beckons. It represents the invitation to go beyond doing good, keeping the rules or nourishing ourselves with the sacraments – it concerns the hard decisions; choosing to teach peace not war, promote dedication to people, not abandoning them in their crises.

Hermon tells us to whom Jesus revealed himself in the Transfiguration. Significantly

it was not the prophets, the priests from the Temple or the rulers of the land. His revelation goes to the rank and file. He calls them to be prophetic, to scrutinise what we are forbidden to think about or mention out loud.

### Inclusion and equality

It is a call to be prophetic, to speak for the poor and marginalised, as the old newspaper slogan goes, without fear or favour. It is an easy mantra, but difficult to live out. For a paper, it can lead to bankruptcy, loss of readership or government censure; for the individual, it may be ostracism from friends and workmates, loss of a job or esteem in society or Church. It is a tough climb.

Finally, Gerizim is the mount of equality where Jesus calls the woman at the well; divorced six times we are told, but in reality abandoned six times, as only a man could divorce. She was not held in adulation as the epitome of grace in her society, but she was the one Jesus called to be his disciple, the clarion of his message.

But she is the epitome of the last mountain, the Beatitudes, the mount of blessing, the great leveller where all are the same, called to the same virtue and simplicity, and found in the most surprising of places.

If the laity lead in giving birth to a new age, the leaders will follow. ✚



## Truth-telling about Australia's First Nations & the Plenary Council

BRENDAN BYRNE SJ

**Brendan Byrne SJ, Jesuit Theological College, Parkville VIC, discusses the truth about our history and first nations as a starting point for re-energizing interest in and relevance of the Plenary Council.**

Because Anzac Day fell on a Sunday this year, I found myself at the end of a parish Mass singing *Advance Australia Fair*. Reading both verses projected on the screen brought home to me for the first time how impossible it would be for Indigenous members of the community to identify with the text. 'For those who've come across the seas, We've boundless plains to share'. But who are "We"? Presumably, 'those who've come across the seas' are the waves of immigrants since World War Two. But what about those who 'came across the seas' since 1788 and took possession of those 'boundless plains'? Are they the "We"? I suspect so. But what about those who were here for tens of thousands of years before them and had those lands taken on the basis (*terra nullius*) that they simply didn't exist? Can we coopt them into the "We" simply by singing over and over these untrue and largely fatuous lines?

These questions turned my mind to the Plenary Council, a topic and a prospect on which John Warhurst has been providing informed and thoughtful suggestions in *Eureka Street*.

There is no question that the Council has lost most of any traction it had in the minds and expectations of Catholics over the past couple of years. The biggest, albeit unmentioned, question among its episcopal promoters must be how to regain

that traction to an extent sufficient to allow the meeting to respond at least in some degree to the aims originally set out for it.

My sense is that this will only be the case if a genuinely prophetic element enters into the agenda and if that prophetic call bears not upon internal matters – governance, clerical celibacy, and so forth – but on pressing issues of Australian society as a whole. In the wake of the abuse crisis and the Royal Commission, the church will not regain credibility by focusing on itself. It will only win back respect by directing out beyond itself and its more domestic concerns the love of God and of neighbour that the recently published *Instrumentum Laboris* speaks of again and again.

### The stain on the Australian conscience

There is one concern that the Catholic community by its very nature is well equipped – indeed essentially equipped – to address. The 'original sin' staining the national conscience is the cost inflicted on the original inhabitants to gain possession of 'those boundless plains to share'. The massacres, lasting well over a century, extending to every state and territory, are well documented; the evidence is uncontestable and digitally accessible for all who care to know. Genocide is not a term to throw around lightly and ought to

be carefully defined. But there is no doubt that expectations and, in some cases, hopes for the extinguishment of the indigenous race existed for decades, well into the last century.

No person living today bears guilt for what took place generations ago. Guilt is not the issue. In this sense to speak of an 'original sin' is inexact in terms of the classic theology of Original Sin, itself a doctrine sorely in need of credible reformulation.

What is required is national acknowledgment of the cost of the organized massacres, including women and children; the dispossession of land; the breakup of families and communities; the imposition of culture, albeit in some cases with good intentions. We possess our 'golden soil' and 'wealth for toil' at a terrible cost; a cost not paid by "we" who sing the song but by those the song neither names nor includes.

### Conversion and reconciliation

In more than a dozen places the *Instrumentum Laboris* does call for conversion; in fact, conversion was the subject of one of the six thematic papers drawn up earlier in the process. But, when one is profiting, as all contemporary Australians are, from a great wrong that has been done, the first step in conversion must be to acknowledge the cost. The original cost cannot be repaid but its lingering virulent effects, all too well known, in the indigenous community, can be owned and, in consultation and dialogue, addressed.

Conversion, after all, is central to response to the Gospel, the presupposition for the

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advance of the reign of God that the Church is tasked to proclaim. If, as the *Instrumentum* regretfully acknowledges (§47), the sacrament of Reconciliation has fallen into desuetude, that is probably because its totally private focus over recent centuries and its preoccupation with sexual sin have ceased to strike ordinary Catholics, now much more educated, as in any way relevant to the eradication of evil on a societal scale.

Yet reconciliation lies at the heart of Christian faith. It is the core business of the Church. God was in Christ, freely reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:18), and the task of the Church is to proclaim that gracious and supremely costly offer to humankind.

But reconciliation with God is not the end of the process. As made clear in the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:21–35), reconciliation is a gift the reconciled must live out and pass on. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount instructs the disciples, *If you are taking your gift to the altar and remember that your brother or sister has something against you, first go and be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift* (Matt 5:23–24). We know our indigenous brothers and sisters have something against us. Can we go to our altars and celebrate our liturgies without first attending to that reconciliation or at least committing to do so? Would St Paul say to us, with the same devastating simplicity as he said to the Corinthians in view of similar social neglect, *It's not the Lord's Supper that you're celebrating* (1 Cor 11:20)?

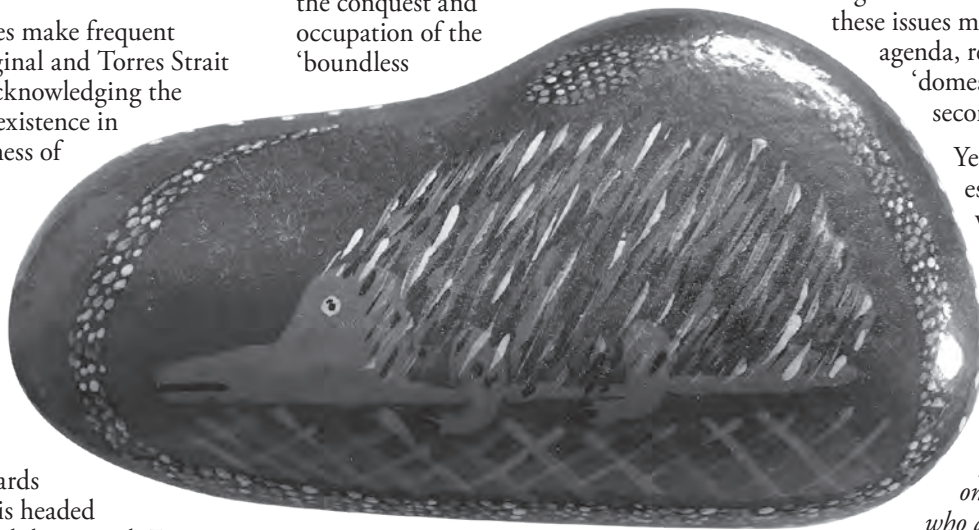
The document does make frequent mention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, acknowledging the antiquity of their existence in the land, the richness of their culture and wisdom, as well as the suffering that has been inflicted upon them by those ignorant of the richness of their culture (§§39–40, 76, 80, 88, 100, 177). A major section towards the end (§§176ff) is headed “Renewing Our Solidarity with First Australians and All Those on the Margins”. The document goes on to quote at length Pope John Paul II’s address at Alice Springs in 1986, which still reads tellingly today. But one may question whether lumping indigenous people together with other marginalized groups

as a problem to be attended to is respectful of their unique status.

At this point (§178) the document offers a promising, albeit tentative, suggestion: *Despite a range of successful initiatives with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by some dioceses, religious institutes and Church agencies, the Plenary Council may prioritise the question of how the Church can include and empower First Peoples to take their place more fully within Church and society.*

It is not clear to me how the two parts of this statement hang together. How might the ‘range of successful initiatives’ somehow make unnecessary the need for the Council ‘to prioritise the question’. But at least the suggestion that the issue might become a priority for the Council is a significant admission, as is the further statement (§179) that the Council *is an opportunity for the Catholic Church in Australian to make a public response to the (Uluru) Statement from the Heart, which called for ... ‘a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history’.*

“Truth-telling” is surely the essence of the matter, as it was in South Africa, Rwanda, and other instances of significant reconciliation. The Church has not found it easy to accept the truth brought home to us by the Royal Commission. Yet the Church constantly hears the Gospel reminder, *You will know the truth and the truth will make you free* (John 8:32). Of all institutions, the Church should be the first to acknowledge the painful truth about the conquest and occupation of the ‘boundless



plains’, especially who paid the cost. The Church that venerates the cost paid by Jesus in bringing divine reconciliation to the world is well equipped to take up the prophetic task of bringing home this truth to the wider society of our land.

## A prophetic agenda

There are reiterated calls towards the end of the document for boldness and courage, for speaking out with *parrësia* – a further Johannine term (§§163, 197). The faithful are invited *to live fully the implications of their baptism in all dimensions of their lives ... so that they might more effectively share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and kingly office in the Church and in the world* (§86). Of that triad – prophet, priest, and king – one tends to hear a lot more about the priestly and kingly than the prophetic. Yet if the Plenary Council is not prepared seriously to take up the prophetic dimension of Christian life, then it will itself be settling for the ‘life of mediocrity’ that, in the words of John Paul II, it deplors (§86).

‘Prioritising’ the question of ‘how the Church can... empower First Peoples’ (§178) will mean including it among four major issues that the Council must address if it is to have any credibility both within itself and in Australian society as a whole. I would list these as

- repentance for the legacy of clergy sexual abuse;
- the situation of women in church and society (including domestic violence);
- the environmental crisis;
- and, as addressed here, truth-telling about the original occupation of the land.

The Council must be prepared to make hearing from those entitled to speak on these issues major items on the agenda, relegating more ‘domestic’ matters to secondary status.

Yes, in each case but especially in the last, it will be controversial and divisive. But that has always been the way of the prophetic from Amos and Jeremiah, to Jesus and beyond. To quote Paul again, *Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine* (1 Cor 11:19).

But at least controversy will stir interest and give hope of dispelling the apathy currently threatening to frustrate the enterprise as a whole. It may even help the Church regain some of the credibility that has been lost in spades in recent years. ☪

## Is the church irrelevant?

KEVIN BATES SM

**Kevin Bates SM OAM, Hunters Hill NSW, explores the way of pastoral care that seeks to include and invite especially those on the periphery of parish life.**



**T**he relationship between the Church and wider society is one that is always worth exploring. For many good people as far as they are concerned, the Church is something of a curiosity, an irrelevance.

Sure, there is the contribution that the Church makes through its services of healthcare, education, welfare and so on. People are perhaps the unwitting recipients of the Church's pastoral care in these forums which may not translate into active involvement in the life of the Church.

We have the large body of people who name themselves as Catholic, and whose lives seem to have little time for active faith practice and who will say that for them the Church has little to offer. Fine people, often living good and sometimes heroic lives, shaped perhaps in some way by Catholic education and church teachings, live out these teachings with varying levels of awareness of the gospel that underpins them.

From time to time they reach out for connection. Perhaps there is a child they would like to baptise, a wedding they wish to celebrate in the church or a funeral for a loved one whose life had some fondness for the life they remember as being somehow Catholic.

These precious encounters come and go, stirring a memory or a certain sentiment at least for a little while. They may express surprise at how relaxed and welcoming the ceremony felt to them. There may be comments such as: "I wish church could be like this all the time, I might come more often."

Then necessarily, they move on with their lives, possibly with a new memory that may nourish them when they call it to mind. The connection with Church

has been fleeting enough but not without worth.

For four weekends during May, the Sydney Archdiocese asked us to keep a count of people attending Mass. Such figures, while they can be useful for strategic planning do not tell the whole story of the life and mission of a community.

It is a joy of course when people come along and want to join us when we worship together. It's natural that we feel concern for those who have taken other paths.

It is important however that these joys and concerns be matched with a deeper understanding of the nature of our mission. Jesus makes it clear that people will know that we are his disciples by our love for each other, not by how numerous we are.

Love as we know, does not count the cost, does not define itself by numbers or the language of success or failure. Love is a gift given and received and then left to find its own course.

If then, love is what marks us as a community among ourselves, and if love is the gift that passing visitors receive and take with them when they leave, then chances are we are true to the mission God entrusts to us.

This does not prevent us from seeking to reach out at every turn, seeking to share our faith with anyone who cares to hear. We do so however, aware that it is God's work we are about. We sow the seeds, water them and allow God's Spirit to go to work in God's good time and theirs.

There's an African tribe who assign a song to each new-born child. Later on, if the growing child breaks the taboos and fails to honour the ways of the community, rather than being expelled, she or he is invited back into the community when the time is right. The community simply sings for him or her, the song given at their birth to remind them who they are.

No matter how irrelevant we appear to be or for how long, we too have a unique song of love to sing that belongs to any soul who comes our way. ☪

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## Giving our Aboriginal brothers and sisters a voice

JOACHIM DIRKS SSS

**Jo Dirks SSS pleads for recognition of an Aboriginal Voice in Australia. Reprinted with permission from Blessed Sacrament Congregation Newsletter June 2021, Vol 5. Details and picture of the Uluru Statement from the Heart can be found here: <https://ulurustatement.org>**



In 1967 the Australian people voted in a referendum that Aboriginal people be granted full citizenship. It was a great act of inclusion. Now over fifty years later there is a desire to recognize an Aboriginal voice and have it enshrined in the Australian Constitution.

The 1967 referendum secured the amendment of Section 51 (XXVI) and the deletion of Section 127 of the Constitution. The rights of Aborigines were abridged not by the Constitution, but by laws enacted by federal and state parliaments.

Now there is momentum building for a new referendum, one that acknowledges the voice of the Aboriginal people. What is this voice? The voice is the outcome of an extraordinary gathering of Aboriginal peoples held at Uluru in May 2017 over three days. Before this event, the doubters, sceptics and scoffers poured scorn on these proceedings, saying there would be walkouts. They were proven wrong. There were none. The outcome was a statement with 250 signatures calling for the setting up of a Makarrata Commission. “Makarrata” is a Yolngu (Arnhem Land, Northern Territory) word that approximates a “treaty”. There has never been such a treaty in existence in the Australian context unlike New Zealand where the Maoris settled with the European “pakehas”.

Makarrata is a Yolngu word “describing a process of conflict resolution, peacemaking and justice”, or “a coming together after a struggle”, and delegates said that it “captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the

people of Australia”, and the Makarrata Commission would “supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations”.

In keeping with the tradition of the Yirrkala bark petitions and the Barunga statement, the Uluru Statement was made in the form of a work of art. The statement is placed in the centre. Surrounding the statement are signatures of over 250 delegates who attended the conference and reached consensus. 100 first nations are represented in the statement by signatories who included the name of their nation.

The artwork tells the story of two creation stories of the traditional owners of Uluru. One tells how the Uluru landscape was shaped by a fight to the death at the Mutitjulu Rockhole between the woman python with eggs from the north east, at the top left, and the poisonous snake from the south west, at the bottom left. The other tells the story of the Mala people, represented by the wallaby who, while holding a ceremony at the top of Uluru, became involved in a dispute with men who came from the west. The men left and created the devil dingo, represented by the dog prints.

The challenge is in articulating, explaining and fixing the concept of the “makarrata” in the general community. Only after there has been an exposure and some acceptance of a “makarrata” in the public domain, would it be realistic for a referendum on a treaty with the Aboriginal people to be successful. The High Court of Australia determined against the Queensland State Government a) on the Mabo decision of 1992 that “terra nullius” should not have been used and b) on the Wik decision of 1996 that pastoral leases cannot extinguish native title rights.

Are we ready to support our Aboriginal brothers and sisters in their quest for fundamental rights? Are we prepared to give them a voice? Their occupancy of the land has been dated back 60,000 years. ☪

# The Bread of Life for all

FRANK BRENNAN SJ

**Frank Brennan SJ, Rector of Newman College, The University of Melbourne, preached this homily on the state of play on ordination of women as deacons on 25 July 2021.**



During these Sundays of Ordinary Time, we have been listening to the Gospel of Mark. For the next five weeks, we take a detour to Chapter 6 of John's Gospel, 'the longest complete sequence in the Fourth Gospel...held together by the motif of Jesus as "the Bread of Life" and the response this evokes from the crowds and the disciples'. There are more than 5,000 to be fed and there is nothing to work with, except the five barley loaves and two fish which the small boy has and happily hands over. Note, the boy does not keep a loaf or half a fish for himself. He gives all that he has. And Jesus works with that. There will be 12 basket loads of scraps left over. There's plenty for everyone. This story of the bounty of the bread of life has added poignancy in a time of lockdown when the Eucharist is not available to any but a few. This story occasions deeper reflection at a time when the Australian Church is coming to terms with the reality that there are no longer enough Australian-born celibate male priests to go around, increasingly restricting the availability of the bread of life.

A couple of weeks ago, I was a visitor celebrating a parish mass. I was introduced to the congregation by the choir leader who had sung at my diaconate ordination 36 years ago.

After mass, she expressed her displeasure that Pope Francis had announced changes to the Code of Canon Law, lumping together the issues of child sexual abuse

and women's ordination. I had not read the changes nor the rationale for same. Hearing her characterisation of the matter, I said, 'I can understand your frustration.' She promptly retorted, 'It's not frustration; it's anger. You have to understand how hard it is for us women to remain.'

Canon law has never been a favourite subject of mine. I thought I had better get up to speed.

## Church authority to ordain women

In 1994, Pope John Paul II solemnly declared 'that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.' In 1998, Pope John Paul II then amended the Code of Canon Law to provide that 'anyone who rejects propositions which are to be held definitively sets himself against the teaching of the Catholic Church'. Anyone who obstinately rejected such a teaching and refused to retract when warned by their bishop was to be punished with a just penalty. Pope Francis has now authorised a further change to the Code of Canon Law so that the obstinate non-retractor is to be punished with a censure and deprivation of office. The canonical screws are being tightened.

Pope Francis has authorised a comprehensive re-write of Book VI of the Code of Canon Law which defines certain offences and sets down sanctions. Quite rightly he has brought in a string of new offences against human life, dignity and liberty, dealing with child sexual abuse, grooming, pornography, and failing to report abuse. He has also introduced a new suite of offences against the sacraments. Until now the Code has dealt with those who are not ordained but who attempt to celebrate mass and those who purport to hear confessions though they are unable to give absolution. The Code also had a more general provision providing for the punishment of an ineligible person pretending to administer a sacrament.

Pope Francis has seen fit to move into the Code a provision (Canon 1379(3)): *Both a person who attempts to confer a sacred order on a woman, and the woman who attempts to receive the sacred order, incur a latae sententiae excommunication reserved to the*

*Apostolic See; a cleric, moreover, may be punished by dismissal from the clerical state.*

Understandably this has left many people upset, including the woman who sang at my ordination 36 years ago. Why the need for a further specific penal provision to be added at this time to the Code of Canon Law, and at the same time as the much needed overdue legal reforms dealing with child sexual abuse? Why not leave things as they were? This new provision in the Code might not only deal with someone purporting to ordain a woman as priest. It could also apply to anyone purporting to confer diaconate on a woman, and the punishment would also apply to the woman seeking the conferral of the sacred order.

## Can women be ordained?

For many years, there has been discussion about two distinct matters: the theological possibility of women priests and the historical evidence for women deacons in various branches of the Catholic Church. Back in 1988, Cardinal Ratzinger, as he then was, spoke at an event in New York where he agreed 'that the God of philosophy is neither male nor female, and the God of theology is both'. He told the audience that the matter of women's ministry as deacons or priests was under study by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In 2002, after 28 years of consideration of the matter, the International Theological Commission could not come to a definitive answer on the historical reality of women deacons concluding that 'it pertains to the ministry of discernment which the Lord established in his Church to pronounce authoritatively on this question.' Whatever that means!

In 2016, the International Union of Superiors General asked Pope Francis to consider the possibility of women deacons in the contemporary Church. He set up a commission. On 7 May 2019, Pope Francis was asked about the work of the commission during a press conference on a flight back to Rome. He said: 'The commission was created and has worked for almost two years. They were all different, all "toads from different wells".'

They all thought differently, but they have worked together and have agreed to a certain extent. But, each of them has their own vision that does not agree with that of the others. And there they have stopped as a commission and each one is studying how to move forward.' He concluded his answer by saying, 'we have reached a point and now each of the members

Continued page 12

the swag



is studying according to their thesis. This is good. *Varietas delectat.* (Variety delights!)

Some months later, the participants in the Special Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region voted 137 to 30 in favour of the Pope investigating further the possibility of women deacons. In his final address to the Synod, Pope Francis indicated that he welcomed 'the request to reconvene the Commission and perhaps expand it with new members in order to continue to study the permanent diaconate that existed in the early Church'.

One of those who served on the 2016 commission is the highly respected American theologian Phyllis Zagano. Prior to her appointment, she published an academic article on 'Women Deacons in the Maronite Church' stating, 'Without question, women were ordained as deacons in many Eastern churches, as copious research demonstrates.' Since completing her term on the papal commission, she has published a book entitled *Women: Icons of Christ*.

She concedes that 'the Church teaches women cannot be ordained as priests'. But she then states correctly: 'it does not teach definitively that women cannot be ordained deacons.' She reminds us that 'Phoebe is the only person in Scripture with the descriptor "deacon" and that Paul did not feminise her title to "deaconess"'. She concludes: 'That women deacons existed cannot be denied, nor can their participation in sacramental ministry.' What troubles her most is that 'Beneath every objection to restoring women to the

ordained diaconate is the suggestion that women cannot image Christ.' For her, this is not only a scandal: 'it is the disfigurement on the entire Body of Christ' and it 'is probably formally heretical'. I quote her because she spent years researching this topic before being appointed to the papal commission. She expressed such views before her appointment, and she has consistently expressed them since.

### Can women be 'icons of Christ'?

We who are called to share the bread of life believe that Jesus had to be human so that we might be saved. Being human, he had to be either male or female. He could not be both.

That did not mean that only half humanity could be saved. Nor did it mean that only half humanity could be 'icons of Christ'.

Zagano demonstrates in her researches that women were ordained deacons in situations when there was a need for women to minister particularly to women and girls. They were 'included in the order of deacon, not only in the early church but at least until the twelfth century in the west (and the East up to modern times)'. Back in 2012, Zagano said, 'at some point, however, bishops are going to have to answer the question the International Theological Commission attempted to answer.'

Having reflected on the writings of Zagano, I now more readily understand why the woman who spoke to me after mass a couple of weeks ago was not just frustrated. She was angry and rightly so. The question about women deacons

deserves an answer now. Not even Pope John Paul II claimed to have closed the door on that one. The matter has been crying out for the discernment called for by the International Theological Commission in 2002. Having given up on his first commission of 'toads from different wells' and having only recently set up his second commission on the matter, surely Pope Francis could have told the canon lawyers to stay their hand when it came to instituting a specific new offence in canon law dealing with the purported ordination of a woman deacon. The canon lawyers had more than enough on their plate with new offences dealing with child sexual abuse. Zagano takes heart that the Vatican official explaining why the new canonical provision was not confined specifically to priestly ordination said, 'If we come to a different theological conclusion, we will modify the norm.'

During the week, we celebrated the feast of St Mary Magdalene who in the Byzantine Liturgy is called 'the apostle to the apostles'. I recall the cartoon of the bearded apostles greeting the women with the words, 'So ladies, thanks for being the first to witness and report the resurrection and we'll take it from here.' It's the women like the one who spoke to me after mass who still front up each Sunday offering us five barley loaves and two fish.

For how much longer can we turn them away? The people are hungry for the Bread of Life, and it's not just the women. It's time for a discerned decision which reflects the delightful variety of the faithful. ☪



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# The Plenary Council – the Spirit inspires but we must act on this inspiration

NIMMI CANDAPPA

**Nimmi Candappa, a member of the Plenary Council from Melbourne, explores the challenge of discernment of the Spirit explaining that it must be bold and courageous.**

When I was younger, I appeared to have a knack at finding things and would be asked by my family to help find a lost item. So, after a quick prayer to St Anthony, I would scoot around the house looking under this, or behind that, opening drawers, ruffling through papers. The family member with the lost item would often trail behind me, showing me likely places the item could be in but then dismissing the need to look there because “I’ve already looked there”. I would insist on re-looking anyway, and inevitably, the item would be in a place already searched. My thinking was that if I looked and it was not there, there was nothing lost.

We must do the same in this upcoming Plenary Council, open ourselves fully to the Spirit, even the areas we are sure we have ‘correct’, confident that no harm can come from opening up anything to the Spirit. Some 80 years since the last Plenary Council, with a backdrop of diminished congregational numbers, limited priestly numbers, and the Royal Commission into sexual abuse, it seems timely to formally ask the Spirit once again to help guide our Church in Australia in this next stage of our faith journey.

It is a humble yet enlightened move to revamp our God-focus. It is an initiative to help us as Church be more fully a Christ-centred Church, throbbing with love for our neighbour; and to identify obstacles to achieving this goal. So it makes no sense to put up, in some areas, barriers to the all-encompassing gaze of the Spirit, effectively saying to the Spirit – ‘look inside here but not there’, ‘come thus far but no further’, ‘don’t bother looking there Spirit, we’ve already looked there’.

In order to reap the bounteous fruits available to us from this Council, we need to be humble enough to hold up all aspects of our Church to the Spirit; be daring enough to truly hear what the Spirit has to say in all these aspects, no matter how challenging; and then be prepared to act on it all, with conviction, determination and staying power.



The agenda for the Plenary Council, as with any agenda, includes broad categories under which the details must be discussed. If however, the resulting discussion under this Agenda remains broad and safe, coy of any of the key issues raised in the first stage of discernment, we risk a perfunctory effort at discernment of the Spirit, likely to do more harm than good overall. Even during the initial discernment stages, when parishioners were asked what God is asking of us in Australia at this time, some cynicism of the possibility of tangible outcomes of this latest discernment efforts had crept in, respondents asking in return ‘why would this time be any different?’.

Perhaps the respondents remembered the 1996 attempt of the *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* project that considered means of creating a greater involvement of women in the Church, extensive attempts that defined clear decisions and actions, actions which remain mostly undone 25 years later. Or perhaps the cynicism related to the road blocks we can create for ourselves as Church, tying ourselves up in knots through many artificial mandates, insisting that we must do in the future, what and how we have done in the past, and then wondering why we find ourselves in the same ineffective situations.

When we seek the Spirit’s guidance in this Council, we must place complete trust in the Spirit and in the Plenary Council process and dare to raise to

the scrutiny of the Spirit, everything identified in the initial discernment stages. It is after all the one Spirit that guides us, in all the areas, in the past and today.

Council members must also be daring and resolute in truly hearing it all. We know only too well that as humans, few if any of us, act as the perfect conduit for the Spirit’s voice, conscious and unconscious bias, along with our own opinions, at some level, playing a part in any discernment. Yet much effort has been made by the Plenary Team to enable members to more clearly hear the Spirit amidst these other influences. It is up to the members to be willing to listen without filters, knowing the role of the Council member is to offer a voice for the Spirit, not a voice for one’s opinion. Recognising that the Spirit guides but does not impose, an unwavering focus by each member is needed to hear the challenging, as clearly as the comfortable.

Then, we must act on the discerned guidance: imagining ourselves as those first Christians, awe-struck by the presence and recollections of Jesus, intoxicated by Love, emboldened by the Resurrection, open, supple of heart, generous to a fault and protective of other believers. With this attitude, in this light, obstacles melt away, fear of change converts to hopeful anticipation, current limitations are understood and embraced with tolerance; and discerned action is inevitable. When we are open and unresisting to the Spirit, we become willing collaborators with the Spirit, united and tenacious in creating the flourishing Christ-centred Church we so desire. ☪

*“We are priests best  
when we are  
priests together.”*

# The struggle for real reform in the Australian Catholic Church: Catholics and their bishops are at odds

TERRY FEWTRELL

**Terry Fewtrell, member of Concerned Catholics of Canberra Goulburn, says Australians should be worried about what is happening currently in the Catholic church. Catholics are engaged in a review of their church in this country, yet there is growing evidence the process is being manipulated.**

Reprinted from *Pearls and Irritations*, 26 May. <https://johnmenadue.com>

After seeking input from lay Catholics, a process known as a Plenary Council, the Catholic church is soon to begin formal sessions. But there is growing evidence the process is being manipulated, as traditionalists try to reconstruct reality, including downplaying Royal Commission findings.

Certainly, many lay Catholics have great suspicions and doubts as to the integrity and good faith of the process. They made that clear in submissions early in the Plenary process, which resulted, in part, from the scathing findings by the Royal Commission into institutional sexual abuse. Those findings included two areas of cultural and structural failures, namely governance and clericalism. Both issues figured prominently in the 17,000+ submissions made by lay Catholics in the first stage of this process.

But now, at a very advanced stage, in a document (*Continuing the Journey*) intended to facilitate a meaningful agenda, both issues are minimised, in ways that distort earlier submissions, deflect the significance of Commission findings and point to ‘business as usual’ outcomes.

Sadly, the document also attempts to deflect serious consideration of the role of women in the Australian church, referring to ‘the *perceived (my emphasis) under-representation of women in formal leadership and decision-making roles*’.

## Ducking away from the agenda of the Plenary submissions

These developments speak of a disregard or overlooking of conscientious lay analysis and input on the church’s mission, and they are markers in what can only be considered a deceitful process, seemingly being run by traditionalists, with the blessing and encouragement of many Australian bishops.

Clericalism is dealt with in a manner that understates its real significance. It is implied as being a problem in only some places and there is no comprehension of its very real cultural, structural, and

behavioural elements. It is a perspective on clericalism that is decidedly clericalist. In seeking to downplay it, the document succeeds in proving the opposite.

What makes the minimisation of clericalism issues more perplexing is that it is one matter about which Pope Francis has been quite explicit and categorical saying: *Clericalism is an evil... to say ‘No’ to sexual abuse is to say an emphatic ‘No’ to all forms of clericalism*. Every Australian and Catholic should ask themselves: Why is the Australian church trying to duck this issue?

It is a similar picture with governance where reform is needed to bring transparency and accountability to a church structure that is antiquated and opaque, and effectively aids ‘the cover-up’. In response to the Royal Commission, the bishops established a governance review team to shed light and clarity on how these matters could be addressed. That group reported last August – *The Light from the Southern Cross* – providing a roadmap for reform in these areas.

But again, the latest pre-agenda Plenary document makes little mention of what has been internationally praised as showing the way forward for the church, not just in Australia but worldwide. Rather than leverage the clarity and insight it provides, the emphasis is on confusing and deflecting, in what can reasonably be assessed as a delaying tactic.

Given all that has happened in the past 10 years, it is breathtaking that an official Catholic church document supposedly aimed at facilitating constructive decision making, could so blatantly attempt to minimise, confound, and deflect the need for reform in these areas. Lay Catholics will not stand for it and neither should the broader Australian community.

## Will we see real reform with the current Plenary Council agenda?

If we are to believe him, the President of the Australian Bishops Conference, Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane,

says that ‘business as usual’ outcomes from the Plenary are out of the question. He describes the process as coming at ‘a moment of crisis’ for the church. He is not wrong. But how will he bridge the gap and achieve meaningful and real reform outcomes?

He seems to think the Holy Spirit is on the job with him. One would hope he is right. He says that to even have established a Plenary Council process is evidence of the work of the Spirit. As the person who championed the calling of a Plenary Council, Coleridge is probably well placed to claim it is the work of the Spirit, as he better than anyone would know the strength of the resistance from his brother bishops to its establishment.

## Genuine discernment needed

The whole process has been presented to Catholics as principally about listening to what the Spirit is saying. The term that covers this process is religious Discernment – a venerable tradition in the line of Ignatius and Benedict, dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Sadly, the process and its evident manipulation at various stages is giving this ancient practice a bad name. As the earnest evidence put forward by the People of God in Australia has been ground down to a gruel, it is becoming stark that the clerics seem compelled to insist they manage the franchise on the Holy Spirit.

There must be some frank and honest conversation about Discernment both prior to and at the start of the formal Plenary sessions. The views of the bulk of ordinary lay Catholics must be expressed in the agenda for the formal discussion sessions. Ultimately, we know that the bishops will make the big decisions, but increasingly it is evident they don’t even want there to be a perception that they may be at odds with the laity.

A key message from lay Catholics at the submission stage was the stark lack of confidence that they have in their bishops. Attempts to minimise aspects of Royal Commission findings are dangerous. There is already enough evidence that the Australian bishops are on a very curious, if not calamitous path, digging-in on positions that are rejected by their people and by the Pope. Watch this space. Ordinary Catholics certainly are, and they invite all Australians to join them. ☞

# Synodality high on the agenda of Pope Francis

NIHAL ABEYASINGHA

**Nihal Abeyasingha is a Sri Lankan theologian. He writes about the current synodal practice in various parts of the world leading to the Bishops' Synod in 2023 on synodality.**

Pope Francis has announced that in October 2022 (now postponed to 2023), the theme for the Synod of Bishops will be: *For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.*

In October 2015, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops by Paul VI, Pope Francis had said, *From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium.* Basically, synodality is walking together on the same road discovering what the Lord expects of us. It is made possible by 'the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.' Thus, synodality is what we can call a 'discerning democracy' on the one hand seeking to understand and commit to God's will; and on the other, to function in solidarity and subsidiarity with our fellow humans. In this essay we look at the institutional forms in which synodality is practiced and set these within the perspective of the call to constant conversion.

## Institutional forms of synodality

First, there are the Churches of Eastern Sector of the Roman Empire: In these, there was a 'synodal structure' of government. It continues to function today. The Synod is the chief governing body of the Eastern Church. Ordinarily, the Synod meets two to three times each year. The day-to-day administrative responsibility of the church and its ministry is mostly delegated to the Synod Working Committee which is appointed by the Synod. (Cf. 1990 Code of the Oriental Churches #110).

Secondly, the Churches of the Roman tradition (Western Sector of the Roman Empire) follow a more centralized hierarchical model of governance. One person (Bishop of Rome) exercises three distinct functions: first, bishop of a diocese (Rome); secondly, metropolitan of the

western patriarchate and thirdly a claim as primate of the universal communion of churches. At first, it was a case of *primus inter pares* (Cf. Clement of Rome); this eventually developed into a claim to universal jurisdiction over all churches. There is no straightforward development of the unfolding of the powers of the popes to the point that it has reached today. Within this structure, Paul VI constituted the Synod of Bishops by the Apostolic Letter (Sep 1965) *Apostolica Sollicitudo*. These provisions are



incorporated in the 1983 Code of Canon Law 342-348. The synod of bishops, thus constituted, is a group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet together at fixed times to foster closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and bishops, to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel in the preservation and growth of faith and morals and in the observance and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world.

Pope Francis effected a change of style. He released the report of the bishops, as is, after the Synod on the Amazon and wrote his Apostolic Exhortation (2020), *Querida Amazonia* offering his opinion, contributing as *primus inter pares* to the collective wisdom of his fellow bishops.

His Apostolic Constitution, *Episcopalis Communio* (15 Sep 2018), places Synods within the perspective of LG 48 – the pilgrim Church in need of constant reform.

Thirdly, *Synods have always been part of the life of the Anglican Communion on all levels*

– local, national and international. The expression according to which she is synodally governed, but episcopally led is not meant simply to indicate a division between the legislative power (which belongs to Synods, in which all sectors of the People of God take part) and the executive power (specific to Bishops), but rather the synergy between the charisma and personal authority of the Bishop, on the one hand, and, on the other, the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on the whole community.

*It is the search to harmonize the institutional/ structural authority of bishop and the Holy Spirit manifesting itself in various ways among the People of God.* (International Commission of Theologians, Report (2017) #36).

Fourthly, there is the German Synod – During the next two years, the 230 members, including 69 bishops and 69 lay persons (progressive) of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) will focus on four themes, according to the statutes: 'Power, participation, and separation of powers'; 'Priestly way of life'; 'Women in Church ministries and offices'; 'Sexual morality'.

The group will meet without following structures of canon law. It seems to be following of parliamentary procedure.

In a Letter to the German people (2019) Pope Francis highlights several concerns: (a) There is needed both a movement from the top down and the bottom up. (b) The temptation to think that structural reform and bureaucratic renewal will solve present and future problems becomes a form of pelagianism. (c) Good organization without the 'newness of the gospel' is fizz (d) Most importantly, *To recover the primacy of evangelization to safeguard the future with faith and hope, because it is evangelizing.*

The church begins to evangelize itself... a state of vigilance and of conversion maintains such a reality alive and operative.

*Vigilance and conversion are gifts which only the Lord can give... I wish to walk by your side.*

Fifthly, Australia, which has embarked on a synodal process in the form of a Plenary Council, will hold its first assembly in October 2021. Reform of Church governance is on the agenda. Last year, the Australian bishops received a groundbreaking report, *The Light from the Southern Cross*, which made 86

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recommendations. Rome is expecting the German and Australian synodal processes to lead to significant changes. Meanwhile, Church sources say that Ireland is likely to announce that it will soon hold a national synod.

In England and Wales, so far only the Archdiocese of Liverpool has embarked on a synod. Will 2021 see others take up the gauntlet? Cardinal Mario Grech, who leads the synod of bishops' office in Rome, has written to bishops' conferences across the world offering his office's support in helping them to develop a 'synodal style'.

### The issues in process

In discussing synodality, several doctrinal issues form a backdrop.

1. The entire Church is in communion, mirroring the unity of the Trinity, based on the Word of God. All are to hear, ponder and obey the Word. All share in the one Spirit.
2. The basic structure of governance in the Churches is hierarchical.
3. The structures of governance draw from the form of this world (cf. LG 48), which by its very reality belongs to this passing world and cannot claim invariability and perfection. That will emerge in the eschatological age, when there will be no need of structures. This process (establishing structures) is called 'routinization' by sociologists like Weber. These are necessary for the permanence and endurance of the institution (in this case, the original inspiration and legacy left by Christ and witnessed to by the apostles).
4. In the Eastern Churches, there is a synodal structure of governance, while the Latin Church governance gradually came to be centralized in the Pope. Beginning with Vatican II, there has been the introduction of the Synod of Bishops as a forum for the widest possible consultation of the church.

### The initiative of Pope Francis

In April 2021, Pope Francis inaugurated a new synodal programme for the Synod of Bishops, now scheduled to be held in October 2023.

There are to be three phases of preparation, at three distinct levels.

First, the diocesan phase (October 2021-April 2022) when the people of God will be consulted – listening to all the baptized who have the *sensus fidei infallibilis in credendo* (the sense of faith, infallible in believing). This will be followed by the

continental phase (September 2022-March 2023), which will be a dialogue at continental level and deepen discernment within the specific cultural context of continent. Finally, there will be the Synod of Bishops (October 2023). What is interesting is what can be called the institutionalization of the process of dialogue and discernment.

### How far have synodal structures achieved the ideal of synodality?

The fact that there is both a structure and an encouragement for conversation and discussion between all the faithful who enjoy the 'instinct of faith' and pastors under the leadership of the Pope is a positive situation. Deliberative democracy functions and this is preferable to autocratic procedures and dictatorship.

But, we need to understand that all of us gather in synod, as sinful people. *Paul said: I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do* (Rom 7:15). The seven capital vices were formulated about 4<sup>th</sup> century. Its imagery finds a place in literature (such as Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*).

In more recent times (around 2011), research attempts to situate the spatial presence of the capital vices (e.g. in Mid-West USA). Scholastic theology has expressed the human situation as 'deprived of the supernatural and wounded in the natural.' Basically, capital vices obscure our vision. This is the drama we live out.

Even though we are a sinful people, we live in hope. As LG 48 states: *Already the final age of the world has come upon us*

*... However, until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, has the appearance of this world which is passing.* The call is to constant reformation.

In the functioning of synodal structures, the majority voice prevails. But, majority consensus does not automatically mean submission to, and unity in the truth. Even a single dissentient voice needs to be heeded.

Reuben, who prevented the killing of Joseph (Gen 37) or Daniel who saved Susanna (Dan 13) are individuals who dissented; they unveiled the truth of the situation. Chapter 3 of the Rule of Benedict suggests: *Now the reason why we have said that all should be called to council, is that God often reveals what is better to the younger.* In this spirit, the interaction in a synod needs to heed every voice.

### Capital vices can function in various ways

The Synods on the family (2014, 2015) were hijacked by the issue of communion for divorced and remarried and the Synod for the Amazon (2019) by the question of ordaining married *viri probati*. In both cases, these were not the pivotal issues. The remarks of Pope Francis in *Let us Dream* are interesting. In the Synod on Amazon, there was discussion and marshaling of arguments, but a point of discernment and walking together was not reached. However, in the synods for the family, there was a point of discernment arrived at by a re-discovery of the basic teaching of Thomas Aquinas (which Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn helped articulate).

Pope Francis said in his letter to the German people (2019): *In substance we speak of a synodus [a joint way] under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that is to walk together and with the whole Church under his light, his guidance and his 'irruption', to learn to hear and to discern the ever new horizons, which he wishes to provide. Synodality presupposes the 'irruption' of the Holy Spirit.*

Followers of Christ in the early church, were known as people of 'The Way' (Acts 9:2; 22:4; 19:23; 24:14 etc.). Today in the spirit of Vatican II, they are said to be in *Syn + 'odos'* = 'The entire Church walking together in synergy with and under Peter (and his College) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For this, structures are needed. They may vary as presently in the Latin and Eastern usages and *ad experimentum* the German synodal path (with the cautionary notes of the Roman Curia). Structures will not function in the spirit of synodality without commitment to constant conversion in discernment. Discernment requires careful observations, looking for sometimes subtle shifts of our interior dispositions.

Pope Francis says that the Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which 'shares also in Christ's prophetic office' according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: *Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet* (what touches all needs to be dealt with by all). The Synod process continues by listening to the pastors. Through the Synod Fathers, the bishops act as authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church, which they need to discern carefully from the changing currents of public opinion. The church keeps moving forward in her pilgrim journey, looking forward to the blessed hope and the coming of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. ☩

# Contemplation and Dadirri

PATRICK MULLINS SJ

Partick Mullins SJ, Emerton NSW, shares some thoughts as a response and appreciation for the work of Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann on the topic of *Dadirri*, reproduced in the 2021 winter edition of *The Swag*.

Many may be enriched and blessed by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann's work but my response may still be of use, based as it is on many years of experience in different Indigenous communities in most states and the Northern Territory, in rural and urban communities. I shall quote two people whose spontaneous responses help focus on issues that give rise to *Dadirri*.

The first is from a 13 year old Kukatja boy (FM), now deceased, who confronted me with a question. He spoke in English and said: *Do you believe in the Dreamtime? I believe in God but we believe in the Dreamtime.* (Balgo, Wirrimanu, 1973)

The Dreamtime (or Dreaming) is translated from the Arrernte word 'altyeringa'. There is some discussion about the suitability of the translation but it is the popular word in English to render words in different languages such as 'tjukurpa' in Western Desert languages. At Uluru, for example, the creation accounts are tjurkupa (Dreamtime). In Alice Springs there is the Ntjarlke Dreaming which means caterpillar Dreaming. This is the Arrernte account of creation where the tops of the MacDonalld ranges look like a caterpillar.

Would we be able to say that both the creation accounts of Genesis and the Dreamtime are the results of contemplative accounts of creation? And are they both myths or mere stories or primitive science? The task is to unravel the meaning of such terms as contemplation and myth in particular.

The second point to consider is a conversation with a Tiwi woman (OT) who is also now deceased. She was explaining to me an account of two Dreamtime figures Purrukapali and Bimi. She spoke in English and I responded by saying that it was a story. She replied with quite some urgency: *That is not a story! It is true.* (Darwin, 1990)

## Myth and story

We need to attend to the notion of myth (and story) which arise in the context we are considering. Myth has overtones of racism, colonialism and primitivism. Is there any truth in myths? The Oxford English Dictionary defines myth as having



'no basis in fact'. And you don't have to look far to sample academic attitudes such as *even in the 1960s an Oxbridge tutor could advise a student, 'if you want to shrink your brain with that sort of nonsense, go and look at other ...shrunk heads'. And in the mid-1930s one respected Encyclopedia of Mythology referred to African Aboriginal myth as 'fairy-tales for Blacks, of no interest to the advanced European mind.'* (Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, London, 1996, Introduction p17).

We must discard the notion of myth at least for now. Myth is so loaded as to be offensive to many people. Our consideration of contemplation will be far more productive.

What can we say about the Dreamtime accounts? As noted above, OT was absolutely certain of the truth of Tiwi Dreamtime. Even anthropological scholars such as Malinowski admit that informants who give accounts from their culture will, like OT, attest the truthfulness of their information.

## Contemplation

The activity of contemplation has existed since time immemorial in as many languages and cultures as we know. Many have written about the concept of contemplation. We can recall many Catholic saints and scholars who have enlightened our lives. John Cassian, the Desert Fathers, Dionysius, Eckhart, The Cloud of Unknowing, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius, John Main, William Johnstone, to name just a few. Here are some others., especially in the context of relationship to truth.

Miriam – Rose: *The contemplative way of Dadirri...It (Dadirri) is something like what you call contemplation.*

Panikkar, Ramon: *contemplative experience gives rise to truth. (Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility. Fortress Press, 1991, p71.)*

St Thomas Aquinas: Contemplation is 'a simple intuition of the truth' (simplex intuitus veritatis) "*Contemplatio, intellectus et simplex intuitus in Aquinas. (American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, 2017, 91(2) pp. 199-225).*

Malinowski, Bronislaw: *Simple empirical truth... (Argonauts of the Western Pacific, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2001, pp326-328).*

And exquisitely, Thomas Merton: *Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is a vivid realisation of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It knows the source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes both beyond reason and beyond simple faith ... For in contemplation, we know by 'unknowing.' Or, better, we know beyond all knowing or 'unknowing.'* (Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, London: Burns & Oates, 1962.)

It would be very difficult to improve on Merton's account of contemplation. We accept with gratitude his legacy. He has said it for us.

## Why can't we get it?

Can non-Indigenous people receive the gift of Dadirri? Miriam says it is easy for anybody. Indigenous people have an advantage because contemplation is second nature. As Miriam points out: *we pass on to the younger ones all they must know ... The contemplative way of Dadirri spreads over our whole life.* The languages convey it too. Key concepts like Dadirri and aneme (Arrernte) and nyineme (Western Desert) are very similar and rich in meaning, basically to contemplate, quiet, still, silence, waiting, sitting, awareness etc. with no word for 'is'.

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These words reveal something of the very essence, self-hood and self-awareness of what it means to be.

There is a kind of competing tradition which we might call 'the world,' materialism, ego-centrism, too busy, thinking and conceptualising, the unruliness of our minds, like 'the tree filled with the chattering of monkeys,' as Buddhism puts it. It is more than just a competing tradition. It is an addiction which can almost overwhelm us. It demands our attention and deprives us of contemplation.

There is a longstanding discussion whether the grace of contemplation comes naturally or must be waited upon until it is 'infused' by God; sometimes called 'intuitive', 'passive' or 'extraordinary.' So, the gift of *Dadirri* – do we have to wait until it is

infused? I am not sure about that but I am sure that we need to be disposed to receive it. Like monkeys chattering in the tree, we shall never receive the gift.

Another blessing from *Dadirri* is like the capacity to explore religious differences. We can say that I believe in God and I believe in the Dreamtime too because the experience is the same contemplative truth that we know.

So, is there no difference at all? Is contemplation in Buddhism, Hinduism, Indigenous religion, Protestant religion and Catholic religion all just the same? Is one better than another? Can they be compared? And even with Cyprian (*Letter LXXII, AD258*) and others, for example: 'Extra ecclesiam nulla salus,' – No salvation outside the Church?

There certainly are differences in contemplation and that is the beauty and even salvation. The richness is open to us all because of cultural differences. However, there can be differences and history records countless errors that have led to evil influences.

We can be deluded about any experience we may claim to be of God. We can be mistaken, mentally ill etc. Discernment is always necessary. By their fruits we shall know them.

This is a work of inter religious dialogue and Miriam is uniquely equipped to pursue it. It is a gift to all of us especially the non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people generally receive the gift naturally. However, we can pursue the *Dadirri* experience because it rings with our own experience of contemplation. ☪



## Melbourne restructure of parishes and reassignment of priests

PETER JOHNSTONE

**Peter Johnstone is a committed Catholic in the Melbourne Archdiocese who seeks renewal of the Church.**

There is concern among Melbourne Catholics at the recent announcement by the Archdiocese of Melbourne of a restructuring of parish pastoral leadership. This paper is an attempt to express the serious concerns identified by a number of Catholic laity and priests.

The plan for the restructure of parishes in groups needs consideration in the broader context of a) the structure of and issues facing the full diocese, with b) the benefit of the sense of faith of the faithful. There has been limited input from the people and priests of the archdiocese, from the many valued Catholic works in the archdiocese, or from the leaders of religious congregations providing a number of parish priests and many services in the archdiocese. The current consultation focusses on implementation aspects of a plan which is in essence settled.

Worse, the plan is proceeding despite the imminent Plenary Council of all Australian dioceses. The Plenary Council has been approved by Pope Francis to address issues of concern to all the people of the Australian Church, issues including the Church's leadership, governance, and institutional organisation including

parish administration. Melbourne's parish restructuring plan pre-empts the work of the Council's members starting in October following many years of consultation in the public domain.

### At the crisis point and synodality

We are all sadly aware that our Church is at a crisis point, no longer adequately inspiring our communities. Our Church has alienated too many people who attended Catholic schools and lived a sacramental life. It has become irrelevant to the lives of too many of our children. It is not yet a Vatican II institution, a truly collegial Church in which decisions respect local cultures, communities and circumstances. Our Church has been scandalised by clerical child sexual abuse and cover-up. It is often focussed on legalism and control, with inadequate listening and dialogue, and often more focussed on its institutional image.

The development of an archdiocesan plan for parish structures needs to respond to Catholic teaching about the role and rights of all the baptised, and to be informed by a synodal approach involving the people affected at every stage. The need for synodality in Church decision-making has been constantly stressed by Pope Francis.

The challenges facing both the diocese and the Church, including diocesan structures are very pertinent to any parish restructuring. Melbourne Archdiocese is generally considered to be too large, twice the size of the Archdiocese of Sydney which was divided in 1986 into Sydney, Broken Bay, and Parramatta. A parish restructuring plan needs to consider the adequacy of current diocesan leadership in facing the current challenges of our Church, and the need for changes in leadership arrangements, practices and culture, particularly the problem of clericalism.

### Grouping parishes

Canon law requires that where parishes are grouped together, one priest is to be appointed as the 'moderator' to 'direct the joint action and to be responsible for it to the Bishop' (c.517). The plan seems to envisage that current parish priests will be preferably co-located in a group presbytery as assistant priests to the one appointed as moderator for their group of parishes, an arrangement with consequences for the priests and parishioners of the parishes involved. Many are unprepared for more collaborative and synodal models of pastoral leadership

Our Melbourne archdiocese already lacks a diocesan pastoral council (Canon 511) and diocesan synods/assemblies (c. 460), both being of particular

importance in preparation for a Plenary Council. This Melbourne restructuring of parishes pre-empts the Plenary Council on matters affecting the people of the Church.

There is no doubt that structural and governance changes are needed in the archdiocese of Melbourne. However, major strategic decisions must respond to the signs of the times and our Church's challenges. That requires openness to the issues of concern to the people of the Church whose Christian lives are impacted, not just accepting a diminished Church.

The present Melbourne archdiocesan plan needs careful consideration with transparency, consultation, and strategic context. We must face up to the challenges of leadership and governance and identify new ways of living the Gospel with new roles for our communities in keeping with Jesus' mandate. The Plenary Council will consider such issues.

In short, the parish restructure plan of Melbourne is based on a centralised assessment of the situation in light of diminished numbers of priests and parishioners, but should be seen in a broader context of ageing parishioners and many of all ages continuing to leave the Church.

Our Church is dying. Archdiocesan leadership needs the benefit of the Plenary Council to ensure that all the people of the Church, laity and hierarchy, are able to fulfil their responsibilities for an accountable, transparent, inclusive and evangelical Church. The Plenary Council must be the major prior focus in addressing the grave threats to the Church's mission.

This is a time for people of the Church of Melbourne to meet their baptismal responsibilities in a spirit of hope and collegiality.

A plea to Archbishop Comensoli: Please defer the parish restructure proposal, excepting immediate needs, until:

1. the Plenary Council has been conducted,
2. the challenges and outcomes identified by the Plenary Council are addressed,
3. a Diocesan Pastoral Council is established, and
4. the Melbourne Archdiocese has arranged a diocesan synod or assembly, development of a diocesan strategy with annual diocesan reports against mission and goals. ☺

## Catechists – at the heart of the missionary church

BRIAN LUCAS

**Brian Lucas, National Director of Catholic Mission, explores the ever growing understanding of ministry among Christ's faithful as the church de-clericalises.**

On 12 May Pope Francis published an Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium* (Ancient Ministry) establishing the catechist as a formal and stable ministry in the church.

In Australia we mostly use 'catechist' to refer to volunteers who provide special religious education in government schools. When the Holy Father refers to 'catechists' he is identifying a wider group of lay people who are at the very heart of church life, especially in mission territories.

It is often the catechist who is the permanent presence in the local community. The catechist leads the Sunday liturgy where no priest is present and is responsible for teaching and leading the community.

The origins of this ministry go back to the way the early community followed the mandate of the risen Christ to go out to all the nations and to teach and baptize. Pope Francis sees this ancient role, and its formal establishment, as encouraging: *the Church in our day to appreciate possible new ways for her to remain faithful to the word of the Lord so that his Gospel can be preached to every creature.*

Vatican II's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*ad Gentes*) stated, *In our days, when there are so few clerics to evangelize such great multitudes and to carry out the pastoral ministry, the role of catechists is of the highest importance.*

At the time of Vatican II, lay ministry was thought of as lay people helping the clergy, or filling in where there were shortages of clergy. Since then, especially following the Synod on the Laity in 1987, the theology of the lay vocation has developed.

In his intervention at the Synod on 5 October 1987, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, Auxiliary in Sydney, explained that the positive term 'Christ's faithful', applying equally to all baptized persons was both wider and richer than the more negative term 'laypersons'. He wanted the Synod to consider the whole range of action which belonged to all the baptized, both clerics and lay people.

This suggestion was enthusiastically adopted in the post-synodal exhortation of Pope St John Paul II, *On the Vocation and The Mission of The Lay Faithful in the*

*Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici*, 30 December 1988). The definition of the lay faithful's role was set out in the context of the lived experience of the power of the Spirit directing the overall mission of the church. The starting point is the sacrament of baptism.

This new direction, that lay ministry is not simply a 'back-up' to ordained ministry, was reinforced in a major document of the United States Bishops Conference *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (2005), and a more recent publication of the Australian Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace* (2018).

Pope Francis' formal establishment of the ministry of catechist should be seen as well in connection with the ministries of lector and acolyte which he opened to women last January. Even though numerous men and women have exercised these three ministries without formal institution, these latest developments reinforce the idea that lay ministry is a service within the church that is stable, delegated by the bishop and publicly recognised by the church. Lay ministry is no longer subservient to ordained ministry and they are complementary and never in competition.

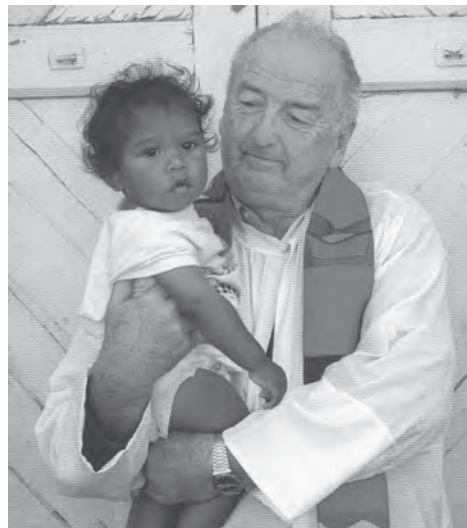
A major work of the Pontifical Mission Societies, of which Catholic mission is the Australian presence, is the financial support for catechists. Over the past three years the Australian church has contributed to catechist programmes in 17 countries.

Writing for *Fides*, the news agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Father Donald Zagore, priest of the Society for African Missions of the Ivory Coast said, *With few resources, both spiritual and material, catechists accompany and carry forward the hope of their brothers and sisters with determination and faith. I believe that without them, evangelization in Africa would not have had the impact it has had.... With this document Pope Francis wants to do justice to men and women of faith who gave their lives to the mission, to evangelization, to the Church in Africa in particular, and to the universal Church in general, recognizing their ministry of catechist as a vocation at the center of the life of the Church.* ☺

# A vision for Redfern parish community revisited

TED KENNEDY

**In 1975 Fr Ted Kennedy, then priest at Redfern parish NSW, wrote to Bishop James Freeman outlining his vision for the St Vincent's community. The letter is dated, but the urgency of its message is not.**



*My Lord Bishop,*

I want as briefly and frankly as possible to furnish this report through you to His Eminence. It comes out of hearts yearning for active support from the rest of the Church.

There are various ways of describing what this community is about. I think I would prefer to think of it first as a community of prayer. It is not difficult to turn our life into prayer here. Living as close to the poor, as we are, means that we are consistently confronted by the Gospel. We are being compelled to meet them and each other in Gospel terms. In our formal morning prayer and in our daily Eucharist, we are endeavouring to break the Word of God to each other.

## **Pastoral care paramount**

Secondly, we are trying to be a pastoral community. It is our aim to know and love every Aborigine in this district, every Aborigine who is passing through. The Aboriginal people remain the poorest and most oppressed in our society. We rest on the help of the Aboriginal people to help us change our hidden prejudices. We rely particularly on Mrs Shirley Smith, who lives here. She loves the people, and she loves us, and she tenderly forgives our shortcomings. We would like to think that we are growing to be a sign of Christ's love, that every Aboriginal person would think of this place as a home away from home, that

they would all feel known and loved by us, and assured that we are ready to support them in their sorrows and anxieties, their aspirations for advancement and their fight for justice.

We must remain a community of hospitality so that all are welcome to share our food and whatever accommodation we can provide. We are all aware that this stance can carry a double edge, fraught with the danger of paternalism. But we rely on the Aboriginal people, and on Christ who is so truly represented in them to keep teaching us the way. In this matter, we have all a long way to go, before the atmosphere here becomes drenched in blackness, marked with the spirit of aboriginality.

## **A contact and service hub**

Thirdly, we aim to be a communication post. Aboriginal people, more than most, yearn to keep in touch with those they love. Very few have access to a telephone, particularly for incoming calls. They are usually forced to change their address frequently. We try, therefore, to be a stable reference point to alleviate their difficulty.

Fourthly, we would like to lay the foundation here of an in-service training centre, with an eye to providing religious personnel in areas which are not at present being served in this way. As well as to the future massive expansion of numbers expected here in Sydney. We are working closely with Fr Allan Mithen in this respect, and with other interested priests and religious in country areas.

Fifthly, also in alliance with others working in this field, we hope to provide a service to those Aboriginal people in jails, and Aboriginal children in institutions, both Church and State, and be a communication link between them and their families.

## **A bridge between Aboriginal and white communities**

Finally, we are aware that we stand as a bridge between the Aboriginal people and the white community, and that in the process of ourselves being sensitised to respect aboriginality, we have the responsibility of helping other Europeans to be sensitised too.

We are conscious then, of the need to communicate with the rest of the Church at all levels, but particularly with the Hierarchy. At this point, I must candidly report that there is a genuine disappointment among a good number of the Aborigines that the bishops are not sensitive to their needs. One has only to review two points of contact with them over the past five years.

On his visit to Australia in 1970, the Pope spoke hopeful words to them. They hoped that the whole Church would take up the same emphasis as the Pope gave to them. The year 1973 saw the Eucharistic Congress and the urgent pleas from the Black and White conferences to the Church to speak up and act on matters such as Aboriginal Land rights, injustice before the Law and the Police and other Government bodies, housing, education, and medical care.

In 1974, Mrs Shirley Smith wrote a letter to the Australian Bishops enclosing an urgent appeal for their support in setting up a structure of pastoral service to Aborigines on the East Coast of Australia. It was signed by fourteen priests and religious as well as herself. She received no reply. Later that year, a group of us were received for several hours by the Apostolic Nuncio where we explained the contents of a petition to the Holy Father. After the official setting up of the A.I.C.C., the bishops failed to consult it, and commissioned unilaterally the conducting of a survey by Fr Hilton Deakin. That survey is now completed, and only reiterated what is already known, and suggests what has already been suggested repeatedly.

In 1974 and 1975, Conferences have been held under the auspices of the Queensland A.I.C.C. Motions were again passed, asking the Government to act in the same areas of need. But the wider Church has not, by and large, taken up those causes, and pressed them, or shown the way to Governments and the general community. Little wonder, then, that the image of the Church, in general among Aboriginal people, is that its attitudes blend in perfectly with the attitudes of the white society, that it stands on the side of the oppressor. It is idle to suggest that the very few religious working in the field are acting vicariously on behalf of all, for that is to deny the nature of the Church. We, in the Aboriginal apostolate, are sometimes

spoken of as if we are waving the flag for others not present, as though we belonged to the Department of External Affairs in the Church. Or even a subsection of the Department of Archdiocesan Charitable Works.

### Touching the pulse of the poor

Yet poverty of spirit is the prerequisite of all Christian life. And there is no poverty of spirit without a sharing of the spirit of poor people. It involves feeling and touching the pulse of their lives, and sharing the weight of their anguish and putting our shoulder alongside theirs, and fighting with them for their rights. If only our bishops would do this in some realistic sense the gulf would close in. I like to think hopefully of our bishops standing at an intersection where two roads meet – the road of exposed misery, poverty and oppression, and the road of the Church's magisterial teaching. It is only here that orthodoxy turns into orthopraxis and that the Word of God begins to speak loudly in men's

ears. I know that the circles in which bishops often move are not their self-chosen ones, but inherited, and shaped by varied expectations. But until they become mouthpieces for the hot breath of the poor to blow long and hard into the life of the Church, even if this means sending the rich away empty, the Aboriginal people will continue to despair of obtaining support from a source from which they can make lawful claim.

The community here which I have tried to describe is a fragile one. Lack of sleep and pressing work could easily become a threat to our prayer life and to the necessary amount of community reflection and study which the work must involve. The time now seems opportune and urgent for the bishops to invite the Major Superiors of Orders, both male and female, to allocate personnel to our community. Yet this community will probably always remain, as it were, a single dimension of the Aboriginal apostolate.

There is still a need for the Church to foster a group of charismatic poor – who go out by vow without script or sandal or purse. At present, in the whole Archdiocese there is no specialised form of religious life for a boy to join if he feels a vocation to that dimension of apostolic life. And then there is the dimension of active theologising over the real human situation and the inspiring creative publishing which could accompany it. That must be fostered too.

I have a dream that our bishops would become gripped with the fact of poverty and oppression which exists among the Aboriginal people, that they would see as their prime pastoral role the leading of all the faithful into the spirit of Poverty (and this will never occur while the 'anawim' are ignored). If the Church is to be a sign of the kingdom, it must give the respect due to princes to the outcasts of the world. Never again must we allow a rhetoric of idealism, a policy of compromise, but the end result being 'business as usual'. ☞



## Synodality: A welcome concept, but difficult to achieve

GEORGE WILSON SJ

Senior ecclesialogist, George Wilson SJ, from Baltimore USA, offers pointers on synodality. He is the author of *Clericalism: The Death of Priesthood* (Liturgical Press, 2008). Reprinted with permission from *La Croix International* April 31, 2021.

Recent commentary on the subject of Pope Francis' support for synodality has moved me to rummage around among memories of my years as a consultant/facilitator for many dioceses and religious congregations to see what ideas I might contribute to the discussion.

Let me begin by noting that the term 'synodality' itself is of recent origin. It is an abstraction.

Back in the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), we spoke of the organizational structures that were being instituted to promote shared responsibility in the Church: synods, councils, boards, and the like.

By contrast to those flesh-and-blood institutions, the word 'synodality' seems to be an attempt to name an attitude or orientation of openness toward the adoption of such structures.

The pope wants to see a Church in which a broader spectrum of the faithful have a voice and a share in responsibility for the life of our Church.

### What is a 'synod'?

In popular usage the noun 'synod' refers to an assembly of the clergy and perhaps laity of a diocese or, more rarely, whole nation. But the pope is surely referring to a broader reality by creating the neologism.

A diocesan presbyteral assembly is synodal in nature, as is a parish council or the board of a Catholic university or hospital.

In essence synodality involves the coming together of human peers to achieve some religious purpose that could not be achieved in the same way absent in such a gathering. It remains a human enterprise even as it is guided by the Holy Spirit.

That might appear to be almost self-explanatory. But experience shows that all too often the reality of human interaction is simply taken for granted in conversations on the subject.

Say 'synod' and people usually jump immediately to structural questions:

Who is going to be invited? What power will the body have? Who will set the agenda? Who will be allowed to speak – or vote?

Such questions will have to be resolved if the event is to be successful, of course. But focusing all attention on such organizational or operational matters can be a way of avoiding the human realities, and pitfalls, involved in bringing together a body of humans with all sorts of theological and cultural world-views (not to speak of personalities, biases and tics of every kind). I will therefore leave to others the discussion of structural and operating norms. Front and centre here are human interpersonal dynamics. Organizational structures may change; human nature doesn't.

### The role of expectations

The announcement of a synodal structure such as a council, board or actual synod means, first, raising expectations. Proclaim the creation of such a body and inevitably the collective psyche of the respective community is changed.

How is this going to affect our lives? What can we anticipate? What can we hope for?

Continued page 22

The kind of expectations generated will depend on the immediate context. That includes still active memories of previous attempts at shared responsibility. If they were successful the new effort will be building on a bank account of earned trust.

Past efforts may, on the other hand, have proven to be fruitless. Perhaps the bishop or pastor or CEO controlled the agenda in such a way as to ensure that the voices of the body would go unheard. Perhaps the leader failed to follow through on the conclusions reached.

In either case, the prevailing response to the new call will be distrust or even outright sarcasm. If leaders haven't earned trust by demonstrating genuine listening and follow-through in the past, the present effort may be all but doomed from the start.

Expectations are a form of human power.

If they are clear and met, the corresponding community will experience greater satisfaction and self-esteem.

If they are unclear or even conflicting from the outset, the result will be community fragmentation or even outright polarization.

And if they were clearly stated but unmet, the community's hope of broadly shared responsibility will be severely diminished.

### **A peer effort or informal 'ins' and 'outs'?**

A synodal body will ordinarily be composed of people from different strata in the organization: various office holders, past officers, significant community members, people with demonstrated talents in other organizations. All well and good.

But once in operation, each member should, in theory, be accorded the same hearing as every other. That principle holds true no matter the criteria by which members were originally selected.

That reasonable expectation of synodal equality is destroyed when the process of decision-making reveals that some participants are listened to while the voice of others is muted.

Sad experience may reveal that an informal coterie has ensured the outcomes before any competing voice gets a hearing. The highest ecclesial body is not immune from rigging.

### **Agendas, open and closed**

Synodal bodies are presumably created to deal with issues of genuine concern for their respective community: clarification of vision and mission; setting of goals; assignment of priorities; development and allocation of resources both human and financial.

Free and open consideration of such matters is the hallmark of a successful synod.

And that, in turn, requires leaders who are internally free to allow the body as a whole to find its way to conclusions that might challenge the leaders of the institution.

### **Stories of human realities that affect synodal bodies**

One of our clients was a religious congregation that prided itself on its democratic ethos. The community took very seriously the value of each individual's contribution to corporate decision-making.

My interaction with the community's contact with our group led to interesting sharing. For many years their provincial chapters had been made up of older members selected year after year for decades.

My contact told me that as a young priest he was finally elected to the chapter. At their sessions, members were assigned seats for the duration of their service. He found himself seated next to one of the old bulls, who became a mentor showing him the ropes.

One morning the body was to vote on some matter (the exact issue is of no significance to the story). The older fellow leaned over to him and said, 'We're free on this one.'

He asked what that meant and was told, 'We can vote whatever we want.'

Naturally the young priest was confused – until he learned that one of the old pros had been giving hand signals from up front, showing the members how they were to vote on issue after issue.

He was like a baseball coach telling players whether to steal a base or stand pat. The whole thing was rigged from start to finish.

'Synodality' in action.

### **Another world**

A far different orientation was shown by a newly installed bishop.

His predecessor had been a top-down administrator who controlled every aspect of his diocese's life in minute detail. The clergy of the diocese wondered how their new ordinary would govern. What was his vision?

One of the bishop's first acts was to convene a five-day priests' convocation. His vision involved beginning his service by asking his priests what was theirs! We were asked to design and facilitate the sessions.

We discovered that after being totally subservient for so many years, the priests were at a loss. They had to learn how to use their new empowerment. It took us several days to get them to name their experience.

At the end of the meeting, they voted unanimously for the creation of a diocesan pastoral council that would empower the laity to share responsibility for their Church. The bishop immediately set in motion the steps needed to create the council.

After helping him devise a method that produced a body that was broadly representative of the diocese's clergy and laity, we were charged to provide the training that would weld this group of strangers into a cohesive, trusting body.

After several sessions the trust level had built considerably and one of the lay members asked, "Bishop, we appreciate your trust in creating this body – but are you going to retain veto power over our decisions?"

The answer would, of course, affect substantially the members' sense of empowerment. The bishop was ready.

With no hesitation he answered, 'Of course if Rome were to ask, I would answer that I retain that power. But I believe that we will always be able to find answers that we can all support. I don't want to ever hear the word 'veto' again.'

He grasped the fact that clarity about operating structures and expectations is indeed important. But ultimately, what counts is the level of humanity and respect that characterizes the decision-making of the body.

That first council operated successfully for four years without a single parliamentary motion, negotiating different points of view through free-flowing dialogue based in trust.

The internal freedom that was generated revealed itself when it came time to

continue the work when the present members' terms were due to end. Who will follow us? How will the good work we have built be maintained when we're gone?

The normal American method for continuing such bodies is some form of rotation; some members stay on while replacements are chosen for those retiring.

In the middle of an extended discussion of various numerical options, one member mused out loud, 'What would it be like if we were to just all retire and let the bishop pick a whole new body?'

The response in the body was immediate and resounding: 'Waste all that has been accomplished? Risk all that work? Absurd!'

But the body had grown in trust, even to the extent of resisting premature closure. Over a period of weeks the options were allowed to simmer.

At one point someone said, 'You know, at the beginning we were a totally unknown quantity and the bishop placed his trust in us and our facilitators. Why should we deny that opportunity to others? Are we all that special?'

After building in some minor safeguards into the transfer process, the body and the bishop took the leap. All of the members retired and new members were selected. We set up an initial shared weekend of the incoming and outgoing groups.

At the close of the weekend of sharing, one of the outgoing members said, 'I was totally opposed to such a dramatic turnover. But having met these wonderful, highly committed people, I am convinced that our decision was an inspiration from the Holy Spirit.'

### Forms of resistance to synodality

If synodality is so attractive, why haven't we had it before?

It is quite common for progressive laity to blame power-clinging clerics for blocking the movement toward genuine synodality. And there is surely enough evidence to ground that assessment.

Experience shows, however, that to accept that answer without qualification is an over-simplification. The laity are not all that ready to embrace the full sense of agency – and responsibility – that will be needed if a synod is to be successful. An example makes the point.

Our group helped a bishop to form and

train a new diocesan council, using the best methods for discovering members who could do the job. After some time together the bishop asked them to tackle a delicate issue: the provision of alcohol at parish festivals.

After over a year debating the pros and cons, and refining different options, they were ready to make the decision. I asked each member in turn how the person was leaning.

Everything was going well until I reached a nice gentleman who said, 'I just want to do what the bishop wants. ...' The disappointment of his fellow members was palpable: 'Is this what we signed up for? Where has he been?'

In fairness to the poor fellow, it must be said that he was only acting out of a mind-set that had been bred into generations of his ancestors for decades.

### A cultural transformation

The illustration is admittedly on the extreme side, but the pattern of subservience appears often enough to be seriously pondered.

What Pope Francis is really doing with his call for synodality is a radical rejection of a whole culture in which the clergy know what's best and the role of the laity is simply to 'pray, pay and obey'.

The roles and scripts of that culture have been in force for a long, long time. They live in the collective psyche, and the creation of structures alone will not overcome their power.

Clerics are not the only ones being called to give up behaviours that benefitted them; the laity are called to embrace an empowerment conferred on them by Baptism.

The issue comes to this: will the distinctions created by differing vocational status be allowed to shout down the basic equality that comes from Baptism?

A synodal body, by whatever name, is a gathering of enfleshed pilgrims – equals all – linked together in mutual trust and respect, searching for the Lord's will for His Church at this moment in light of the signs of this time.

The methods a synodal body employs to organize its operations have value only to the extent they enhance the solidarity of its participants. ☪



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# Catholic Plenary Council – an opportunity for Indigenous reconciliation

NEVILLE ROACH

**Neville Roach, former Chairman of Fujitsu Australia and New Zealand and of the Australian Government's National Multicultural Advisory Council and Business (Migration) Advisory Council discusses how the Plenary Council is an opportunity for ground-breaking reconciliation action with First Nations people in Australia. Reprinted with permission from *Pearls and Irritations* 1 July, 2021: <https://johnmenadue.com>**



It is encouraging that the *Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Document) of the Catholic Plenary Council due to meet in October 2021 affirms: *We honour and acknowledge the continuing deep spiritual relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.*

The Document makes several other respectful references to Indigenous Australians. A key theme is ‘renewing the Church’s solidarity with First Australians’, indicating the Council “may prioritise the question of how the Church can include and empower First Peoples to take their place more fully within Church and society.” Most promisingly, it considers the Council “an opportunity for the Catholic Church in Australia to make a public response to the Statement from the Heart and increase opportunities for collaboration with local Indigenous communities around the country”.

A Plenary Council is the highest formal gathering of all local churches in Australia (hereafter ‘the Church’). Its objective is to have a dialogue and make binding decisions about the future of the Church. It is a rare opportunity, only the fifth ever. The previous one was in 1937! This Council can be one of the great turning points in history, emulating the wonderful

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu!

While the Document would be familiar to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous delegates, it is probably less so to Catholics, even regular Sunday Mass attendants, and largely unknown to non-Catholics. The wider community, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, may not even be aware of the Council!

It needs much more coverage from the pulpit, and the media, Catholic and general. The response to the Statement must aim to meet its aspirations – Voice.

## Treaty truth

The Council is a timely forum to listen to the Voice of Indigenous delegates and provides a forum for eliciting the Truth and can be the start of the ongoing journey towards a Treaty between the Church and Indigenous Australians. Auspiciously, the Church’s Reconciliation Sacrament, with its specific steps – examination of conscience, confession of sins, repentance, purpose of amendment and reparation is an excellent guide for this journey.

Examination draws out Truth, starting with the doctrine of Discovery, the foundation stone of the edifice of terra nullius. A pedant might argue that the

culprit church in Australia was Anglican, not Catholic. While literally so – the Anglican Church might consider its own examination – the original sin was conceived and committed by Rome. Papal bulls, starting with *Dum Diversas* in 1452, called for non-Christian peoples to be ‘invaded, captured, vanquished, subdued, reduced to perpetual slavery and their possessions and property seized by Christian monarchs’. This encouraged predatory laws that, despite Mabo, remain the basis of ‘ownership’ of much of Australia’s lands and waters. Moreover, the Church was complicit in abetting this theft, itself acquiring vast tracts of aboriginal land, now worth billions or more, with no, or inadequate, compensation. Discovery also justified other sins – forced conversion, enslavement, incarceration, abduction etc. – because Indigenous peoples required Christian evangelisation.

## Reconciliation

Confession and Repentance require the Church to publicly acknowledge all its numerous mortal sins against Indigenous Australians, expressing unqualified remorse for them. This could be done publicly during the Council, with all participants, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, taking the place of the Confessor in the Sacrament. Publicising Council deliberations on Reconciliation in the Media, Pastoral Letters and Sermons would raise awareness of Australians, Catholics or otherwise of this seminal development.

Purpose of Amendment – commitment to sin no more – can only be effective if it revokes the original sin, Discovery, thus removing the temptation to sin again. The Council should resolve to urge the Pope, the ultimate authority over the doctrine, to rescind it *ex cathedra*.

On this fundamental moral issue, Australia is a laggard. Search ‘Discovery Catholic Bishops Canada Lorretto Community’ and find numerous bodies, Christian and non-Christian, religious and lay, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, even the UN, urging rescission. Searching ‘Discovery Catholic Bishops Australia’ reveals the discovery of gold! Pope Francis raised hopes of rescission in Bolivia in 2018, saying, ‘I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the church herself, but also for crimes committed

against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America'. Sadly, despite numerous pleas from Indigenous people the world over, rescission seems off the Pope's agenda. The Council must put it back!

### Restorative justice

Reparation, or making good, is the Church's biggest challenge, requiring it to commit to restorative justice for all the wrongs it now wants forgiven. However, as with the Sacrament, reparation is a prerequisite for forgiveness. In the context of the Statement from the Heart, Treaty would include what and how much Reparation would be. While the Treaty the Statement envisages is primarily between Sovereign Indigenous Nations and Australian Governments, it doesn't preclude other negotiated settlements. The Church has an unprecedented opportunity to set an example of goodwill and good faith that our governments, institutions and the rest of us occupiers can follow.

Even if adequate compensation is beyond the Church's capacity, this is no different from damages civil courts routinely impose on commercial organisations guilty of large-scale damage. Also, the Church is far from poor. It has a vast property portfolio of buildings, (all constructed on indigenous land), many of which are increasingly underutilised due to diminishing congregations, that can be put to more productive use. For example, single-use buildings used for weekend services only, could be put to beneficial use during the working week. Catholic educational and health

institutions could provide subsidised services to close the gap between Indigenous Australians and the wider community. The faithful could make generous voluntary contributions too.

We non-Indigenous Australians are also extremely fortunate that our Indigenous brothers and sisters have an ingrained culture of community and sharing, entirely different from the adversarial game that exemplifies western, especially colonial, disputation. Makaratta is about coming together after a struggle. It is a beautiful synonym for Reconciliation!

The Council is a Carpe Diem opportunity for the Church. ☪

**Front cover photo:** Elizabeth Lee, Northern Territory Desert Pea. Reprinted with permission.

## Celebrating integrated Eucharist creatively

PATRICK FLANAGAN

**Fr Patrick Flanagan, Victoria, has written many introductions, prayers and eucharistic prayers for the Mass based on the scripture texts and feast of the day. He describes this process and the benefit to good liturgy.**

I have written many times for *The Swag* on various topics. This time and in the future, I intend to be mainly sharing on my experiences with Liturgy.

In 1971 the Melbourne Liturgical Commission held a marvellous seminar about celebrating the new Mass, the Mass of Pope Paul VI, at the Pharmacy College near Melbourne University.

The main keynote speaker was the liturgical musician, Lucien Deiss. One of his contributions was that of showing us where we can make variations in the Mass. And, overall, he stressed putting together an integrated celebration, that had a unity about it, quite the opposite of a dog's dinner.

There were obvious variations like having 4 Eucharistic Prayers, and choosing from among them the one that best integrated a particular celebration. But he also pointed out that the Invitations at various points during the Mass such as before the penitential rite, before the Our Father, the Rite of Peace, and before Communion contain formulas that are samples. They can be varied to better suit a particular celebration. Similarly, the penitential tropes could be varied, the better to integrate a celebration.

I set to work to do all of this for every Mass. My basis for integration, besides seasons and feast, was the scriptures selected for particular Masses. I would go through the scriptures searching for phrases in them that I could integrate into the invitation to the penitential rite (which is also an invitation to take part in a particular celebration), the invitation to recite the Lord's Prayer, the invitation 'Let us offer each other a sign of Peace', the invitation, 'Behold the Lamb of God' and of course, the whole of the Prayer of the Faithful. In 1974, the Melbourne Liturgical Commission published my efforts for the weekdays of Lent, and many priests bought and used them.

Eventually, I produced for my own use, similar efforts for each Sunday of the three-year cycle, and for the weekdays of all the seasons. I also produced eventually similar schemas for each of the saints' days. I kept adding biographical notes to these to help with talking about the saints.



I don't see how you can celebrate saints if you know nothing about them.

Each time I came to use them, I would try to improve them.

As time went on, I ditched the invitations I had written for the Our Father, and for the Rite of Peace. I had come to conclude – and I wasn't the only priest to do so – that *that* part of Mass had too many words, and the aim should be to reduce them rather than expand them.

As well, then still in a time of experimentation, I began to write an Opening Prayer, a Prayer over the Gifts, a Prayer after Communion, and a Preface for each Sunday and Feast day of the three-year cycle. I also wrote Prefaces for each weekday of Advent and Lent.

Paul Stenhouse MSC (RIP 2020) was giving a parish Mission in Hamilton Victoria in 1972. He encouraged me to write prayers suited to each night's topic of the Mission. He valued my writing, and wanted me to write Prayers for weddings that he could publish in *The Annals*. I never got around to doing this.

My hope in all of this writing of prayers was that I would contribute to enriching the Roman Liturgy. Whether anything I have written will eventually find a wider use is in God's hands. But I can say that, in the parishes in which I have served, parishioners have appreciated my contributions. ☪

# The number of a person: 666 (Rev 13:18)

FRANCIS J MOLONEY SDB

Francis J Moloney SDB, Sunbury VIC, explores the meaning of 666 in the Book of Revelation.

Over recent years I have devoted attention to Revelation. This devotion has led to three publications in the ‘apocalyptic’ year of 2020: *The Apocalypse of John. A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), *Reading Revelation at Easter Time* (Collegeville: Liturgical) [written to accompany the Easter Office of Readings], and *A Friendly Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Mulgrave: Garratt Publications).

A regular contributor to *The Swag*, Patrick (‘Flags’) Flanagan, has encouraged and supported me over those years. Now he has made a request I cannot refuse: You would do well by your fellow-priests by writing an article about 666.

There are almost as many interpretations of the name for the beast in Rev 13:18, as there are interpreters. G K Beale’s outstanding commentary (1999) devotes 10 pages to them! The preferred current interpretation is that when numerical equivalents are given to the letters that form the name *Nerōn Caesar* the result adds up to 666 (the Jewish practice of *gematria*). This accepts the theory that the beast represents the myth of a return to life of the executed Emperor Nero (see 13:12).

That explanation is better than the savage interpretations that originated in the

sixteenth Century, widely used by both Catholics and Protestants as ‘biblically inspired insult’, well represented in the striking artwork of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1474–1528) and Albrecht Dürer (1472–1553). The beast named 666 is regularly identified with the Antichrist. The Antichrist never appears in Revelation. In the New Testament, the expression is used only by the author of 1 and 2 John to identify former members of a Christian community who have abandoned the group, no longer accepting that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ and the Son of God (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

The NRSV renders Rev 13:18: *Let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six* (Rev 13:18). But the Greek behind ‘it is the number of a person’ (*arithmos gar anthrōpou estin*) is best rendered: the number represents a human reality. The number 666 does not refer to an identifiable human being. If so, what human reality could be represented by 666?

Once one understands John’s use of numbers, received from broader biblical tradition, one can easily understand and calculate the number of the beast. The number 7 indicates completion.



The number 6 falls one short of completion. And it falls short 3 times! The number 3 indicates perfection. The threefold repetition of a number that falls one short of fulness indicates a human reality that forever falls frustratingly short of possible perfection.

The beast from the sea and the beast from the land in Rev 13 are the agents of the fallen dragon of 12:7-9. Through them he ‘makes war on the rest of her children’ (12:17), pursuing the offspring of the fallen woman (12:5-6, 13). Genesis and Exodus form John’s background. His use of 666 reflects an experience common to many of us, attracted as we are by the corrupt agendas of the representatives of ‘that ancient serpent’ (see 12:9). It is indeed a human reality. We regularly fall frustratingly short of possible perfection. ☪



## Ministry after COVID: thinking with Pope Francis

NIHAL ABEYASINGHA

Nihal Abeyasingha, a Sri Lankan theologian discusses the challenges facing ministry. What possibilities are there to face these challenges? The present article is an abridged form of the original, which is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

The basic thesis of this essay is that, as the opening paragraph of *Lumen Gentium* states *Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.* The mission remains, but the modality of the mission remains to be re-discovered and reformulated in each

successive era. The key instrument to carry out this mission is the Word of God – proclaimed, lived and celebrated in its sacraments. This mission is essentially the journey of a pilgrim people.

We are not talking of a paradigm shift – that is a change in the basic concepts and experimental practices of a scientific discipline. What is happening is more like what Karl Jaspers (1888-1969) identified an axial revolution in human consciousness. Today, many movements and developments

are coming together resulting in new ways of thinking. The Church has to be aware of the strengths and weakness of this situation, as it works towards the coming of the kingdom. COVID has highlighted how fragmented the world really is. We have not yet reached a point of fraternity and social friendship. On the other hand, globalization and technology have worked to create vaccines in record time. Pope Francis pointed out an area, to which the mission of the Church could extend, (cf *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) #7).

### Centripetal outreach to centrifugal outreach

In the recent past, the functioning of ministry has been church-centered or one

might say, centripetal. The celebration of the sacraments and breaking the Word in many forms has been for the most part in the churches. So, also catechism classes and other outreach ministries. Even during COVID the celebration of the Eucharist, celebrated in Churches has been disseminated through the use of technological means. But the question is whether that alone is sufficient after COVID. What about other sacraments? What about pastoral care that encounter with truth which sets people free? What we need is a Church that doesn't sit around waiting for people to walk through the door but goes out to meet them where they live.

Perhaps we need to begin thinking of the ministry as something of a centrifugal activity, like a cartwheel – the spokes radiating from the centre to the periphery. The periphery would represent those in need. The outreach would be – to use the imagery of Pope Francis – like a polyhedron.

The basic instruments of the church's mission are the word and the sacraments.

One of the modalities of this missionary activity is through the use of technological means, but operating from different centres or focal points. Technological means brings people into connectivity, but it does not build relationships.

### Metaphors from Pope Francis – always leading to Christ

The church has of necessity to engage in works of charity and outreach. In this perspective, besides others, four images used by Pope Francis may be worth reflecting on and considering. First, the Church is not an *NGO*. It is not involved in doing good for its own sake, but in working towards the building of the Kingdom. Secondly, we are not *baby sitters*: If she were this, hers would be a 'slumbering Church'. We are not providing an opiate to keep the masses quiet.

Thirdly, the church has to consider itself a *Field Hospital*, attending to immediate needs as needed to preserve and stabilize life. After that stabilization, one can move further to improve the quality of life. Fourthly, the church's mission involves *caring for the sheep and experiencing the smell of sheep*, which is not very pleasant.

### Instituted ministries

Besides the renewal of the ministry of word and sacrament by the clergy, the laity need to be assigned their rightful place in the mission of the church. In the context of the institution of the ministry of catechists, Pope Francis has said in

*Antiquum Ministerium* (2021) #7: To be sure, there has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. It follows that the reception of a lay ministry such as that of Catechist will emphasize even more the missionary commitment proper to every baptized person, a commitment that must however be carried out in a *fully secular* manner, *avoiding any form of clericalization*. (emphasis added).

When Paul VI by *Quaedam Ministeria* (1972) established the ministries of Lector and Acolyte supposedly as lay ministries, the majority who received them were clerics en route to the priesthood. It was available only to males. With Pope Francis opening these ministries and that of catechists to persons of both sexes, there is the possibility of conferring these ministries as part of the outreach of mission spoken of above.

### Concupiscence, selfishness, the capital vices

COVID has highlighted the fragmentation in the world. The roots of fragmentation are basically selfishness, which is itself rooted in concupiscence. Today, we hesitate to talk of sin. Believing the gospel requires repentance.

Pope Francis had spoken of concupiscence and selfishness. Linked to these concepts, perhaps, it may be appropriate to consider the reality of the capital sins/vices and their penetration into the structures of society.

Some famous literary works of the past explored the seven deadly vices e.g. the Decameron, Paradise Lost. Especially in Dante's *Purgatorio*, the schema of the capital sins is found very prominently. From the 16th century onwards, the capital vices did not play such an important role in the analysis of behavior. Yet their presence and functioning is a reality.

### Addressing our issues of selfishness and fragmentation

In *Querida Amazonia* (2020) #93 Pope Francis says that it is not simply a question of facilitating a greater presence of ordained ministers who can celebrate the Eucharist. That would be a very narrow aim, were we not also to strive to awaken new life in communities.

We need to promote an encounter with God's word and growth in holiness through various kinds of lay service that call for a process of education – biblical, doctrinal, spiritual and practical – and a variety of programmes of ongoing formation.”

### In synodality

This collaboration with laity needs to take place in a spirit of synodality, where the magisterium listens to the Holy Spirit speaking to them through the people of God (LG 12) as well and, this, includes a two-way process of common listening to the Spirit and communal discernment (*sensus fidei*) by the entire people of God who *journey together* to evangelize and bring about the Kingdom of God.

For the Church engaged in this mission, four principles are outlined in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) #217-237:

1. Time is greater than space
2. Unity prevails over conflict
3. Realities are more important than ideas
4. The whole is greater than the part.

Listening in this way and implementing the principles above involves a training in a process of discernment.

Pope Francis states in *Amoris Laetitia* #302: *Therefore, while upholding a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases. Pastoral discernment, while taking into account a person's properly formed conscience, must take responsibility for these situations.*

### Searching for other possibilities

The two supreme instruments which the Church possesses are the Word and the Sacrament.

There are limitless possibilities in regard to the word. But there are limitations in regard to the sacrament.

Finally, a word can be said about finances. Most parishes find a drop in financial resources especially when Sunday Masses cannot be held regularly.

In analyzing this issue, the point is not more fund-raising measures, but asking the question whether the institution (parish, monastery, lay organization or whatever) provides a useful service.

### Promoting and encouraging a new evangelization

After Vatican II, there were individuals and groups that went around disseminating the basic insights of Vatican II. Who is really engaged in this dissemination today? An exercise of ministry along the lines and more importantly, the spirit of what is suggested above will inevitably lead to the re-thinking and re-formulation of reality. Realities are more important than ideas.

✞

# The Sydney Statement: an interfaith charter

PATRICK MCINERNEY SSC

*The Sydney Statement – Building Bridges Between Believers from Different Religions*, is a new interfaith charter published in 2021. Rev Dr Patrick McInerney SSC, Director of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations and Columban priest writes about the shaping and content of the text. Although named after its city of origin, *The Sydney Statement* is relevant to multi-religious societies around the world.

The *Sydney Statement* was inspired by similar interfaith statements from other cities e.g. *The Athens Declaration* 2015, *The Beirut Declaration* 2017 and the *Washington Declaration* 2018.

*The Sydney Statement* is unique among the interfaith statements in that it is authorised by young people. All the others are written by elders. In 2019, Youth PoWR (Parliament of the World Religions), a coalition of young adults from different religions, held consultations across Sydney. They asked young people about their experience as people of faith, good and bad; about what our world would be like if people of all faiths could flourish together; and the concrete steps to reach that ideal. Their answers formed the raw material for *The Sydney Statement*.

## Drafting the text

In 2020, a drafting committee shaped that content into a text. They consulted regularly with the Youth PoWR Coordinating Committee and with the Steering Committee, both made up of representatives from different religions. When the text was nearing completion, they consulted theologians and religious leaders to ensure there were no hindrances to its reception by their respective congregations.

They also consulted the wider Youth PoWR network to ensure that the text genuinely reflected their original concerns. It was a very rigorous process. There were 16 drafts, each one more accurate, precise and concise. Much of this work had to be done online as people could not meet physically due to COVID restrictions.

## Action-oriented

*The Sydney Statement* is also unique in that it is directed to action. The substance of the document is 21 commitments for engaging in interfaith relations – in daily life, in acting together for the common good, in sharing knowledge about each other's religions, and in exchanging spirituality – and to promote interreligious dialogue within one's own community. These commitments are not motherhood

platitudes. They do not affirm the status quo but seek to transform it. They are cutting edge. They push the reader out of their comfort zones, but not so hard that they resist. They “ruffle feathers, but don't break wings”!

## Catalyst for conversation

Not everyone will agree with everything in *The Sydney Statement*, nor should they! It contains many voices. It originated in conversation and is a catalyst for further conversation. When people from different faiths engage with the *Statement* and with each other, including their disagreements, they will forge better mutual understanding for a more resilient multi-faith society.

On 15 October 2020, the Committee presented *The Sydney Statement* online to the wider Youth PoWR network. Like any parliament which passes legislation, the Youth “Parliament” of the World's Religions considered the final text. They voted overwhelmingly in its favour and authorised its publication.

## Website

*The Sydney Statement* is published as a single-sided A1 poster, a double-sided A4 poster, an A5 32-page booklet, and on a their website, [www.thesydneystatement.org.au](http://www.thesydneystatement.org.au)

The home page has the short version of *The Sydney Statement*; clicking the links opens the longer explanatory version; clicking the further links opens references for the values and principles, and concrete suggestions for carrying out the 21 commitments, along with resources for doing so. The posters and booklet can be downloaded free from the website and professionally printed versions can be purchased from the online shop.

In addition, the website has a wealth of interfaith resources: the *Story of The Sydney Statement*, the interfaith statements that inspired it, links to national and international websites on interreligious organisations, articles on interreligious dialogue, endorsements by civic and religious leaders, and much more.

Most importantly, Youth PoWR invite



everyone around the world to pledge to live out the values, principles and commitments of *The Sydney Statement* by signing up on the dedicated website. Simply fill out your personal details, click “sign”, and begin “*Building Bridges Between Believers from Different Religions*”.

## Launch

*The Sydney Statement* was launched online on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 through an e-mail blitz that reached more than 100,000 people in Australia and around the world. It was officially launched by Youth PoWR at the Sydney Town Hall on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 in a gala event attended by youth, school students, religious and civic leaders.

*The Sydney Statement Project* was initiated by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. They partnered with Western Sydney University, who provided research into the interfaith statements. It was financially supported by the NSW Government with a COMPACT Grant through Multicultural NSW and underwritten by St Columban's Mission Society.

The Project Executive Team thank Youth PoWR for giving us *The Sydney Statement*. It is a world class document that has the potential to transform interfaith relations in towns, cities and nations around the world. We hope it does not remain a poster on the wall, a booklet on the shelf, or bytes in cyber space. We hope that people of all faiths and worldviews will embrace its values, principles and commitments, and themselves become living bridges between believers from different religions. ☺

# The right to the rite

HARRY MOORE SM

**Harry Moore SM is a retired Marist priest who has worked in Papua New Guinea, Mexico and Norfolk Island. He stills helps out in local parishes when the need arises.**

Once upon a time many years ago, I was a holy missionary, and I was fortunate enough to have in my parish an anthropological phenomenon called 'Cargo Cult'. The story was this: the local people would see huge ships appear from over the horizon and disgorge mountains of goodies but the goodies were never for them. There was some kind of supernatural secret involved which was whispered to newly ordained priests when the bishop ritually embraced them during the ordination ceremony, and the selfish priest would not share the secret, so they set about discovering it for themselves. Certain sacred sticks, shells and stones (the matter) were arranged in a special way, and certain sacred incantations (the form) were chanted over them. When nothing appeared on the horizon, it was obvious that there was some defect either in the matter or the form. Fine tune and try again. This went on for decades.

In about 1971, there appeared in one of those theological magazines, a short article by Karl Rahner called *On Receiving a Sacrament and Meaning It*. As I remember, Rahner called it a Copernican revolution in his thinking. It was an Emmaus moment for me. I suddenly realised that up until then I had been a sacramental cargo cultist. I believed that if I said the prescribed words (the form), and used the correct material (the matter), some kind of spiritual magic would happen. Unfortunately, my belief was not supported by evidence or results. If I have understood our brother, Karl, properly, Sacraments are intensification of a spiritual reality that already exists within us, and that intensification happens in the context of sacred theatre, that is, a sacramental liturgy.

## Confession, penance, reconciliation, forgiveness, conversion, metanoia

In our short lifetimes, there have been many names for the sacrament of God's forgiving love, but the one that seems to be in vogue at the moment is Reconciliation, so let us run with that.

In the early church Christians had only one bite at the forgiveness cherry, and that

was in public and for offences that repulsed the community like brutal murder, rapes and idolatry, and if you reoffended – hard luck – no second chance. Then, in the seventh century came the compassionate Irish missionary to Europe, and following the Eastern Monastic tradition, taught that reconciliation with the community could be frequent, secret,



and in private. But, over the years, some say for reasons of control, the bureaucracy gradually heaped onto God's unconditional forgiveness cart all kinds of hoops to be jumped through and conditions to be met ... for example, all sins were to be told in kind and number, and if we missed one out, that made it a 'bad confession' and was in itself another sin, and we would have to start all over again. Not what might be called 'obsessive/compulsive' friendly. Fortunately, during the war the military chaplains would cut through all the crap, assemble the troops about to go into battle and give them all a general absolution as a job lot. Thank God for the chaplains.

Then came the sixties and the seventies. Fire and brimstone were not scaring anyone any more. Churches began to

empty; priests began to leave and get married and poor old individual confession was well and truly on the toboggan.

Enter the bureaucracy again. I think it was in the early seventies. There were to be three rites of reconciliation. The Third Rite was to be a job lot celebration. The churches started to fill again. Priests reported a counter-intuitive phenomenon, whenever the Third Rite was celebrated there was a marked increase in requests for private confession. Then, not so many years ago, the Pole or the German decided that life was not meant to be easy, and put a definite stop to all this Third Rite nonsense.

## What we knew as kids

The nuns taught us well. We knew as kids that there was no forgiveness without remorse or regret and that remorse or sorrow for our sins was also a free gift from our compassionate Lord. We also knew that as soon as we embraced that gift of sorrow for our sins, the merciful Lord would forgive our trespasses long before we went to Confession.

We knew that a voluntary, wilful, total severing of our relationship with God was very rare but was, by definition, spiritual death. We knew that apologies without a genuine desire to change our ways was bogus sorrow, and was not going to cut it with the Lord. We knew that we had to do our best to make up for the wrong we had done.

We had to wait until we went to the seminary to be instructed in such gems of rationality as matter and form of sacraments, valid and invalid celebrations of sacraments, integral confessions, sins of sexuality not admitting of parvity of matter, and that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church.

## The Plenary Council

Around the traps, I have heard lots of calls by lovers of the forgiving Lord, to bring back the Third Rite. It is my hope that the matter comes before the Plenary Council. If it does, I feel sure that there will be spirited debate. The interventions may go something like this:

First Ancient Cleric: *Brothers, remember matter and form, species and number.*

Chair: *Would you care to rephrase your comments?*

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the swag



## FEATURES

Ancient Cleric again: *Whoops! My apologies, Ladies. Brothers and sisters, for a confession to be valid and sins to be forgiven, it must be integral, that is, all sins must be told to a priest, the type of sin and the number, for example, impure thoughts, one hundred and forty-six times. And I remind you that all sexual sins are mortal.*

Second Ancient Cleric: *Madam Chair, sisters and brothers, I thank my colleague for his thoughts. My comments come from a somewhat different understanding of sacramentality. In normal human affairs, if we offend a loved one, we instinctively know that the loved one forgives us but we feel that a formal apology by us will be helpful in strengthening our relationship of love, and so it is with our relationship with the Lord. That is what reconciliation is all about. A ritualised formal apology designed to intensify our relationship of love and gratitude with our forgiving Lord*

The church has provided us with a ritual whereby that relationship of friendship that already exists between us and Jesus is intensified and gives us a feeling of certainty of God's forgiving love for us which is totally unmerited on our part. Accordingly, I feel it is a disgraceful injustice that the faithful are denied their right to intensify their relationship with their loving and forgiving God. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I always bet on form, and the way things have been going lately, if it comes down to a vote, my money will be well and truly on the cargo cultists.

### The next step

From time to time, theologians bleat about how our faith is communal, about how we are all on this journey together, and there is just a slight chance that the Plenary Council will agree that coming together

as a pilgrim people and praising the Lord for his forgiving love in a formal setting, is what is needed for our believing community at this time.

If that happens, then I beg you, do not write to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments requesting the reinstatement of the Third Rite of Reconciliation because you already know what the answer will be. In fact, in your deliberations, do not even mention the words 'the Third Rite of Reconciliation'.

I would suggest you assemble a group of people who understand theatre, and commission them to prepare examples of Celebration of God's Forgiving Love, and send them to all the parishes in Australia, and if the faithful feel the need to include the magic words, that would be entirely up to them. ☪

## NEWS

### Stay COVID free and Spirit positive!



Join us online for the fifth *Mission: one heart many voices* conference this 1-3 September 2021.

You are invited to be curious and creative in this time of liminality, transition and interruption in how to lead with a mission heart now.

Inspired by Jesus, this conference will focus on themes of encounter on the margins, inclusion, governance and synodality and challenge you to consider contemporary Mission in light of Pope Francis' teaching, witness and vision of liminal leadership in mission.

This is our fifth *Mission: one heart many voices* conference and we're taking the opportunity to do things differently. In response to the signs of the times, the conference will be held online and embrace the many opportunities this affords.

Keynote presenters include Senior Australian of the Year Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann AM, Hugh MacKay AO, Cardinal Tagle, Craig Foster AM, Robert Fitzgerald AM, and Dr Ursula Stephens. There are specialised workshops to select from and a range of unique sessions to engage your heart.

Register now: [www.mohmv.com.au](http://www.mohmv.com.au)

### Know the dioceses for the Pastoral Council in 2021

On 3 October 2021 some 280 bishops, priests, deacons, religious and laypersons will gather at 5 provincial 'Hubs' across Australia to celebrate the liturgical Opening of the 5th Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia. These Members of the Council, called from the 36 'particular churches' in Australia – 28 territorial dioceses, 5 eparchies and dioceses of the Eastern Churches, the Military and Anglican ordinariates, and the personal prelatore of Opus Dei – will, in their coming together, give witness to the 'communion' between all the churches in Australia and with the Bishop of Rome. They will also discuss synodally the common pastoral concerns of the particular churches and discern common solutions so that together they can 'make provision for the pastoral needs of the people of God' (C. 445).

To provide a better understanding of the dioceses, Dr Peter Wilkinson has prepared a series of Diocesan Profiles on each territorial diocese (see map of territorial

dioceses below) drawn from a variety of official church and government data with the hope that they will serve as a useful resource to assist the Members of the Council and Catholics generally to understand the state of the Church in Australia on the eve of the Council.



The territorial dioceses are administratively and geographically divided into seven archdioceses (state and national capital cities) and 21 dioceses, with 26 organised into five 'provinces', generally following State/Territory boundaries and named after the Metropolitan Archdioceses of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, and Adelaide (includes NT). While the archdioceses of Canberra & Goulburn and Hobart are not included in the five provinces, they collaborate with the Provinces of Sydney and Melbourne respectively. The Eastern Churches, ordinariates, and personal prelatore are not included in the provincial structure. Readers can access all the Diocesan

Profiles at Item #99 in the Documents Section of the Catholics for Renewal website: [www.catholicsforrenewal.org/documents](http://www.catholicsforrenewal.org/documents)

## Tridentine Rite severely restricted



Pope Francis issued a new 'motu proprio' called *Traditionis custodes* (Guardians of the Tradition) on July 16 which reverses the liberalisation of the use of the Rite by priests under Pope Benedict XVI.

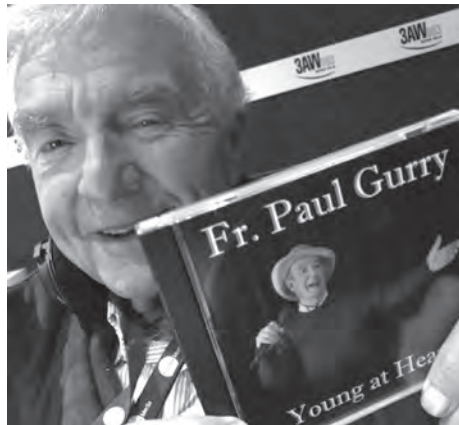
After a survey of the world's bishops in 2020, Francis has responded to the reports of division and the weaponizing of the Rite in the culture war against the reforms of Vatican II and the alienation of mainstream Catholics in parish communities that have become homes for the old rite.

Francis affirms the Roman Rite of Paul VI as the normal way Mass should be celebrated. Priests must get permission to celebrate the Old rite and new priests may celebrate the old rite only with express authorisation of the bishop. Francis suggests that the old rite is to be exceptional and for particular communities and not celebrated in parish churches.

These severe restrictions shall be seen by some as further evidence to oppose Pope Francis' reforms, but for the vast majority of Catholics seeking spiritual nurture at their Sunday Eucharists it will be welcomed. Francis has decided to put an end to the disunity caused by the imposition of the old rite on ordinary parishes and the message that somehow the Roman Rite is heretical or defective.

The Pope expressly demands: *discontinu[ing] the erection of new personal parishes tied more to the desire and wishes of individual priests than to the real need of the 'holy People of God'.*

## Priest sings to support asylum seekers



Fr Paul Gurry (retired priest of the Archdiocese of Melbourne) has produced a CD, *Young at Heart*, which features him singing popular songs such as *What a Wonderful World*, *You'll Never Walk Alone* and *The Green, Green Grass of Home*. The CD produced in 2018 is now available to support the Brigidine Sisters Asylum Seekers Project.

To order a copy contact Fr Paul Gurry, Unit 10/32 Mentone Pde, Mentone VIC 3194. M: 0425 802 754. Cost: \$20.00 (which includes postage).

## Australian reform groups call for new Plenary Council agenda

The Australasian Coalition of Catholic Church Reform (ACCCR), which brings together 19 reform groups in Australia and New Zealand, has produced a response to the Plenary Council draft agenda. The response addresses all sixteen questions on the draft agenda for the Plenary Council and offers theological and practical suggestions to respond more realistically to the serious problems confronting the church as it seeks to respond to the current crisis in leadership, canon law and pastoral care.

For example in response to agenda question one, *How might we better accompany one another on the journey of personal and communal conversion which mission in Australia requires*, ACCCR suggest the Plenary Council 'affirm the critical role of personal conscience as the basis and authentication for an inner voice and authority in relation to conversion' and 'recognise and seek to understand the position of the vast majority of Catholics on matters such as family planning and contraception, relationship breakdown and cohabiting, sexual ethics, justice for sexual and gender diverse people and all LGBTIQ+ people in reviewing Catholic teaching' and 'commit to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and

exclusion from our Church, whether in relation to sharing Eucharist, providing pastoral care, or sacramental ministry.'

In response to the agenda question on First Nations people, ACCCR suggest the Plenary Council needs to *listen to the concerns and spiritual understandings of Australian First Nations peoples*.

The document of 9,000 words covering all areas of church life and how dialogue might be promoted will be published soon along with other documents aimed at developing a way forward for the Plenary Council to achieve its vision.

See book review *A Church for All: A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond* in this edition.

## Pope supports Fr James Martin LGBTI ministry



On June 21 Pope Francis wrote a personal letter to Fr James Martin sj to support his ministry with LGBTIQ as he prepared for a conference to support pastoral ministry of LGBTI Catholics and allies to be held at Fordham University.

Speakers included Sr. Jeannine Gramick, S.L., co-founder of New Ways Ministry, who will speak on 'Fifty Years of LGBTQ Ministry', Fr. Bryan Massingale, a gay priest and theologian, who presented on 'Intersectionality and LGBTQ Catholic Ministry' and Bishop John Stowe, OFM, Conv. of Lexington, Kentucky.

The Pope wrote regarding the conference: *I want to thank you for your pastoral zeal and your ability to be close to people, with that closeness that Jesus had and that reflects the closeness of God. Our Heavenly Father approaches with love every one of his children, each and everyone. His heart is to open to each and everyone. He is Father. God's 'style' has three aspects: closeness, compassion and tenderness. This is how he draws closer to each one of us.*

Continued page 32

## Pope's desire for synodality will reshape the Church says Cardinal Tobin



Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey said on May 4, Pope Francis' repeated calls for mercy and for the church to hear voices from the peripheries is an invitation to accept that the Holy Spirit speaks not just to church leaders but to all the baptized, reported Dennis Sadowski on Catholic News Service July 6.

In his lecture, *Synodality and the Long Game of Pope Francis*, the annual Cardinal Bernardin Common Cause Lecture at Loyola University Chicago, Tobin noted: *one way we can look at this is that the election of Pope Francis opened up the rest of the world to the rich theological foment of the church in Latin America, with its strong sense of mission, encounter, the peripheries and mercy. And many, including church leaders in this country, have found that shift to be uncomfortable.*

Tobin emphasized this shift as a key long-haul strategy by Pope Francis. The path toward synodality, the cardinal continued, will require the church to undergo its own conversion, 'a new way of understanding and approaching how we carry out our mission.'

Cardinal Tobin recalled that John XXIII when convoking the Second Vatican Council invited participants to serve as 'medicine of mercy' rather than 'a spirit of severity.'

Cardinal Tobin said those who feel most threatened by including those on the peripheries in the life of the church are those 'with the most engineered grasp of all the norms and canons (of church law).' Synodality, he said, requires that voices throughout the church are welcomed and heard.

'We always associated [opening the windows] with letting in fresh air,' Cardinal Tobin said. 'But something else happens when you open a window.

You can hear what the people outside, those below your window, are saying.'

Such openness is at the root of synodality that Pope Francis seeks for the church, he said.

### Pope to priests: Be shepherds with 'the smell of the sheep'

Pope Francis spoke with a group of French priests pursuing higher ecclesiastical studies in Rome urging that priests be shepherds with the 'smell of the sheep', grounded in the situation of their flock, reported Robin Gomes in *Vatican News* on June 7.

'Studies are ... to enable you to better appreciate the reality in which you are called to proclaim the Gospel of joy', he told them. He said they should not go into the field to apply theories without considering the environment in which they will be working or the people entrusted to their care, Gomes reported. He expressed concern that sometimes reflections and thoughts on priesthood are laboratory sample: this priest, that priest and so on. He said priesthood isolated from the people of God, is neither a Catholic priesthood nor a Christian one.

'Strip yourselves of your pre-constituted ideas, your dreams of greatness, your self-assertion, in order to put God and people at the centre of your daily concerns,' the Pope said. 'A priest has to be a pastor in the midst of God's people because God has chosen him for that.'

### The church needs fragile pastors – not 'superman' priests



Pope Francis told a group of priests studying in Rome that if they do not want to be pastors, spending time with the faithful, they should request dismissal from the priesthood and concentrate on academics instead, reported Cindy Wooden of Catholic News Service reported on June 07, 2021 in *America magazine*.

'Be pastors with the scent of your sheep, persons able to live, laugh and cry with your people—in other words, to communicate with them,' the pope told the priests. 'The priesthood cannot be understood without its essential connection to "the holy people of God," the pope told them. 'The ministerial priesthood is a consequence of the baptismal priesthood of the holy faithful people of God.'

'If you think of a priesthood isolated from the people of God, that is not a Catholic priesthood,' he said. A Catholic priest puts God and God's people at the centre of his daily concerns, setting aside self-interest and 'dreams of greatness.'

"To put God's holy faithful people at the centre, you must be a pastor," he said.

The pope said: 'if you are a priest, be a pastor'. He went on to comment that this requires a level of comfortability with fragility where the Lord is encountered lived with a sense of joy and gratitude. He contrasted this with the futility of 'superman' priests.

### Pope names English archbishop to lead worship congregation



Pope Francis named English Archbishop Arthur Roche to lead the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, replacing Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah, 75, who led the congregation from 2014 until his Feb. 20 resignation. The Vatican announced the appointment May 27.

The congregation is charged with promoting the celebration of the Mass and the sacraments and fostering their correct celebration, including by overseeing the approval of the translations of liturgical books and texts. Born in Yorkshire in 1950, the new prefect led the Diocese of Leeds until his appointment as secretary of the congregation in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI.

He also served as chairman of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, which was responsible for the current English translation of the Roman Missal. ☪

## A Church where women feel included

In response to Nimmi Candappa's letter (Winter 2012) I would like to make some observations to support her position on 'making a Church where women feel included'.

Nimmi is understandably distracted by the phrase 'for us men and for our salvation' in the Nicene Creed because, according to the current acceptable usage of the English language, this excludes women.

This prompted me to go to the original text of the Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople I (381). The Nicene Creed we use today is the creed first produced by the Council of Nicea and then expanded by the Council fathers of the Council of Constantinople I. The original language is in fact Greek. It showed that the Council Fathers of both councils used the word 'anthropos', a word which means 'human being' with no inference of it being either a man or a woman. The Greek language has a different word for 'man' and 'woman'. The official Latin translation of that time accurately translates this word by using the word, 'homo'.

Unfortunately, the current English translation of 'for us men and for our salvation' from the Nicene Creed is not accurate. It may well have been an acceptable translation in 1973 when ICEL (the International Commission on English in the Liturgy) gave us the universally used English translation of the Roman Missal but was definitely not acceptable in 2012 when we received the current English translation of the Roman Missal.

I also checked my Dutch and Italian translations of the Roman Missal. Those translators did not make the same mistake! They used good idiomatic inclusive language. It goes to show that St Jerome, who translated the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek languages into Latin and knew the pitfalls about translating, was right when he said, 'Omnis translator traditor' (Every translator is a traitor). It would appear that the translators who gave us the current translation of 'for us men and for our salvation' also proved to be 'traitors'.

The English translation of the Lectionary also needs attention to make it feel more inclusive for women. This translation dates back to the mid-sixties and is now definitely showing its age because our language has evolved considerably since then. We do need a modern translation of the Bible for our Lectionary. When will this happen??

*Fr Peter Kooloos, Koo Wee Rup VIC*

In 2015, having become a member of the St Leonards Discussion Group, I was introduced to *The Swag* and have become a dedicated reader ever since. As our discussion and study group progressed with input from *The Swag*, I began to believe that the exclusion of women from the priesthood was not in accord with God's plan that men and women were intended to be equal partners in the Kingdom of God on earth for eternity. (Genesis 1: 27).

This act of God has over a period of some thousands of years has been overturned by man contrary to God's will. In a book, *How to Defend Our Faith* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2015), the authors write that 'At the dawn of human history, male and female roles were rigorously divided. To men belonged responsibility, authority and presence in the public sphere – law politics and power – while women took charge of home, family and education.

Anthropological and Archaeological studies plus a study of existing indigenous societies indicate that pre 7500BC at least men would have shared most of life's activities including those requiring stamina and intellect. Women were far from being the weaker sex. The authors do note that women in the past one hundred years have begun to reverse their subordination.

In *Jesus the forgotten feminist*, Chris Geraghty, a former lecturer of theology and liturgical studies, argues convincingly for women's ordination. He reminds us that: There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male and female – for all are one in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:11). If our Church is to restore its former high status as an ecclesiastical institution it is not enough to tinker with out-of-date canon law or liturgy but to make a significant statement of reform. I believe that the ordination of women as priests is a Christian imperative if God's will at the creation of humanity is to be restored. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

*Eric Horne, Sydney NSW*

## Eucharist – assembly, gratitude, mystery

Patrick Kempton offered some, what I might call, truth-telling observations about how we Catholics generally understand Eucharist (Winter 2021, p.32). I found myself truly pleased in what he had to say. An observation that stood out for me is when he says 'to emphasise the notion of *real* presence is an exercise in futility. Jesus is either present or He is not'. Yes, rather perplexing – to be more present than present!

In my view what ushers Catholic minds

toward appropriating *real* into their vernacular when speaking of Jesus' presence re Eucharist, as distinct from any other context, is twofold: the physical/incarnational aspect of the sacred elements of bread & wine; our understanding of Catholic Eucharist as transubstantiation. [And, if I may be so bold to ask the reader to hold onto another thought: the latter the basis of distinguishing ourselves from our baptised brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations].

Regarding the former point, as Kempton records the words of Bernard Cooke, Vatican II made clear Jesus' presence 'in the Church gathered, in his Word, in the person of the presiding minister'. Are we, hence, unwittingly failing to notice that these aspects of Jesus' presence are also physical/incarnational? That it is these aspects – no less real – which precede the consecration. [There can be no consecration until the community assembles]. If so, therein lies an unfortunate blindness!

Frank Andersen has suggested: 'To consecrate the gifts of bread and wine is to consecrate the assembled community'. When we celebrate Mass, are our sights focused upon the sacred elements at the expense of appreciating the reality of the assembly? Does the way we assemble at our Masses – oft times so scattered – fail us in depth and feeling the bond of faith with those around? Is there a call to awaken our sensibilities to the profound experience of consecration as hunger, thanks, and remembrance of Jesus' life to be bread broken for each other, and blood poured out? And to speak of 'holy communion', are we aware what that actually points to? It is by taking stock of these realities that the recognition of the presence of Jesus is broadened.

When it comes to the expression 'transubstantiation', I'm treading on sacred ground, yet I feel a deep lament. The language and tone of transubstantiation, in the way we have 'brandished' it at times, leaves much to be desired. If 'one of the earliest words used in relation to the celebration of the sacraments was the Greek word *mysterion*' (Cooke), then our penchant to define what happens at the consecration overshadows the sense of mystery, impedes a growth in consciousness of *who we are*, and sadly serves as an obstacle to break bread with those from other Christian denominations. Yet all are baptised; all have a relationship with the risen Christ; all are a work in progress to recognise Jesus in all they do as his disciples; all are urged to celebrate this reality, to bring their lives to the moment of remembrance. *That is the mystery!*

*Continued page 34*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Yet, as a Church, we reserve the right to judge how Christ resides in the mind and heart of those who join us.

How is it not a mockery of the bond of our baptised faith to suppress some from sharing in the bread and wine that has been consecrated? How much longer will the mark of our presence to each other at our Eucharists continue to be guided by the question 'Do you believe in the real presence?' instead of our desire for Christ? Either we TRUST in the mystery that unfolds or we do not. Plainly, as a Church, we don't!

**Leonard Blahut, Hazelbrook NSW**

### Rev John McDonald: a great ecumenist

I would like to let the readers of *The Swag* to know that I was saddened to learn of the death of the Rev. John McDonald, who for almost 30 years was the Rector of the Anglican Parish of St. Basil's Anglican Church, Artarmon.

I first met John in the late 1980's when I represented the Catholic Diocese of Parramatta at the monthly meetings of the New South Wales Ecumenical Council. John would attend the meetings each month without fail and always contribute constructively at the meetings. The late Bishop Bede Heather, who at one stage was chairperson of the council for two years, appreciated John's contribution and support. John was very zealous in inter-church and interfaith relations. With his death the Anglican church in Sydney has lost a great ecumenist.

We became good friends and I remember him telling me once that when he was a student for the Anglican ministry at Moore Theological Collage in the late 1950's at the time Pope Pius XII's death, he and his fellow students would gather in prayer, praying for God's guidance on the Cardinals as they were electing a new Pope and as a result Pope John XXIII was elected.

Let me conclude with what was written in John's funeral notice in Saturday's Sydney Morning Herald (12 June 2021):

*Be a pastor after the pattern of Christ the great Shepherd... Be a teacher taught by the Lord in wisdom and holiness. Lead the people of God as a servant of Christ. Love and serve the people with whom you work, caring alike for young and old, rich and poor, weak and strong.*

As a Catholic priest who has been involved in inter-church and interfaith relations for over forty years, I found John a real inspiration to continue in this work.

Although at times I felt discouraged, we both believed that this work would contribute to the wellbeing of human kind.

**Rev Zvonimir Gavranovic, Glenwood-Stanhope Gardens NSW**

### Mass for you at home

During my many years visiting Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Shut-ins etc, I have heard many people speak of how they appreciated *Mass for you at Home*. In the years I worked as a Chaplain in Sydney prisons I was amazed at the number of times that prisoners spoke to me of participating in Mass on TV early on a Sunday morning.

*Mass for You at Home* has been broadcast since August 1971. It is believed to be the longest-running program on Australian commercial television. A magnificent achievement for all those involved.

Recently the Mass has moved to Fairy Meadow NSW and is now a production of the Diocese of Wollongong in partnership with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Like most Catholics since the pandemic, I have enjoyed tuning in to Mass in many different Churches. The Jesuits from North Sydney should be congratulated for the wonderful contribution they have made to the Australian Church each day by making the Mass at Lavender Bay available to us.

However, recently after yet another period of hospitalisation I have once again begun to join in *Mass for you at Home*. Somehow it is good to link in with so many who don't have access to Mass any other way. I must admit that I tape it and watch it later in the day!

The setting for Mass is simple but dignified. The production is highly professional with beautiful music that is often highlighted with glorious visuals. Readers are well prepared, clear and attempt to engage with us. In recent times young priests from the Dioceses of Wollongong, Sydney and Parramatta have led us. I must admit that, as an older priest, I wish they would loosen up a bit but I recognise that they are consistent in their style of celebrating Mass which has obviously been emphasised by their training. I must say that they are all immaculately groomed!

So, I commend all those who are involved in *Mass for you at Home*. May it continue to give solace and comfort to so many who participate in Mass in this way.

**Michael Walsh CM, Croydon NSW**

## On the importance of the Trinity

In an article by Junno Arocho Esteves published 27<sup>th</sup> June 2021 by the *Catholic Weekly* we are made aware of St John Paul's guidance for leading humanity towards a greater understanding of the unknown. The then Pope stated the 'benefit of a synergistic relationship' between religion and science.

An enlightening answer was offered by Fr Richard Waddell's article in the same issue. In a thoughtful commentary on Stephen Hawkins' question on whether there is a God, he suggests we 'contemplate the Trinity'. It seems that our idea of the greatness of God is being stretched by the day as we hear science expounding on the multitudes of universes.

I was pleasantly encouraged by the fact I had been watching the prolific teachings on YouTube of Fr Richard Rohr OFM, founder and long-term director of the Centre of Action and Contemplation. He keeps up with the latest science and has written books amongst others on the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation and the implications on the latter if science finds human life on other planets.

As a thinking Catholic, I find Richard Rohr's teaching both practical, logical and inspiring. For me, the teaching of St Augustine on the Blessed Trinity is only enhanced by Rohr's contemplative stance.

**Jo de Groot, Sydney NSW ☩**



### – BEQUESTS –

*Have you considered leaving a bequest to NCP in your Will to help us continue working to support priests in Australia?*

*Further information contact the NCP National Office.*

## Preparing for the Plenary Council

*A Church for All: A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond, The Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR), 2021, is available from [www.garrattpublishing.com.au](http://www.garrattpublishing.com.au) RRP is \$14.95*

The Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR), a coalition of 19 renewal groups across Australia and New Zealand, has published 'A Church for All: A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond' – a statement of the challenges facing the Plenary Council and proposed responses to those challenges.

The Plenary Council will commence with a first assembly 3-10 October 2021. The Council was announced by the Australian bishops in 2017 in response to the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and other challenges and failings. 'A Church for All' brings together papers addressing the expectations of many Catholics for the Plenary Council.

The booklet contains addresses to two virtual Convocations of Catholics in 2021 convened by ACCCR to promote the Plenary Council and support its task of renewing the Church in Australia.

The first Convocation of Australian

Catholics, conducted in May 2021, featured Sr Joan Chittister OSB. It attracted many thousands who seek change in our Church. Joan called for lay Catholics to be treated "as equals, as seekers, as spiritual adults". Joan asserted prophetically that Catholicism must grow up, "... beyond the parochial to the global, beyond one system and one tradition, to a broader way of looking at life and its moral, spiritual, ethical frameworks".

The second Convocation, in August, was opened by Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann, the 2021 Senior Australian of the Year, and addressed by other prominent and thoughtful Catholic leaders including Debra Zanella and Robert Fitzgerald with a concluding summary by Emeritus Professor John Warhurst. The speakers focussed on issues related to deepening connections with the traditions of our First Nations peoples, the international context, hearing the voice of the people in the Church, synodality and governance, and inclusion of all the faithful particularly ensuring the equality of women.

ACCCR has also included in the booklet a response to the official Council Agenda, 'The Australian Plenary Council: An Agenda for Reform?'. The response records the widespread dismay and disappointment felt by many Catholics in regard to the Agenda, while offering considered responses to the Agenda questions.

The Coalition sees the Agenda as a set of unnecessarily general, and sometimes superficial, questions. After extensive consultation with its 19 member groups, and informed by public submissions to the Plenary Council process and the Convocations, ACCCR has produced considered responses to address the deficiencies and questions raised in the Agenda.

'A Church for All' calls on Plenary Council members to respond to Pope Francis' hopes for a new era of synodality where we will all walk together, listening to a range of voices. It is the model of Church that Jesus expects from us in this millennium, requiring uncommon courage, a commitment to changes in how we do and are church, and openness to radical conversion, reform and renewal. ☞



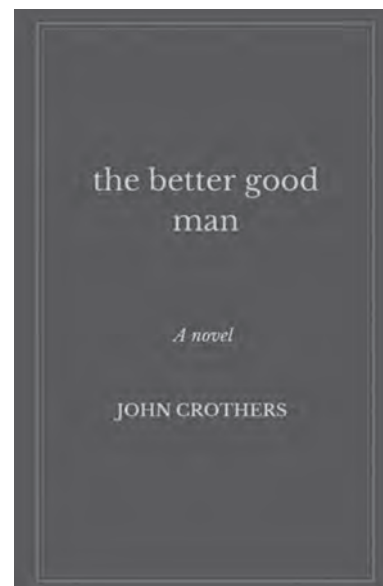
## The good man: the transformation of a priest

*The Better Good Man, John Crothers, 2020. Reviewed by Peter Maher.*

It may not be too strong a statement to say there is a crisis in pastoral care in the priesthood today rather than an ideological, theological or liturgical battle of ideas. The people in the pews, seeking the sacraments, pastoral care or advice and bereaving their loved ones don't actually care about a battle of wits or theological disparity. They seek to make sense of their current crisis, dilemma or reality and their baptismal birthright which includes compassion, sensitivity, inclusion, flexibility and good common sense. John Crothers follows his commentary on the current clericalist church, *The Clergy Club*, with a novel. *The Better Good Man* is fiction but will ring as true as can be to every priest, bishop and layperson. Crothers describes dilemmas, crises and practical pastoral conflicts experienced regularly in parishes everywhere. The challenges of finding a pastoral solution to real people before us somehow sitting alongside the 'letter of the law'.

The fiction is so engrossingly real I simply couldn't put it down. The story describes the challenge of a priest who is 'a good man'. He is diligent, kind and faithful to the rules. It's not long in the story till he realises that the rules approach can leave people sad, depressed, angry and/or excluded. The genius of the author's approach is the resistance to an ideological or judgemental position. Crothers rather opts for an exploration of what might occur in a reflective practitioner.

Crother's style of writing is beautiful. His clarity of thought, the gentle compassionate understanding of the process of conversion and transformation, the closeness to my own story of transformation and struggle with illness, the empathy with the pastoral care challenge and its vulnerability and simple storytelling ability make this a compelling and easy read.



I found it very satisfying reading. Crothers has the ability to compassionately and sensitively touch the pain and beauty of success and failure in pastoral care, holding the reader in a safe space to learn from their own experience. Far from being judgemental, it is an encouragement to

Continued page 36

learn and celebrate growth in ministry beyond age or experience. Pastoral care ministry is a life-long learning journey.

I found reading this book a healing and affirming experience. It invited compassion and understanding which we clearly need in the polarised church today. Can we support each other to be a more compassionate, sensitive and caring church? Crothers' novel makes good reading for those hoping for this. It should

be mandatory reading course for all priests and seminarians.

It might also offer a unique insight into the mind of many priests for the people in the pews who simply can't understand why a priest could be so cruel or incompetent sometimes. There is something structural and systemic that must change for the sake of competent care. It asks the question about training and the clericalist culture in which priests are steeped.

Readers will enjoy this book but beware it's deceptive. It has woven between the heart rending stories a challenge for the church to offer more comprehensive gospel-centred pastoral care. This is no small matter for the pastoral carer or those seeking care. ☺

Available online free:

<https://tinyurl.com/45rrkdzx>



## *The Unholy* – horror, faith and piety on screen

**Peter Malone MSC looks at a 2021 movie, *The Unholy*, which is about an apparition of Mary. It is in the horror genre but also about faith and Catholic piety.**

Most of us probably don't rush off to see horror films. But, since *The Exorcist* in 1973, many have raised Catholic issues and questions, especially about possession, the devil, roles of clergy. Some of them are high profile. Others, like *The Unholy*, less seen. It is an adaptation of a novel by reputable British author, James Herbert, *The Shrine*, transferring its location from England to Massachusetts (with its memories of the witches of Salem and the burnings).

Perhaps horror fans might raise some questions with us. *The Unholy* works at several levels for review and reflection.

First of all, there is the popular movie level, of religious horror film, the intrusion of the devil. There are some shocks and scares, a couple of jumps out of the seat. There are the elements of witchcraft in the prologue, set in 1845 Massachusetts, burning, denunciations of a priest, then ghosts and hauntings. This is a world of superstition. There are references to Satanism and pacts with the devil. There are also superstitions and apparitions of Mary, healings, in the context of the contemporary American Catholic Church. The impact of the horror film does not depend on an audience understanding Marian apparitions, which most audiences would not be familiar with.

Secondly, the film and its plot, the religious focus, will be viewed with hostile response by an audience which is anti-religion, anti-church. The portrayal of the visionary, the apparitions, Marian devotion and piety will probably confirm scepticism, such piety and activities appearing somewhat ludicrous to the sceptic. There is also the role of the clergy, the authority of the Bishop and the role of the hierarchy including an exorcist. But

there can also be some scepticism about the diabolical and satanic interventions in the world. The behaviour can be dismissed as religious mania, a world of the irrational which can be criticised and/or mocked. But these are not the intentions of the filmmakers.

At a third level, *The Unholy* can be considered from an informed Catholic perspective. The author, James Herbert, had a British Catholic upbringing and draws on his understanding of the church. The screenwriter has done his homework, there are quite explicit references and vivid and visual images of the apparition at Lourdes, at Fatima, at Medjugorje. There is also reference to the work of Pope Benedict XIV in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment era and his regulations for the requirements and acknowledgement of miracles: something incurable, instantaneous cure, lasting. So, the film has quite a Catholic atmosphere and a Catholic advisor is mentioned in the final credits (though Mass sequences are not too accurate).

So, this is a drama of the conflict between good and evil, using religious language, and some graphic imagery of Satan, deriving from the art of the Middle Ages. One of the characters remarks that when God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel next door (attributed to Martin Luther).

The film goes back to the burning of witches in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the use of dolls as retainers of superstition, the finding of such a doll at the site where the audience knows a witch was burnt. However, the attention is given to a young 18-year-old deaf-mute girl living in the priest's house with her uncle, the parish priest. She is devoted to Mary and surprises those who see her hasten to the tree, able to speak, say

that Mary, The Lady, has appeared to her, giving her messages, encouraging people to faith. And, what happens, of course, is that crowds come, that Alice is able to heal, that she enthuses the crowd with her devotion.

In fact, the central character is a sceptical journalist who has fabricated stories in the past and lost his reputation. He is a witness to what is going on, gets an agreement that he alone will be the mediator between Alice and the media. In the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, the apparitions certainly get media and, especially, social media attention. The parish priest is supportive of his niece. The Bishop is consulted and brings in an exorcist Monsignor whose task is to disprove the reality of the miracles. However, the Bishop, more than a touch smarmy, gets caught up in the atmosphere, building a shrine and encouraging people to come.

A religious and Catholic sensibility will soon realise that the whole focus is on Mary, with plenty of images and statues of Mary and other saints, but minimally of Jesus, minimal reference to God. It is all Mary-focused, that the faithful should have faith in Mary, with many scenes of dedication to her, including the Bishop. The screenplay is very critical of an obsessive piety and devotion to Mary which does not lead, as the dictum says, to Jesus through Mary.

So, the film is actually a film about faith, misguided faith in sincerely devoted people, emotional faith that is not God-centred. And, there is a dramatic conclusion, some fiery purging, but also the possibility of the truth and peace. *The Unholy* is probably not going to get this kind of attention from audiences or reviewers – but, as indicated, it has themes and treatment which are pervasively Catholic. ☺

## Seeing in different ways

*Alive with Disability*, Khoi Doan Nguyen MSC, 2021, Coventry Press.

Reviewed by Peter Maher.

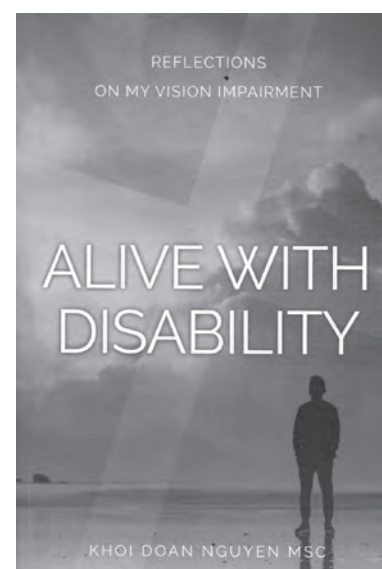
Being diagnosed with a serious illness is always difficult and confusing. People respond to bad health news in many ways depending on how serious the illness or disability, the time of life when it occurs, the disposition of the person, their personal support, family, prospects for recovery and much more.

Having been recently diagnosed with a serious illness myself, I can relate to the main matters of Nguyen's book which explores this experience from a very personal perspective. Khoi Nguyen, facing blindness at an early age, explores this experience in a deceptively simple way. Mixing stories and anecdotes from his life experience with the pain, confusion,

disappointment and struggle of facing blindness, Nguyen manages to inject mature and sophisticated spirituality.

The master stroke of this modest volume of ninety-one pages is the quality of spirituality delivered which seems so accessible to himself and the reader. There are gems of wisdom throughout the book.

Readers undergoing the experience of life changing illness, or assisting those who are, will find connection, encouragement and compassion in this book. A strong plus in this book is it does not burden the reader with analysis or theoretical spirituality. It is experiential wisdom delivered in accessible language and with



an ease that delights the spirit and intellect rather than making you work for it. It is worth a read. ☺



## Pell's plan to overturn Vatican II

*Their Grey and Scarlet Eminences*. How B A Santamaria and George Pell worked to stifle and overturn the reforms of Vatican II, John Braniff, 2021.

Reviewed by John Scanlon.

John Braniff spent just on thirty years as a Marist Brother and was a headmaster at several Marist schools in Australia and a senior administrator in his order before reverting to a lay life in 1995. His working life was spent largely in Victoria and Sydney, and for the past forty years he has been an observer of the career of his "Scarlet Eminence", Cardinal George Pell. Braniff's teaching career also exposed him to pressures from followers of his "Grey Eminence", the late B A Santamaria, who dominated the politico-religious right wing in Australian public life for almost fifty years until his death in 1993.

The sub-title of this book is "How B A Santamaria and George Pell worked to stifle and overturn the reforms of Vatican II." Braniff uses the biographers of the two men (Gerard Henderson on Santamaria and Tess Livingstone on Pell) to show that the relationship between them was a close one and involved promotion of the interests of each other, as well as their shared opposition to the changes that flowed from Vatican II. Santamaria marked Pell as a promising young man before he ever moved out of his home diocese of Ballarat and did his best to facilitate the further advances in Pell's career. Santamaria's attitude to Vatican II was immediately and instinctively hostile,

and he was a strong supporter of the clerics who in later years formed the schismatic Guild of Pius X. Pell did not have the same fetishist attachment to the Tridentine Mass, but he did not like the anti-authoritarian tone of some Council documents and once John Paul II began to demonstrate his dictatorial character, Pell's innate conservatism also became expedient and helped him to gain Papal favour.

While the major theme of the book is the retreat from Vatican II in Australia, largely engineered by Pell's work in Melbourne and Sydney that built on foundations laid by Santamaria, there is a strong second theme involving the sexual abuse crisis in the Australian church and the legal actions against Pell on criminal charges of sexual abuse. In fact, the first chapter of the book was written as a comment on these trials, culminating in Pell's acquittal by the full bench of the High Court, that Braniff circulated to a number of friends. He ruefully admits that his own relief at the finding of the High Court was not shared by most of those to whom he wrote, and in his book, he takes to a wider audience his argument that the choirboy abuse allegations were both physically and psychologically impossible.

Braniff's personal account will resonate with many of his peers who were young



adults at the time of Vatican II and who have been involved in the Australian church since that time. Anyone with an interest in how human relationships work will enjoy the sight of George Pell and his clerical friends of his youth helping each other to climb the greasy pole, founding the Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy in the process. Even those who see George Pell and B A Santamaria as dinosaurs in the evolution of the Australian church could enjoy seeing how these two figures came to loom so large in our history. ☺

Available free online at <https://tinyurl.com/4dc2z2wv>  
For details of purchase of paperback email: [jiffie@ozemail.com.au](mailto:jiffie@ozemail.com.au)

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## I shall be made your music

*Music of Eternity: Meditations for Advent with Evelyn Underhill: The Archbishop of York's Advent Book 2021*, Robyn Wrigley-Carr, 2021, London, UK, SPCK Press. Reviewed by Tom Ryan SM.

*Music of Eternity* is the unifying metaphor for this collection from the later prayers and writings of Evelyn Underhill – Anglican writer and spiritual guide. Compiled skillfully by Australian theologian Robyn Wrigley-Carr, there is a brief prologue, four chapters and an epilogue, each followed by discussion questions and a closing prayer – all designed for daily use over a month.

In Part 1, we welcome God's coming, eyes set on the mystery of God. We are called to ponder (and listen to) the 'mighty symphony' of God and of eternal love overflowing into creation.

In Part 2 the focus is Advent: we await God's coming, now in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. The Incarnation reminds us how we straddle two worlds – the visible and its daily activities and the invisible with the Spirit's tranquil workings. Awaiting the Christ-child reminds us to be attuned to detecting the signs of God at work.

In Part 3 we 'gaze on' Christ as 'Emmanuel' (God with us). With Evelyn, we accompany Jesus from his birth through his temptations, public ministry, to his

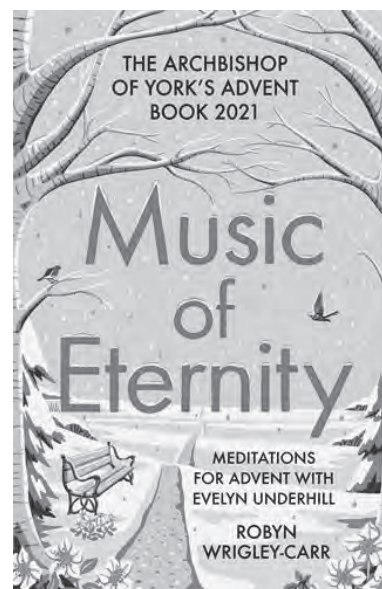
transfiguration, the Emmaus encounter and, finally, his glorification.

Part 4 deals with 'holy living', our response to all God has done – in adoration, the Eucharist, sacrifice, humility, love, forgiveness and peace.

Wrigley-Carr's epilogue returns to the opening metaphor of Eternity and the mighty Trinitarian symphony. By participating in God's Eternal song, we may echo John Donne's words (used in Evelyn's retreats): 'I shall be made Your music – as I come'.

The text, enhanced by Dr. Wrigley-Carr's insightful commentaries, reflects Evelyn's voice – engaging, enlightening and encouraging while being firmly anchored in the Scriptures. The selections reveal Evelyn's practical wisdom as a retreat guide and preacher. We also detect her artistic sensibility in her use of images from nature or rural or domestic life.

Within the Advent framework we reflect, with Evelyn, on God's loving plan of salvation and redemption – highlighting the richness of the season in the process. Underhill might also have a particular appeal to a modern sensibility.



Her spiritual vision is underpinned by awe and adoration allied with God's active presence in creation. Again, Underhill appeals to God as Creative Spirit (or to the Holy Spirit) as quietly at work from the deepest recesses of each human being suggesting an inclusive perspective.

This book draws the reader to pause, ponder and pray, which it does well. For that, we are indebted to Evelyn Underhill and Robyn Wrigley-Carr.

We have been offered a thoughtful companion for quiet-time in Advent or any time of the year. ☺

## The Official Directory – of the – Catholic Church in Australia 2021/2022

The Directory, a 1 July publication, gives the rich picture of the Australian Church, listing all ACBC Committees and Secretariats; Diocesan information – parishes, schools and organisations; as well as Religious Orders and Catholic Organisations.

This edition is Sally's 24<sup>th</sup> and Chris' 18<sup>th</sup>!

In his *Word of Welcome* which will be published at the beginning of the new edition, and on the Directory website, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference says, ***"I thank Sally Heath and Christine Moore of the National Council of Priests office for their work in compiling the Directory with a care that goes beyond efficiency. It is a real service to information and communication within the Church and, to that extent, a gift to all of us as we make our way through affliction to a more peaceful time."***

The Directory – (print 900 pages) and the companion online edition are essential resources for all working under the Catholic Church umbrella – priests, pastoral associates, administration staff, principals, school librarians, CEOs etc.

Fact: 398 parishes have not purchased a copy of the Directory since 1998!

For the complete picture of the Australian Church and to keep connected... fill out the order form inside the back cover and return it to the National Office.

## Joseph Cardijn and Vatican II

*The Leaven in the Council: Joseph Cardijn and the Jocist Network at Vatican II*, Stefan Robert Gigacz, published online and available free at: <http://theleaven.com.au/>  
Reviewed By Peter Maher.

Stefan Gigacz has spent a lifetime in the Jocist movements and has dedicated much research time to the life and works of Joseph Cardijn and the way they have influenced the theory and practice of catholic social praxis over the last 100 years. This book is the latest benefit of that research which is the result of his doctoral thesis on the little-known influence of Cardijn's insights on the teachings of Vatican II on lay formation and ministry.

Cardijn began his work that led to the famous 'see, judge and act' methodology when working with young workers. His insight was that Christian praxis begins with the experience of Christians in their daily work. As the existential reality is explored in the light of gospel values, a course of action for justice emerges. This is a radical departure from the accepted doctrine at the time of following a predetermined teaching or ethic which is imposed over the lived experience and context.

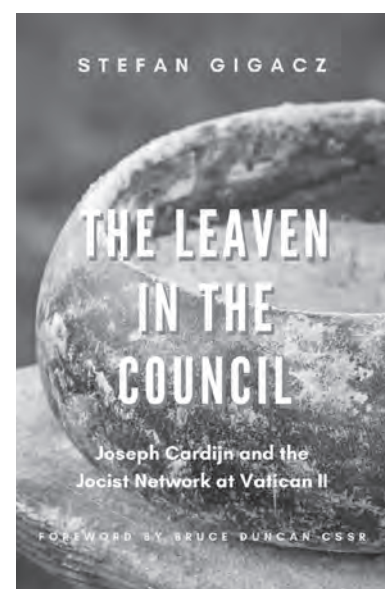
Gigacz became interested in the influence this insight had on the lay ministry

movement in the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He found as he researched the documents and writings of Cardijn's life that he had a bigger influence than is usually recognised.

As Bruce Duncan notes in the forward of the book, Gigacz's research highlights Cardijn's influence through his many bishops, priests, theologians and lay YCW associates. Cardijn worked with key Vatican II figures such as Chenu, de Lubac, Congar, Helda Camara and many others.

Interestingly Gigacz charts the influence of Cardijn on major Catholic Social teaching encyclicals such as *Rerum Novarum* and *Mater et Magistra*. Cardijn thinking and writing had widespread influence on Catholic Action in many forms and the way in which Catholics might work ecumenically, multi-faith and in the wider culture. These ideas, but more importantly methodology for action, has influenced the way the Catholic church has embraced dialogue through Vatican II and beyond.

Many of these themes are explored as Pope



Francis explores the limits of dialogue and praxis in the emerging practice of 'synodality'. Cardijn's influence is still very important this book argues.

Duncan summarises the importance of this book in the forward: [It] is a work of immense, painstaking scholarship, highlighting the continued and even growing importance of Cardijn's contribution to the Church in how to serve the world in its hopes and fears, and to foster the engagement of lay people in their Christian mission of social transformation. ☺



## Aboriginal cosmography

*Periphyseon on the Division of Nature*, John the Scot, Myra L Uhlfelder (translator), Jean A Potter (Introduction), 2011, Wipf and Stock Publishers. Reviewed by Dan O'Donovan, Broome WA. Johannes Scotus (c. 800-c. 877), is the most significant Irish intellectual of the early monastic period. This work is arranged in five books. *Natura* is the name for the universal, the totality of all things, containing in itself being and non-being. There is a connection with Aboriginal understanding of nature.

In *The Swag*, Autumn 2021, Richard Francis' article, *Evolving a New Heaven and a New Earth*, speaks to us of a new cosmology to our understanding of our faith and the way we have imagined it in the past. It reflects Periphyseon on the Division of Nature in many ways. Inviting the question, could this be a call to 'metanoia' for us?

To quote from the splendid Introduction of the book by Jean A Potter: The major Greek sources for Eriugena, (John the Scot), are Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Denys, and Maximus the Confessor; and those in the Latin West are Augustine and Ambrose. But they do not reach a common doctrine. Despite their Biblical and Platonic

heritage, eastern and western Christian thought had, by the time of Eriugena, diverged steadily until each had acquired those distinctive characteristics which are evident even today. It was Eriugena, more than any other medieval thinker, who sought to reunite them.

The translation, by Myra Uhlfelder, is itself a work of art, a delight to read and ponder. The Latin text followed is Floss's edition, printed in vol, 122 of *Patrologia Latina* (Migne).

This review ties in with the series of exchanges I had with Martin Wilson MSC in *Nelen Yubu* (published by the Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit) around my 'conjecture'

that 'Aboriginal cosmography has no outside, and never has had, not even the suspicion of one.' In the recognition that the word 'conjecture' means the barely informed guess of an ignoramus.

As for Christian religion, Indigenous thought needs the shock-experience of the biblical Burning Bush revelation (Exodus 3). In a later issue of *Nelen Yubu*, Martin observed that readers had found the series interesting, and asked that the subject not be dropped. The more abstruse our language becomes however, the more likely we are to stray from the simple gospel of Jesus, 'good news for the poor'. ☺

*"We are priests best when we are priests together."*

# Returned to God

## BOB BARBER SM

12/03/1949 – 13/02/2021

✠ Much loved Marist, Bob left us in February this year. Newcastle-born and educated, Bob ordained in 1978 served the Church here in Australia and for some years on mission in Cameroon. His ministry included teaching at Marist Colleges, Woodlawn in Lismore and the former St Pauls, Bellambi, as well as parish ministry, most recently at St Patrick's Church Hill. Bob served as Provincial of the Australian Marist Fathers Province, completing his term at the end of 2019. At the time of his death, Bob was beginning a new chaplaincy role at Marist Brothers College Lismore and St John's College Woodlawn.

Generous, determined and always unassuming, with a touch of the whimsical larrikin about him, Bob endeared himself to people of all ages. Up until his last days he was visiting confreres in ill health and making pastoral connections with many, always without fuss and with good humour.

Bob's funeral Mass was celebrated in the chapel of St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, as was fitting given his great affection for the Marist Brothers and his many associations with them.

May he rest in peace.

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## CORMAC NAGLE OFM

04/12/1932 – 04/05/2021



Brisbane-born Cormac Nagle completed his secondary education at the Franciscan juniorate (Robertson NSW) before joining the 1950 novitiate. After ordination in 1957, he taught Year Six boys at Padua College, Kedron. His appointment to Rome in 1961 to gain a doctorate in Canon Law with graduate studies in Moral Theology was the beginning of a lifelong service to the Franciscan Order, the Church and people in general.

Upon return to Australia, Cormac taught Moral Theology to Franciscan seminarians, but Canon Law was never far from his practice. He was a founding member of the Canon Law Society in Australia (1967) and the last active surviving founder. His understanding and practice of Church Law were marked by clarity and precision. His well-considered canonical opinions and implementation of the law were noted for being sensible and helpful, pastoral and compassionate, practical and human.

From 1971, Cormac's teaching at Yarra Theological Union, Melbourne, paralleled a long association with Catholic hospitals, notably Mercy Hospital for Women as its ethicist from 1995. Catholic Health Australia awarded him in 2015 the Maria Cunningham Lifetime Contribution Award, recognising decades of teaching and advocacy for a holistic approach to hospital treatment particularly for women and families in need. One line in his acceptance speech sums up his character: "The most rewarding aspect of my work is being able to help people". He was still working for Mercy Health on the day he died suddenly, aged 88 years.

Cormac contributed articles to journals regarding canon law, moral theology and medical ethics, and was awarded Associate Professor status by the University of Divinity in 2013 for his theological and pastoral education of laity including seminarians.

For the Franciscan friars, Cormac was a highly respected formator and leader. Twenty-five years over three separate appointments saw him guiding new brothers along the Franciscan path: a humble and kind mentor who taught by example. He was a popular choice when twice elected as Provincial Minister (1977-1983, 1983-1985). The second term was curtailed by his election to the Order's General Council in Rome, with specific responsibility for Asia/Oceania (1985-1991). From 1995 to 2002, he was the Pontifical commissioner for the Confraternity of Christ the Priest.

Cormac's memorable blend of personal humility, religious commitment, academic excellence, pastoral sensitivity and loyal friendship was celebrated at his funeral in St Paschal Chapel, Box Hill, Melbourne, after which he was buried in the adjacent Franciscan cemetery.

---

## NICHOLAS KERR

26/03/1940 – 27/07/2021



Nick was a leader as a lay person and as a Deacon in the fields of communication, pastoral ministry and support for the African communities and as the current Chairman of the National Association of Deacons.

He was an award-winning journalist who wrote and edited religious publications including *The Southern Cross* and the *Uniting Church's New Times* for many years. Pope John Paul II knighted him (Knight of St Sylvester) for his work in religious journalism and he was also presented the Gutenberg Award for excellence by the Australasian Religious Press Association.

He will be grieved by all who knew and loved him, but our hearts and prayers go first to Eveleen and their children Christian and Mariot.

May he rest in peace.

---

**THOMAS (TOM) JOSEPH O'CONNELL****06/03/1933 – 28/02/2021**

Tom is the last of a long line of beautiful Irish priests who left their homeland and made Australia home, enriching the Diocese of Sale and Gippsland with their priestly goodness, compassion and love.

He made his way to Australia in 1956 commencing ministry at Yallourn, then in the Parishes of Sale, Bairnsdale, Morwell, Leongatha, Neerim South, Wonthaggi, Koo Wee Rup, Cowwarr, Dalyston, Omeo, Fish Creek and Trafalgar and as Director of Propagation of the Faith.

Tom will be remembered for his extrovert personality and priestly goodness. In both the joy and desert places of his ministry he had wonderful 'angel messengers' who walked with him and he with them.

As a brother priest he brought friendship, delights, stories and songs to the presbyterate of Sale. On taking up his appointment to Trafalgar, in 1980 he went visiting one of the parishioners. Just as he approached the washing line where the baby nappies were being dried, the wire snapped. The nappies fell, the young mother struggling to collect her washing. Suddenly beside her were his shiny black shoes and his enormous smile, a warm voice saying – "My dear you look like you could do with a blessing." This was the start of a beautiful friendship.

Tom, was a legend at the Trafalgar Golf Club. He was often heard to say after a few practice swings measuring his stance, eyeing the ball, "Now stay still you little blighter, I'm going to hit you." Tom took on all the new opportunities to exercise his priestly gifts throughout his 19 appointments. He loved every minute, naming Gippsland 'the Garden of Australia'.

Tom is survived by his siblings, Fr Maurice and Sheila, who live overseas and two nieces, Katie and Una and nephew Aiden in Australia.



*May the road rise up to meet you  
May the wind be always at your back  
May the sun shine warm upon your face  
The rains fall soft upon your fields  
And until we meet again  
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.*



---

**PAUL BERNARD O'NEILL****02/05/1952 – 28/05/2021**

Paul Bernard O'Neill was born in Waratah, NSW, son of Esther O'Neill (nee Coulson) and James O'Neill and brother to Sharyn, brother-in-law to William, loving uncle to Simone and Brendan, and caring and loving great-uncle to their children.

Paul attended the seminaries of St Columba's, Springwood and St Patrick's, Manly.

He was ordained priest by Bishop Leo Clarke on 9 October 1976 at Our Lady of Victories, Shortland.

Paul served in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle as Assistant Priest to the communities of Cessnock, Mayfield and Raymond Terrace.

Paul served as Parish Priest to the communities of Raymond Terrace, Rutherford, Stockton, Taree and Wingham, and the Chisholm Pastoral Region parishes of East Maitland, Maitland, Morpeth, Lochinvar, Beresfield and Rutherford. Paul was also a Moderator of the Chisholm Pastoral Region. Paul held Diocesan appointments of Diocesan Director of Vocations, Chairman of Diocesan Vocations Board, Diocesan Director of Australian Catholic Relief, Chaplain of San Clemente High School, Member of the Bishop's Council of Priests, Diocesan Consultor, Trustee, and Dean of Myall and Hunter Deaneries.

Paul was a deeply spiritual person. This was especially manifest in the way he accepted the diagnosis of his illness and how he prepared to meet his maker. Two of Paul's strengths were his gracious, positive manner and his ongoing commitment to his priestly formation.

He was a great supporter of NCP and a regular participant at NCP Conventions over the past forty years. Paul died on Friday 28 May 2021, aged 69, as the Parish Priest of East Maitland, Maitland, Morpeth, Lochinvar, Beresfield and Rutherford parishes. His Funeral Mass was celebrated at St Joseph's Church, East Maitland on 7 June 2021.

Rest now in peace dear Paul.

*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May the souls of the faithful departed,  
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.*

Continued page 42

**PETER LIU**

**09/06/1924 – 09/05/2021**



Peter was born in the village of Kongliuba, Renxian County, Hebe Province, China, the third in a family of seven siblings.

He was talented and intelligent and received a good education.

At the age of nine, Peter went to the Temple of God in Julu County, Shun de Diocese where he was praised by priests and teachers for his talent and the fact he could memorise as he read.

In 1938 at age 14 he was admitted to the local Minor Seminary then to Gunsheng Middle School in Beijing in 1944. In April he was admitted to the St Vincent Seminary in Genoa, Italy and was ordained there on 29 June 1955. The same year he attended the Pontifical Urbanian University and obtained a degree in Canon Law.

Unable to return to China, Peter arrived in Australia and was incardinated into the Diocese of Armidale where he faithfully served in the parishes of Tenterfield, Narrabri, Gunnedah, Quirindi and Glen Innes.

Peter retired to Nazareth House, Tamworth and died after a short illness.

May he rest in peace.

**Returned to God, but no obit received. We hold them in prayer.**

† Geoffrey Allen, Diocese of Wollongong.....	24/06/2021
† Daniel Carroll, Archdiocese of Brisbane.....	05/08/2021
† Idris E Cassidy, Diocese of Wagga Wagga.....	10/04/2021
† Kevin Condon, Dominicans.....	14/06/2021
† William Cunningham MSC, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.....	18/06/2021
† Gregory Ferguson SM, Marists.....	23/06/2021
† Alexander Levey, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.....	12/06/2021
† Brian Maher OAM, Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn.....	24/06/2021
† Colin Mason, Archdiocese of Sydney.....	13/07/2021
† Michael McCarthy, Archdiocese of Sydney.....	07/04/2021
† Bernard McGrane MSC, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.....	22/07/2021
† Larry Nemer SVD, Divine Word Missionaries.....	09/06/2021
† John Vere O'Reilly, Archdiocese of Perth.....	30/06/2021
† Anthony Simari, Archdiocese of Sydney.....	01/07/2021
† Robert Stickland, Ukrainian Eparchy.....	05/07/2021
† John H Ware, Diocese of Sandhurst.....	09/07/2021

Please email obits to Sally at: [national.office@ncp.catholic.org.au](mailto:national.office@ncp.catholic.org.au)

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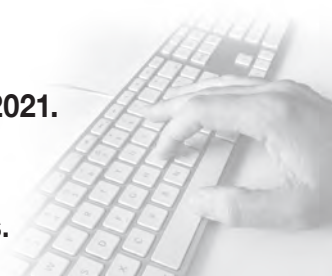
## The Swag Summer Edition

Closing date for letters and articles is **Monday, 25 October 2021.**

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## The National Council of Priests of Australia (NCP)

The National Council of Priests (NCP) is an Australia-wide organisation of Catholic Clergy (Bishops, Priests & Deacons) and Associate Members (Lay, Religious & Seminarians) who join together to support each other in their ministry in the Church.

Founded in 1970 in the Spirit of Vatican II, the NCP is committed to the fraternity and further education of clergy and to representing clergy in the public forum.

### The Objects and Purposes of the Council

- To promote a spirit of fraternity among members and other clerics of the Catholic Church in Australia.
- To devise ways and means for members and others to better serve the people to whom they are called to minister.
- To provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and to promote the spirit of ecumenism and to establish ecumenical links.
- To effect a liaison with other national bodies of religious women and men and with national bodies of laity.
- To maintain contact with similar associations.
- To be a consultative body to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

### *Prayer to St Joseph*

Lord God, Sprit of Creation,  
You have formed and fashioned our earth, our being and our living.  
At the dawn of Creation you breathed in us the spirit of justice.  
You are our dreamtime.  
You are our hope.  
You are our strength.  
Bless us, and bless those who share the riches of this earth.  
From the seed to the sapling, to the great forests of the world.  
The timbers give us shelter, the timbers give us warmth.  
We call upon St Joseph, the carpenter, craftsman of the timber.  
We dedicate ourselves to serve others as he did.  
A common Jewish tekton – carpenter – man of wood.  
St Joseph be our guiding hand, our model of compassion.  
A man of dreams.  
A man of hope.  
A man of strength.  
As hammer against nail, inspire us to be strong.  
As timber against timber inspire us to be tall and proud.  
As craftsman among humanity, inspire us to dream.  
Let us welcome the cross of timber,  
the sign of our faith in Jesus, earthly son of St Joseph.

**Michael Carmody (10/08/1983 – 22/12/2007)**

*Written by Michael when he was a student at St Joseph's College, Geelong  
and reprinted with the permission of Michael's family.*