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EVALUATION REPORT

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIONS IN 'WOMAN & MAN: THE BISHOPS RESPOND' SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY STATEMENT 2000

Trudy Dantis Stephen Reid Katherine Jelavic Carole Gan

NCPR
National Centre for Pastoral Research

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this publication contains names of and information about deceased persons.



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ABBREVIATIONS

Below is a list of abbreviations used in this report or related documents:

The Catholic Directory	*The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia*
ACBC	Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, also referred to as the 'Conference'
ACCER	Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations
ACLRI	The Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes
ACRATH	Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans
ACU	Australian Catholic University
AMPJP	Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons
BCA	Bishops Committee for Aborigines
BCCM	Bishops Commission for Church Ministry
BCELM	Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry
BCL	Bishops Commission for Liturgy
CACW	Commission for Australian Catholic Women
CACW2006	Council for Australian Catholic Women
CELM	Council for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRA	Christian Research Association
DPC	Diocesan Pastoral Council
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
IVF	In-Vitro Fertilisation
MPJP	Ministerial Public Juridic Person
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee; the name of the annual celebration of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
NATSICC	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council
NCE	National Centre for Evangelisation
NCEC	National Catholic Education Commission
NCPR	National Centre for Pastoral Research
OPW	Office for Participation of Women
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan
SJSS2000	*Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000*
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency

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FOREWORD



The Bishop's Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry of the Australian Bishop's Conference has been given responsibility for the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia Decree Four "Witnessing to the equal dignity of Women and Men" where Article 3 reads: ***"That the Plenary Council commits the Church in Australia to implementing more fully the undertakings made by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in their Social Justice Statement, Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond (2000), in response to the research report Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus (1999)".***

In 1996, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference launched a major research initiative focusing on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia. I remember well the consultation process taking the leaders of the research initiative all around Australia, including here in Geraldton, Western Australia. The participation and interest of many people in the listening sessions suggested both women and men were very engaged and keen to ensure women's participation in the life and leadership of the Catholic Church in Australia.

This research initiative took three years to complete, with the final publication in 1999 of the report, "Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus".

The Australian Bishops Conference's response was their Social Justice Sunday Statement for the year 2000. In the Statement, there were nine decisions the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference committed to implementing at the national level. Thirty-one proposals were recommended to be selected from and implemented within each diocese and eparchy around Australia.

Remembering back 30 years to the original research, a lot of listening and discernment was undertaken around Australia where no one was excluded, like the journey towards the Fifth Plenary Council in 2018 - 2022. However, it is well known that the journey of life and ideas does not happen in a straight line but can move in many directions with many variations. This reality is reflected in the survey results of this project evaluating the implementation of the *Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000* (*SJSS2000)* recommendations. Many situations or changes in circumstances in the Church and society have impacted the implementation of the *SJSS2000* and they require serious listening to, to understand why many decisions and proposals have not been fully implemented. My hope is this evaluation report will assist the Catholic Church at the national and local levels in renewing their commitment to implementing more fully the *SJSS2000* following the hope of the Fifth Plenary Council.

During the past 30 years, there have been major changes in the demographics of our Catholic communities. Our communities are enriched by the arrival of people from many cultures and traditions

who can have different understandings about how we live out our faith in the Church and the wider community. At the same time, we are all much closer to each other through the dramatic growth of information technology where views and understandings are acquired from other places.

Another major change that has occurred in the last 30 years has been the growth of ministerial public juridic persons, primarily continuing the ministry and work of religious orders in areas of education, social work, aged care and health.

As a nation and as a church, we continue on the journey with First Nations Peoples by listening to and engaging with the oldest living culture on Earth with respect.

I encourage everyone to read the Evaluation Report with a listening and discerning ear as happened 30 years ago in communion with and participation in the local church around Australia. I am very thankful for the dedication and professionalism of the National Centre for Pastoral Research with Dr Trudy Dantis and the members of the Committee commissioned by the Bishop's Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and to undertake this research project.

Sr Sonya Wagner SGS, a member of the 1996 Research Initiative Team, in 2009 said**: "Let us savour the wisdom of Habakkuk's prophetic message for all times: 'The vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come' (**Hab 2: 2-4)".



Bishop Michael Morrissey
Bishop of Geraldton
Delegate for Women, Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry
12 February 2026

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Katherine Jelavic is a Research Assistant at the National Centre for Pastoral Research. Katherine reviewed the literature on women's participation in the ecclesial structure of the Church, conducted interviews, analysed qualitative data and contributed to the writing of this report. She also supported the project through numerous administrative tasks, including liaising with respondents, applying for ethics approval and editing and assembling documents.

Ms Carole Gan

Carole Gan was a Research Assistant at the National Centre for Pastoral Research at the time of the project. She contributed to data checking and analysis, as well as to the writing and editing of this report. Carole also provided support with various other tasks to help bring the report to completion.

The National Centre for Pastoral Research

The National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) is an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference whose mission is to assist the Catholic Church in Australia at all levels in understanding the cultural, social and personal dimensions of religion in the changing contemporary context. The work of the NCPR is overseen by the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research which, in turn, reports to the Permanent Committee of the Conference. The NCPR was established in 1996 and was previously located in Melbourne, before moving to Canberra in 2018. Previous research studies conducted by the NCPR include *Thriving (& Surviving) in Ministry: A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia: Health and Wellbeing* (2025), *Synod of Bishops: Australian Synthesis* (2022), *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying: Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1* (2019), *Understanding Religious Vocations in Australia Today* (2018), *Our Work Matters: Catholic Church Employers and Employees in Australia* (2017) and *Called to Fullness of Life and Love: National Report, Australian Catholic Bishops' Youth Survey* (2017).

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Mr Malcolm Hart, the Director of the National Centre for Evangelisation (NCE), who emphasised this project's importance and provided invaluable support and encouragement at every stage.

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Thank you,

Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid, Katherine Jelavic and Carole Gan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was commissioned by the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry (BCELM) and undertaken by the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR). Its purpose was to evaluate the implementation of actions outlined in the *Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 (SJSS2000)*—the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's (ACBC) response to *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* (1999). The study sought to:

- Assess progress on the nine Decisions that the ACBC committed to implementing at the national level.
- Determine the extent to which dioceses and eparchies adopted the 31 Proposals recommended for local action.
- Identify gaps and critical areas requiring attention.
- Explore new opportunities for women's participation in the life and mission of the Church.

The evaluation used a two-stage mixed-methods design to assess progress on the actions outlined in the *Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000*. Responses were received from 20 of Australia's 28 geographical dioceses, along with contributions from congregations and ministerial public juridic persons (MPJPs), proving a substantial national evidence base while also reflecting the diversity of local Church contexts.

Stage 1 examined the implementation of the nine national Decisions through surveys and analysis of documentary evidence from ACBC agencies, their archives and other relevant sources. Data was collected between May and August 2024. In total, 646 documents—including minutes, reports and publications—were gathered to assess progress on these commitments.

Stage 2 examined the adoption of the 31 Proposals recommended for dioceses and eparchies, drawing on survey submissions, supporting documentation and semi-structured interviews. An online survey conducted from March to May 2025 received 74 submissions and 244 supporting documents. To supplement this data, 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted between July and September 2025 with key personnel from across the Church.

A Research Reference Group guided the project, and the Christian Research Association Human Research Ethics Committee granted ethics approval. The study was undertaken as a formative evaluation, focusing on both implementation and emerging outcomes across diverse Church contexts.

Key Findings

Overall, this review revealed that while significant progress had been made in implementing some of the commitments outlined in the *SJSS2000*, many actions remained incomplete or were unevenly applied.

Of the nine Decisions, only three were fully implemented. The remaining six had some fully implemented components and others that had only progressed partially or not at all. Significant achievements included the establishment of the Commission for Australian Catholic Women (CACW), guidelines for lay preaching, pastoral resources for marriage and family life, and initiatives promoting inclusive liturgy and integrating First Nations cultural elements into liturgical celebrations. However, gaps remain in areas such as gender balance on councils, collaborative ministry, supervision for lay ministers and pastoral care guidelines for those struggling with male-only ordination.

The evaluation found uneven adoption and variable implementation of the *SJSS2000* Proposals across dioceses over the past 25 years. A small number of Proposals were widely adopted, most notably those aimed at achieving a better balance of women and men in councils and leadership roles and those providing faith education opportunities for women in rural communities. While uptake of these Proposals was broad, the strength of implementation ranged from weak to strong and was shaped by local leadership commitment, resources and priorities.

A larger number of Proposals were adopted by several dioceses, but implementation was typically uneven and inconsistent. These included initiatives to strengthen gender and role balance on Diocesan Pastoral Councils; encourage women to act as Church spokespersons and guest speakers; appoint and train women for marriage tribunals; foster collaborative ministry and leadership formation; promote contemporary Catholic female role models; advance cultural education for clergy and inclusivity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in decision-making; expand pastoral and professional services for women; and oppose the unjust treatment of women in social and economic life. In many instances, initiatives depended on particular individuals or short-term programs rather than being embedded as ongoing diocesan practice.

Several Proposals showed more limited uptake, having been adopted by some dioceses only and generally implemented weakly or inconsistently. These included developing and promoting Parish Pastoral Associate roles and ensuring fair employment contracts; requesting theological institutions to engage with the Woman and Man report; involving women in pre-marriage programs; developing a database of Catholic women and their skills; prioritising women's participation through financial resourcing; supporting attitudinal change regarding gender equality; fostering the reunion of families affected by the Stolen Generations; increasing employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; and supporting solo mothers through greater inclusion in Church life.

Two areas displayed distinctive patterns. The role of Parish Pastoral Associate was adopted by several dioceses in the early years following the *SJSS2000* but declined significantly over time, reflecting changing pastoral priorities, financial pressures and structural shifts. Initiatives encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to share their stories and charisms were adopted nationally and by some dioceses, though implementation remained uneven and ad hoc. One area—the appointment of lay women and men as marriage celebrants under canon law—was not adopted, due to ongoing structural and canonical constraints.

Positive Drivers of Implementation

Several key factors supported the implementation of many actions. Increased leadership opportunities for women and initiatives led by women themselves created pathways for participation and visibility. Practical support and resourcing by bishops—such as funding programs, endorsing councils and promoting leadership formation—signalled strong commitment. The influence of women religious and MPJPs was particularly significant, as they acted as role models and advocates for inclusion. A broader attitudinal shift within the Church toward co-responsibility and synodality also encouraged collaborative approaches, while positive experiences of partnership between clergy and laity reinforced the value of shared leadership. These drivers collectively fostered an environment where progress in implementing the actions, though uneven, was possible and often sustained by strong local networks and episcopal leadership.

Barriers to Implementing Decisions and Proposals

Despite notable achievements, several systemic and cultural barriers limited the full implementation of the *SJSS2000's* commitments. Structural changes within the ACBC—particularly the major restructures in 2006 and 2016—shifted priorities and responsibilities, resulting in a loss of continuity and institutional memory. This led to partial implementation of some actions and uncertainty about what remained outstanding. Ambiguous language in the original Decisions and Proposals compounded these challenges; phrases such as "a better balance" lacked measurable criteria, making progress difficult to assess and left room for minimal compliance. Cultural and attitudinal barriers, including persistent clericalism and gendered expectations, further restricted women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles. In many cases, lay involvement remained optional and dependent on local leadership priorities, with resistance to a synodal style of inclusive governance evident in some contexts. Financial constraints, competing pastoral priorities and declining volunteerism also hindered efforts to sustain initiatives such as Pastoral Associate roles and structured vocational pathways for women.

Across the evaluation, sustained progress was found to depend less on the passage of time than on intentional leadership, adequate resourcing and clear accountability structures. Where actions were embedded in ongoing processes and supported by monitoring and shared responsibility, more enduring change was evident. These gaps underscore the need for clear accountability, measurable standards and intentional strategies to overcome entrenched attitudes and systemic limitations**.**

Personal Influence and Current Impacts

Many interview participants reported that the implementation of the *SJSS2000* had positively influenced their participation in the Church, particularly through initiatives that provided female role models, funded education and created leadership opportunities. Programs such as the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship were cited as having a lasting impact.

For some, engagement with the *SJSS2000* in its early years led to meaningful change, though progress often stalled when initial momentum faded. Others felt the document continued to serve as a framework for action, offering confidence and purpose in promoting inclusion. However, not all participants experienced its influence; some attributed their involvement to personal initiative or broader societal changes, while others expressed frustration at the lack of cultural shift toward valuing skills over gender. The presence of visible female leaders and formation pathways was also found to shape the expectations and participation among younger generations, even where broader structural change remained limited.

Actions Taken Beyond the *SJSS2000*

The research uncovered numerous initiatives taken by dioceses, religious congregations and Church organisations over the past 25 years to extend the outcomes of the *SJSS2000* beyond the original commitments. These included programs such as *Called and Gifted* and the Areté Centre for ministry development, diocesan pastoral plans emphasising inclusion and expanded opportunities for lay leadership. Women's visibility was promoted through national networks, mentoring programs, awards like the Magdalene Award and innovative platforms such as the *Australian Women Preach* podcast. Scholarships for theological studies, leadership formation and digital engagement strategies further strengthened participation. These actions demonstrated creativity and adaptability, responding to emerging needs and fostering co-responsibility in the Church's mission.

Addressing Challenges and Planning for the Future

Participants identified synodal practices as essential for strengthening lay involvement and overcoming barriers. Recommendations included mandating diocesan and parish pastoral councils, expanding formation for collaborative ministry and promoting inclusive language in liturgy and pastoral documents. Suggestions also addressed new pastoral priorities, such as supporting families affected by domestic violence, assisting couples experiencing infertility and enhancing marriage preparation programs. Broader cultural change was seen as critical—challenging stereotypes, addressing clericalism and recognising diverse forms of engagement. Some participants called for admitting women to priestly ministry or the diaconate, while others emphasised mentoring programs and intentional planning to ensure women's gifts are fully utilised. Across all responses, strong episcopal leadership was viewed as vital for meaningful and lasting change.

The release of the Synod on Synodality's Final Report of Study Group 5 on women's participation, published in March 2026, provides an important contemporary reference point for this evaluation. The Study Group 5 Report emphasises that efforts to strengthen women's participation must be attentive to local ecclesial contexts and structures, rather than applied uniformly. This emphasis closely aligns with the findings of the present evaluation, which demonstrates that progress in implementing the *SJSS2000* has been shaped by local leadership, resources and context. Read together, the two documents highlight the importance of local discernment, synodal practice and intentional leadership in supporting the full and co-responsible participation of lay women and men in the life of the Church**.**

Limitations

This study faced five constraints that affected the comprehensiveness of its findings. First, the scope of the data was limited to documents and responses submitted during the research process; additional relevant material may exist but was not available for inclusion. Second, the ambiguous wording of some Decisions and Proposals—such as phrases like "a better balance"—made it difficult to measure progress or confirm completion. Thirdly, responses were not obtained from all dioceses, congregations and MPJPs, limiting the ability to present a complete national picture. Fourth, the scope of the project did not extend to the systematic collection of grassroots voices, and these perspectives were therefore not included in the evaluation. Finally, structural changes at both the ACBC and diocesan levels—including staff turnover, access to historical records and the absence of embedded reporting requirements in the *SJSS2000*—meant that a complete and fully accurate historical account of implementation was not possible.

Despite these limitations, the research offers valuable insights into areas of progress and highlights ongoing challenges that require attention. The findings underscore the need for a renewed commitment, structured accountability and adequate resourcing to ensure that the equal dignity of women and men is not only affirmed but fully realised in practice. As the Church moves forward, these insights provide a practical roadmap for implementing the decrees of the Plenary Council and actions from the Synod on Synodality to respond to emerging priorities through dialogue, innovation and intentional action.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

This project was commissioned by the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry (BCELM). The National Centre for Evangelisation (NCE) invited the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) to undertake the research and evaluate the implementation of the actions identified in the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) *Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 (SJSS2000*).

The *SJSS2000* was the bishops' formal response to the earlier national study, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* (henceforth, *Woman and Man)*, published in 1999. In the text of the *SJSS's* Decisions and Proposals, the *Woman and Man* study is referred to as "the Report".

Woman and Man was one of the outcomes of a significant joint research initiative undertaken by the ACBC through the Bishops Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (ACLRI) to examine the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia. Women's participation was studied by addressing four questions:

1. What were the ways in which women participated in the Church?
2. What assistance and support was provided to enable their participation?
3. What barriers existed?
4. How could their participation be increased?[1]

The *Woman and Man* publication included participants' suggestions to address the issues raised in the study. Rather than the Research Management Group offering formal recommendations to the bishops at the time of publication, the ACBC was left to "consider and evaluate" the suggestions and recommendations received from thousands of respondents.[2]

The ACBC's first decision was to approve the immediate publication of the *Woman and Man* report.[3] A list of actions they decided to undertake in response to the research was announced in the *SJSS2000.*[4] These actions took the form of nine Decisions that the ACBC committed to enacting at the national level and 31 Proposals that diocesan bishops and eparchs could choose to implement at the local level.[5] *Appendices 1* and *2* contain a complete list of the Decisions and Proposals. When launching the *SJSS2000*, Archbishop Francis Carroll observed that the statement's general tone committed "the bishops and the wider Church to long-term dialogue and endeavour".[6]

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[1] Marie Macdonald et al., *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus: Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia* (HarperCollinsReligious, 1999), xii.
[2] Macdonald et al., *Woman and Man*, xvi.
[3] Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (hereafter ACBC), "Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond. Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000", in *Building Bridges: Social Justice Statements from Australia's Catholic Bishops 1988 to 2013* (Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 2014), 171.
[4] ACBC, "SJSS2000", 172-6.
[5] ACBC, "SJSS2000", 172.
[6] Francis Carroll, "Social Justice Launch Speech, 13 September 2000", quoted in Kimberly Davis and Brian Lucas, "The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church - Ten Years On", *Australasian Catholic Record* 86, no. 2 (2009): 151.

Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation sought to determine the extent to which the commitments outlined in the Decisions and Proposals of the *SJSS2000* were enacted over the past 25 years and to identify areas requiring renewed attention. The study assessed the practical measures undertaken to enhance women's participation in the Church in Australia by addressing the following key questions:

1. What progress has been made in implementing the nine Decisions listed?
2. Where do the gaps lie? What are the critical areas that still need to be attended to?
3. How have dioceses received the 31 Proposals? Which of these have been addressed? Which ones are yet to be implemented?
4. Are there any new areas for the participation of women that the research has uncovered?

A Research Reference Group was established to advise and guide the project.

The Christian Research Association (CRA) Human Research Ethics Committee granted ethics approval for Stage 1 on 16 May 2024 (*Appendix 3*) and for Stage 2 on 28 October 2024 (*Appendix 4*).

Audience and Key Stakeholders

The primary audience for this evaluation is the ACBC and the BCELM. The findings are intended to assist these bodies in understanding the extent to which the commitments made in the *SJSS2000* have been enacted over the past 25 years, and to support ongoing discernment, planning and decision-making at the national level.

The evaluation is also relevant to dioceses and eparchies, whose leaders and pastoral bodies were responsible for considering and, where appropriate, adopting the 31 Proposals recommended for local action. Further stakeholders include national advisory bodies, Catholic education authorities, CRA and religious institutes and ministerial public juridic persons (MPJPs), whose work directly engages with women's participation in the life and mission of the Church.

Another audience includes those involved in pastoral ministry, formation, governance and research, who may draw on the findings to inform practice, strengthen collaborative approaches and contribute to ongoing conversations about women's participation in a synodal Church.

About this Report

This report brings together the findings from both stages of the evaluation and provides a comprehensive assessment of progress since the promulgation of the *SJSS2000.* It begins with an executive summary, followed by background information and an outline of the evaluation approach employed in the study. The next section reviews the demographic changes in the composition of Catholic women in the Australian population since the release of *SJSS2000*. It also provides an overview

of their contributions in parishes and Church organisations, identifies key themes that have emerged in national and international discussions about increasing women's participation in the Catholic Church and highlights recent initiatives aimed at increasing women's involvement—particularly in leadership and decision-making roles in the Church.

The later chapters of this report provide a detailed assessment of the implementation of each of the nine Decisions and 31 Proposals in *SJSS2000*. Each Decision is presented with two components: an **Evaluation**, summarising the extent of implementation, and **Details of Progress Made**, which describe developments since the publication of *SJSS2000*. For ease of review, some Decisions (e.g., 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) have been divided into subcomponents. The Proposals, grouped by theme, are assessed in a similar format, with an analysis of findings for each proposal.

It is important to note that, rather than auditing every diocesan response, this report evaluates the overall adoption of the *SJSS2000* Proposals. Because dioceses were never formally required to document their initial positions or subsequent actions nor to maintain historical records and only 65 per cent responded to Stage 2, the evaluation focuses on demonstrated evidence rather than a complete national audit.

To promote confidentiality, diocesan names and interviewee details have been anonymised. Where possible, footnoted references are provided. However, much of the information was gathered through submissions—particularly for the Proposals—and referencing would breach ethical requirements for anonymity.

Finally, some content overlap is inevitable, as participants addressed similar issues across surveys and interviews. The report concludes with a discussion of overall findings and reflections from five experts, offering diverse perspectives on the evaluation's outcomes.

Change in Naming Conventions

Since 2000, several ACBC bodies have undergone restructures or name changes. Table 1 provides a guide to the terms used in the original *SJSS2000* and their 2024 equivalents to help readers interpret references throughout this report.

Table 1: *SJSS2000* Conference Bodies and 2024 Equivalents

SJSS2000[7]	Decision	2024 Equivalent[8]
Organisation	1	Organisation (no change)
Advisory Body This included: - Commission - Council	1 1, 2, 8, 9	Council Advisory Board Reference Group National Catholic Education Commission (The 2006 name change from *Commission* to *Council* did not apply to the National Catholic Education Commission)
Bishops Committee	3, 4, 5, 7	Bishops Commission
Central Commission		Permanent Committee

Please refer to *Appendix 15* for a comprehensive list of the ACBC bodies in 2000, 2006, 2020 and 2024.

[7] ACBC, *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia 2001* (National Council of Priests of Australia Inc., 2001), 23-8.
[8] ACBC, *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia 2024-2025* (St Pauls Publications, 2024), 32-7.

EVALUATION APPROACH

This chapter outlines the approach used to evaluate the implementation and adoption of the Decisions and Proposals in the *SJSS2000*. It describes the evaluation framework, design, data sources, methods and analytical processes used across both stages of the project

Evaluation Framework

The evaluation of the SJSS2000 Decisions and Proposals was guided by a formative evaluation framework,[9] designed to generate insights that could strengthen current practice and inform future action. A formative evaluation approach was selected because the *SJSS2000* actions were long-term, complex and implemented across a diverse and decentralised Church landscape. This approach is well-suited to examining commitments that have unfolded over 25 years and across autonomous dioceses, eparchies, MPJPs and other bodies. Unlike a summative evaluation, which focuses on final outcomes, a formative evaluation pays attention to both historical developments and emerging opportunities by identifying areas of progress, gaps in implementation and priorities for renewal. It emphasises learning, continuous development and the practical application of findings that strengthen women's participation, inclusion and leadership in the Church. Within this formative approach, the evaluation employed two complementary types of evaluation:

- **Implementation Evaluation**

This component examined the extent to which the nine Decisions and 31 Proposals of the *SJSS2000* were enacted by the ACBC, dioceses, eparchies, MPJPs, religious institutes and other Church bodies over the past 25 years. The evaluation focused on documented actions, processes undertaken and structural changes made to give effect to the commitments outlined in the *SJSS2000*. For each Decision and Proposal, implementation was assessed along a set of consistent criteria to enable a comparative assessment across time and contexts. [10]

- **Outcome Evaluation**

While the evaluation was not designed to measure long-term social or cultural outcomes, it examined the proximal outcomes of implementation. These included changes in representation, participation, leadership opportunities, formation pathways and ministry practices for women across the Church. The outcome evaluation component, therefore, focused on the observable impacts arising from implementation efforts, including the extent to which actions contributed to greater inclusion, visibility and co-responsibility of women in ecclesial structures. [11]

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[9] As defined by Peter H. Rossi et al., *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach,* 7th ed. (Sage Publications, 2004), 34-36.
[10] Implementation Evaluation is defined by Rossi et al., *Evaluation,* 175-77.
[11] For more information about Outcome Evaluation see Rossi et al., *Evaluation,* 204-232, in particular, the "Summary" on 231.

Guiding Principles

Across both components, the evaluation was guided by the following principles:

- **Evidence-informed judgment:** Findings were based on documentary evidence, survey responses, interview insights and historical records.
- **Context sensitivity**: Recognising that dioceses and eparchies vary significantly in history, capacity, geography, and resources, implementation was assessed with attention to contextual factors.
- **Respect for diversity:** The evaluation acknowledged the diversity of women's experiences—including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, religious women, lay women and women working within and across diverse Church organisations.
- **Ethical responsibility:** All processes were approved by the Christian Research Association Human Research Ethics Committee and conducted in accordance with requirements for confidentiality, informed consent and cultural sensitivity**.**
- **Researcher positionality:** The research team acknowledges that all evaluation processes are shaped by the positionality of the researchers involved. To minimise the influence of personal or institutional perspectives, decisions about coding, interpretation and categorisation were made collaboratively and guided by documentation, evidence and methodological transparency. This reflexive approach strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

By bringing the formative, implementation and outcome dimensions together, the evaluation framework supports both accountability for past commitments and the discernment needed to guide future priorities in promoting the full and co-responsible participation of women in the life and mission of the Church.

Evaluation Questions

Building on the formative evaluation framework and the dual focus on implementation and outcome evaluation, this study was guided by a set of core evaluation questions designed to assess both the actions taken since the release of the SJSS2000 and their observable effects. These questions provided the structure for analysing national, diocesan and organisational responses and for identifying areas where renewed focus is required.

The evaluation addressed the following key questions:

1. **To what extent have the nine Decisions committed to by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) been implemented at the national level?**

This question examined the actions undertaken by the ACBC, its commissions, agencies, advisory bodies and related structures to fulfil the commitments articulated in the SJSS2000. Each Decision was assessed using the agreed implementation criteria to determine the degree to which it had been enacted.

2. **Where do the gaps lie, and what are the critical areas that still require attention?**

This question sought to identify areas of partial, inconsistent or absent implementation, and to describe the structural, cultural or resource-related barriers that continue to limit progress. It also provided a basis for identifying priorities for future action.

3. **To what extent have dioceses and eparchies adopted the 31 Proposals recommended for local action?**

This question explored the breadth and nature of diocesan and eparchial responses to the Proposals, recognising the diversity of local contexts and capacities. It considered both the extent of adoption and the types of initiatives undertaken.

4. **Which Proposals have been implemented, partially implemented or not implemented?**

To complement the broader assessment of adoption, this question focused on the status of each Proposal individually. It enabled the evaluation to map patterns of implementation across the country and highlight areas where engagement has been strong or limited.

5. **What new opportunities for women's participation in the life and mission of the Church have emerged since the release of the *SJSS2000*?**

This question acknowledged that the landscape of women's participation has evolved significantly over 25 years. It captured developments not envisaged in the original *SJSS2000*, including new ministries, leadership pathways, formation initiatives and structural reforms.

6. **What observable outcomes—intended or unintended—have arisen from the implementation of the Decisions and Proposals?**

Although long-term cultural change was outside the scope of this review, the evaluation examined the immediate and intermediate outcomes associated with implementation. These included increased participation, shifts in leadership representation, new formation pathways and improvements in pastoral and organisational practice.

Linking Evaluation Questions to Methods

Each evaluation question was addressed through a clearly aligned set of data sources and analytical methods. Questions concerning the extent of implementation of the nine Decisions and the adoption of the 31 Proposals were primarily informed by documentary analysis and structured survey responses. Questions exploring experiences, barriers, enablers and emerging opportunities were addressed through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Quantitative elements of the evaluation, such as participation patterns and implementation levels, were examined using descriptive statistics drawn from diocesan submissions and archival data. This alignment ensured that every evaluation question was investigated using the most appropriate and robust evidence base.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation design effectively employed a two-stage mixed-methods approach that aligned with the study's formative purpose and the dual focus on implementation and outcome evaluation. Together, these two stages provided a comprehensive view of national implementation and local adoption over the 25 years since the publication of the *SJSS2000*.

Stage 1 examined the implementation of the nine Decisions that were the responsibility of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and its related national bodies. Data collection centred on a structured online survey and direct requests for information from Executive Secretaries, agency heads and other ACBC staff responsible for implementing the Decisions.

Stage 2 explored the extent to which dioceses, eparchies, religious institutes and MPJPs adopted the 31 Proposals recommended for local action. This stage employed a broader mixed-methods strategy to recognise the diversity of contexts. First, an online survey, mainly addressed to dioceses and eparchies, invited them to submit information to determine the extent to which they had implemented the optional Proposals. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to provide broader information, particularly in cases where documentary evidence was incomplete or where additional insights were needed to address gaps in Stage 2 data.

Ethics approval for both stages was granted by the Christian Research Association Human Research Ethics Committee. Quality assurance processes included the use of standardised survey instruments, consistent coding procedures and inter-researcher reliability checks across both NVivo and Excel analyses. These procedures supported the validity and consistency of the findings and ensured that the evaluation design remained both methodologically sound and aligned with the study's formative intent.

Implementation Criteria

Because the *SJSS2000* contained two different types of actions—Decisions, which were mandatory commitments of the ACBC, and Proposals, which were optional recommendations for dioceses, eparchies, religious institutes and MPJPs—each required its own evaluation criteria. The criteria below ensured that the assessment was consistent, transparent and sensitive to the varied contexts in which implementation occurred.

Criteria for Evaluating the Decisions

The nine Decisions were national-level actions that required coordinated and documented implementation by the ACBC and its associated bodies. Each Decision was assessed using three standard categories:

- **Fully Implemented** - All components of the Decision were acted upon at the national level, with clear and sufficient evidence demonstrating completion. Actions were consistent with the intent of the Decision and where relevant, were sustained beyond the initial period of implementation.
- **Partially Implemented** - Some aspects of the Decision were acted upon, but implementation

was incomplete, inconsistent over time, or limited in scope. Evidence showed progress in certain areas, while other required elements remained unaddressed.

- **Not Implemented** - No verifiable evidence of action could be identified, or actions did not meet the intent of the Decision**.**

Criteria for Evaluating the Proposals

The 31 Proposals were optional recommendations intended for local adoption in highly diverse contexts. Because dioceses and other entities varied significantly in their size, resources, priorities, and governance structures, the evaluation used two separate dimensions—Scope of Adoption and Strength of Implementation—to reflect both how widely a Proposal had been adopted and how deeply it had been implemented where it had been taken up. These two dimensions enabled a more accurate interpretation of the varied and uneven patterns of implementation evident across Australia.

A. Scope of Adoption *(How widely the Proposal had been taken up across responding dioceses)*

- **Widely Adopted** – Evidence showed that 60 per cent or more of responding dioceses had undertaken actions aligned with the Proposal. Adoption was geographically broad and evident among multiple respondent groups, indicating that the Proposal had achieved widespread uptake**.**
- **Adopted by Several Dioceses** – Evidence showed that 30 to 59 per cent of responding dioceses had undertaken actions aligned with the Proposal. Adoption was evident across several dioceses, demonstrating meaningful uptake, though it was not yet widespread.
- **Adopted by Some Dioceses** – Evidence showed that one to 29 per cent of responding dioceses had undertaken actions aligned with the Proposal. Adoption was limited in scale and reach, often reflecting early, isolated, or uneven initiatives rather than broad take-up.
- **Not Adopted** – Evidence showed that no responding dioceses had undertaken actions aligned with the Proposal.

B. Strength of Implementation *(How deeply and consistently the Proposal had been implemented where it was taken up)*

- **Strong Implementation -** Actions had been well-developed, intentional and clearly aligned with the Proposal's aims. Evidence showed embedded practice, structured programs or long-term initiatives.
- **Moderate Implementation -** Actions had addressed the Proposal but were limited in duration, depth or consistency. Initiatives may have been isolated, short-term or dependent on particular individuals or circumstances**.**
- **Weak Implementation -** Only small-scale, preliminary or one-off actions were evident. These reflected awareness of the Proposal but did not result in sustained or structured practice.

Data Sources

The evaluation drew upon a broad and varied evidence base, reflecting the complex history and multi-level nature of the *SJSS2000* implementation.

1. **Documentary evidence** formed the backbone of the study. This included ACBC Plenary minutes, committee and commission records, agency reports, internal correspondence, policy documents, strategic and pastoral plans, guidelines and liturgical and canonical documents. Additional archival material was provided by the ACBC Records and Governance Officer, offering insight into developments that occurred in the years immediately following the release of the *SJSS2000*. In Stage 2, dioceses, religious congregations and MPJPs contributed 244 supporting documents, including parish-level examples, Reconciliation Action Plans, charters, reports, formation resources, event flyers and other materials illustrating local practice. These documents provided rich detail about the actions undertaken, the contexts in which they emerged, and the challenges faced at different points in time.

2. **Survey responses** constituted another major source of data. In Stage 1, the survey captured information from ACBC staff responsible for Decisions, offering structured explanations of actions taken and difficulties encountered. In Stage 2, 74 written submissions were received from dioceses, eparchies, religious congregations and MPJPs. These submissions often included detailed descriptions of initiatives, changes made over time, reflections on leadership and culture and examples of ongoing work aligned with the Proposals. Many respondents provided context-specific explanations that clarified how actions were shaped by local constraints and opportunities.

3. **Semi-structured interviews** with 24 participants from 16 dioceses and eparchies provided a further significant source of data. These interviews enabled the research team to explore issues not visible in documentation—such as attitudinal change, local leadership dynamics, reasons for discontinuity and the impact of historical or structural factors. Interviewees included lay leaders, religious women, clergy, diocesan directors, chancellors and pastoral ministers, offering perspectives from a broad cross-section of ecclesial roles.

4. **Supplementary information**—such as materials from diocesan websites, national Catholic agency resources and previous research conducted by the National Centre for Pastoral Research—was also incorporated to contextualise developments and provide additional insight into emerging national initiatives and pastoral priorities.

Handling conflicting or incomplete evidence

Where evidence from different sources could not be reconciled or was incomplete, the evaluation team applied a principle of “best available evidence”, prioritising contemporaneous documentation when available and corroborating survey or interview responses through triangulation. Instances of unresolved discrepancies were noted in the internal records and were treated conservatively in the final interpretation of the findings.

Data Collection and Participant Recruitment

Data collection occurred across two stages to reflect the division between national and local responsibilities in the *SJSS2000*.

Stage 1: Data collection for Stage 1 was conducted between 16 May and 30 August 2024. Survey invitations were issued to Executive Secretaries, ACBC agency heads and other staff responsible for implementing the Decisions. A copy of the invitation is available in *Appendix 5*. Respondents provided information either via a Qualtrics survey or through direct email submissions. The ACBC Records and Governance Officer supported this stage by supplying historical documents, including meeting minutes, emails [where appropriate to be shared], committee reports and relevant publications. Additional documents were retrieved from the ACBC website and through contributions from a former Council member.

In total, 646 documents were catalogued for Stage 1, forming a substantial evidence base for evaluating national implementation. These included Conference minutes, reports and a variety of publications and notes from survey respondents.

Stage 2: Data collection in Stage 2 was conducted between March and September 2025 and involved two key components. The first was an online survey distributed to dioceses, eparchies, Catholic Religious Australia and the AMPJP. The survey invited respondents to provide information by theme or by individual Proposal, supported by documentary evidence. An invitation letter was sent to representatives of these bodies, outlining the rationale and purpose of the research and inviting them to nominate contacts who could share information about their experiences in implementing the proposals. A copy of the invitation is available as *Appendix 6*.

Nominated contacts were invited by email to share their experiences through the online survey. Copies of the invitation and the participant information sheet are available as *Appendix 7* and *Appendix 8*. A training workshop helped participants navigate the survey portal and understand the types of evidence that could be submitted. The 31 Proposals were categorised into five themes. A list of the groups and themes is available as *Appendix 9.* The decision to group the Proposals thematically was made to enhance clarity and streamline data collection for respondents. Although these themes were not part of the original *SJSS2000*, they reflected contemporary language and organisational structures, making it easier for dioceses and other entities to provide comprehensive and non-duplicative evidence. At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to nominate a person who could provide further information about their experience in a follow-up interview.

Thirteen dioceses responded to the invitation. Information was also received from four religious congregations and three AMPJP-associated groups. A total of 74 submissions were received, along with 244 supporting documents, including newspaper articles, event flyers, topic timelines and more complex submissions. These submissions included detailed thematic or proposal-based responses, reports with extensive appendices, organisational charters, diocesan plans, a Reconciliation Action Plan and a summary of interviews conducted for the project. One diocese supplied its 2001 diocesan response to the *SJSS2000.*

The second component of Stage 2 consisted of semi-structured interviews with 24 selected participants. The individuals were chosen based on their capacity to provide specific insights on behalf of their

diocese or community, or to share valuable experiences that could address any gaps in the research. Invitations to participate in the project were emailed to the nominated individuals. A copy of the invitation is available as *Appendix 10*. Participants were provided with an Information Sheet (*Appendix 11*) and a Support Services Sheet (*Appendix 12*) and were asked to complete a Consent Form (*Appendix 13*) before the interview. Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams between 23 July 2025 and 5 September 2025, guided by an interview schedule that explored various topics, allowing for spontaneous questions and the development of responses. A copy of the questionnaire is available as *Appendix 14*.

Of the 24 interviewees, 20 were female and four were male. Eighteen were lay participants, three were religious sisters and three were clergy, including one bishop. Most participants held, or had held, leadership roles within their dioceses or organisations at both local and national levels, bringing significant expertise and experience across various areas of Church life. Their roles included diocesan chancellors, diocesan leaders, directors of offices, agencies, committees or commissions, members of the curia, liturgists, parish leaders and academics.

The interviewees were located across 16 dioceses or archdioceses, including two Eastern Rite eparchies. While not all spoke on behalf of their diocese, their contributions reflected a broad range of perspectives. Eight dioceses were primarily urban, four were regional and two were remote, thus offering insights from diverse geographical contexts.

Strong ethical procedures guided both stages. All participants provided informed consent, identifying details were anonymised and culturally sensitive processes were observed, particularly in areas relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These procedures supported a robust and respectful data collection process across the diverse contexts of the Church in Australia. Based on the combined responses from the survey and interviews, researchers obtained information in Stage 2 from 20 of the 28 geographical dioceses.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis involved systematic and integrated qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure rigour, consistency and depth across both stages of the evaluation.

Documentary evidence from Stages 1 and 2 was analysed using structured documentary analysis techniques. This involved reviewing, classifying and interpreting documents to identify actions taken, timeframes, policy changes, structural developments and examples of local practice.

Quantitative data from the surveys were analysed in Microsoft Excel, where descriptive statistics were used to assess adoption levels, participation rates and implementation patterns. The data was reviewed for internal consistency and, where possible, cross-checked against archival records or publicly available sources. Missing or incomplete data were documented, and no assumptions were made to fill gaps. This ensured that all quantitative findings accurately reflected the scope and quality of the evidence provided.

Qualitative analysis formed a central component of the study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, with interviewers noting impressions, recurring themes and points of interest during discussions. Interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses were uploaded into NVivo for detailed thematic analysis. Coding involved both descriptive coding—organising information by topic or Proposal—and *in vivo* coding, in which themes emerged from participants' own language and expressions. The coding used an agreed coding framework developed collaboratively by the research team. Inter-researcher reliability checks were conducted in both NVivo and Excel to maintain consistency in coding and interpretation across the research team. Differences in interpretation were discussed and resolved through consensus, strengthening the reliability of the thematic findings.

Together, these analytical processes enabled the evaluation to draw coherent findings from a large and diverse dataset and ensured that the results were evidence-informed, contextually grounded and aligned with the study's formative purpose.

Limitations

The evaluation was subject to three key limitations that shaped the scope and depth of the findings. These limitations do not diminish the value of the evidence presented but clarify the constraints within which the study was undertaken and help to contextualise the conclusions drawn.

1. **Limited Scope of Data:**

The scope of available data was limited to the documentary evidence and responses submitted during the two stages of data collection. While a substantial body of material was gathered—including ACBC archives, diocesan submissions, parish-level examples and historical documents—it is likely that additional relevant material exists but was either unknown to respondents, not retained over time, or simply not provided. This was especially true of older records from the early 2000s, which were often incomplete or no longer accessible. As dioceses were never required to document their initial responses to the *SJSS2000*, gaps in historical information were expected.

2. **Ambiguity in Language**

The wording of several Decisions and Proposals posed challenges for evaluation. Terms such as "a better balance" or general references to consultation lacked measurable criteria, making it difficult to determine the extent to which actions were completed or whether outcomes were consistent with the original intent. In cases where resources or guidelines were produced, limited information about their distribution or use also complicated the assessment. This ambiguity required the evaluation team to rely on reasonable interpretation and triangulation across multiple data sources.

3. **Limited Responses across Australia**

Not all dioceses, religious congregations or MPJPs participated in the study. Stage 2 received responses from 20 of Australia's 28 geographical dioceses, alongside contributions from congregations and MPJPs. Nevertheless, the responses that were received represent a broad cross-section of geographical, cultural and organisational contexts across the Church in Australia. However, the absence of responses

from several dioceses means the evaluation cannot present a fully comprehensive national picture. As a result, the evaluation highlights patterns and tendencies rather than making definitive claims about every diocese. Furthermore, the diversity of diocesan structures, capacities and local priorities meant that the depth and type of evidence varied considerably across respondents.

4. **Absence of Grassroots Voices**

While the evaluation captured diocesan-level perspectives and the experiences of individuals in leadership and ministry roles, it did not systematically include the voices of parishioners or women who engage with the Church primarily at the grassroots level. This limitation reflects the scope of the project rather than a lack of interest in these perspectives, which are likely to provide valuable insights for future research.

5. **Structural and Organisational Constraints**

The evaluation was further shaped by structural constraints, including staff turnover in the ACBC and individual dioceses, changes in diocesan leadership and varying availability of historical records following multiple ACBC restructures. Many dioceses were not required to retain detailed documentation from the early 2000s, resulting in gaps that limited the reconstruction of complete implementation histories. These factors should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation provides a strong and meaningful account of the actions undertaken since the release of the *SJSS2000*. The breadth of evidence gathered—combined with interviews, documentary analysis and multiple forms of triangulation—enabled the identification of clear patterns, recurring themes and critical areas requiring continued attention. The findings therefore offer both a reliable assessment of past commitments and an informed basis for future planning.

WOMEN IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Population Changes

In the 24 years since the publication of *SJSS2000*, there have been several demographic shifts in the makeup of Catholic women in the Australian population and their participation in the life and mission of the Church. In 2021, Catholic women comprised 21 per cent of the total female population in Australia.[12] One significant change within this group over the last 20 years has been the increase in the level of education (see Table 2). In 2001, 13 per cent of Catholic females and just over 11 per cent of Catholic males aged 15 and over had a university degree. In 2021, the difference between the percentage of Catholic females with a university degree (27%) had grown in comparison to Catholic males (21%). A similar change between 2001 and 2021 also occurred in the educational qualifications of the overall Australian population.

The rise in educational levels has also had an impact on the workforce. In 2021, almost 60 per cent of Catholic women were employed or seeking work, compared with just over 52 per cent in 2001. Of those who were employed and recorded an occupation in 2021, almost 39 per cent were managers or professionals, compared to 32 per cent in 2006.

Table 2: Selected Census Characteristics of Catholic Females and Males by Census Year, 2001-2021

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
% Catholics aged 15+ with bachelor's degree or higher					
Females	13.0	16.2	19.4	23.1	27.4
Males	11.3	13.6	15.5	17.7	21.2
All Catholics	12.2	15.0	17.6	20.6	24.6
% Catholics aged 15+ employed or seeking work					
Females	52.3	56.7	58.5	60.1	59.7
Males	62.8	69.4	69.6	68.9	66.5
All Catholics	57.3	62.7	63.7	64.2	62.8
% Catholic Managers and Professionals * (% of those recording an occupation)					
Females	NA	32.0	33.7	35.4	38.7
Males	NA	32.2	32.4	32.8	35.4
All Catholics	NA	32.1	33.0	34.1	37.1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Censuses of Population and Housing, 2001-2021.
** 'Managers and professionals' includes, for example, marketing and production managers, education and health service managers, retail managers, school principals, school teachers and IT professionals.*
NA: No directly comparable data is available due to a change in occupational classification.

[12] All demographic data comes from Australian Censuses: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Censuses of Population and Housing, 2001-2021.

Roles within Parishes and Church Organisations

Women continue to play a significant role in parish ministries and in Mass attendance. According to the 2021 National Count of Attendance, around 56 per cent of all attenders were female.[13] Data from the 2016 National Church Life Survey[14] revealed that women held 65 per cent of all leadership and ministry roles in parishes.[15] These roles included lectors, special ministers of the Eucharist, leaders of prayer, youth or discussion groups and members of Parish Councils.[16] Overall, more women (42%) than men (38%) held a leadership role in a parish.[17] More recent data from Catholic dioceses revealed that significant proportions of women held roles as Chairs (55%) and members of Pastoral Councils (45%), as well as members of safeguarding councils (49%).[18]

The contribution of women is not limited to voluntary roles in parishes. Within the Catholic Church in 2017, there were over 3,000 organisations that employed more than 220,000 people, with 77 per cent of these roles occupied by women.[19] This is significant when compared to the broader Australian society at that time, where females made up 46 per cent of the workforce.[20]

Across all the sectors, the presence of women is prominently seen in education, health and aged care, but dioceses and parishes remain places where women also contribute significantly (78%).[21] Within all Church organisations, women contribute not only through clerical and administrative roles but also as professionals, with 61 per cent of all professional roles held by women.[22]

A 2020 analysis of data from the ACBC's Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) returns from 2016 to 2020 showed that the proportion of men and women in managerial roles at the national level varied over those five years. Overall, a greater proportion of women than men were employed in the organisation.[23] In 2020, the ACBC employed more women than men in managerial and non-managerial roles where managerial roles included heads of businesses or CEOs, Office Executives or General Managers, while professionals or clerical/administrative workers filled non-managerial roles.[24]

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[13] Trudy Dantis et al., *The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2021: A Report Based on the National Count of Attendance and the National Catholic Census Project* (ACBC, 2024), 14.
[14] Data on Catholic parishes from the 2021 National Church Life Survey is not available.
[15] Ruth Powell, "NCLS S3 Attender Dataset for Catholic Parishes", dataset, NCLS Research, 2016.
[16] Powell, "Data for NCLS S3 Attender Dataset for Catholic Parishes".
[17] Trudy Dantis and Stephen Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey 2019: A Report to the Implementation Advisory Group* (ACBC, 2019), 7-8, 13.
[18] Kerryn Boland et al., *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia* (ACBC, 2020), 171, 176.
[19] Robert Dixon et al., *Our Work Matters: Catholic Church Employers and Employees in Australia* (ACBC, 2017), v.
[20] Dixon et al., *Our Work Matters*, 6.
[21] Dixon et al., *Our Work Matters*, 26.
[22] Dixon et al., *Our Work Matters*, 35.
[23] National Centre for Pastoral Research (hereafter NCPR), "Women in the ACBC – Gender Equality Report", *Pastoral Research Online* 51 (2020): 5, https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Pastoral-Research-Online-Issue-51-December-2020.pdf.
[24] NCPR, "Women in the ACBC", 5.

Discussions on Women's Participation

The discussion about increasing women's participation in the Catholic Church has continued in many forums, both in Australia and globally. At the time of its publication, Archbishop Francis Carroll believed the *SJSS2000* committed the Church to ongoing endeavour and dialogue. A ten-year review of the publication discussed the initiatives identified following the original research, including the establishment of the ACBC's Commission for Australian Catholic Women (CACW) with its dedicated secretariat and the subsequent changes after the ACBC's 2006 restructure together with an overview of the Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship.[25] At that time, it had become evident that existing Church practices required a review to accommodate the increased participation of women.[26] The CACW was tasked with implementing the *SJSS2000* actions to engage women more fully in the life of the Church. However, in reflecting on the *SJSS2000* nearly 20 years later, Geraldine Hawkes, the inaugural chair of the CACW, recalled that "the Commission frequently encountered attitudes and behaviours which hindered or prevented progress".[27] This experience appears at odds with the actions taken to establish the CACW quickly and support its work.

On the twentieth anniversary of the *Woman and Man* study, ideas about expanding women's participation and barriers to participation were identified in the commemorative publication *Still Listening to the Spirit, Woman and Man Twenty Years Later.* Areas identified included using existing provisions in the Code of Canon Law[28] and increasing women's participation in liturgy[29] and interfaith dialogue.[30] Some factors that were seen to require more attention included challenging narrow perceptions of women's roles solely as mothers and nurturers,[31] addressing the disproportionately greater number of women experiencing economic disadvantage[32] and domestic violence,[33] acknowledging the contributions of religious women,[34] and treating women complainants of sexual abuse with compassion, dignity and justice.[35]

The role and participation of women took a prominent place in the deliberations preceding the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia and the Bishops' Synod on Synodality. An ongoing theme in these discussions at various phases of the Plenary Council and the Synod was a call for the Church to be more

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[25] Kimberly Davis and Brian Lucas, "The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church - Ten Years On", *Australasian Catholic Record* 86, no. 2 (2009): 145.
[26] Davis and Lucas, "Ten Years On", 14-17.
[27] Geraldine Hawkes, "Looking Back, Looking Forward - Love or Fear?" in Sandie Cornish and Andrea Dean, eds., *Still Listening to the Spirit. Woman and Man Twenty Years Later* (Office for Social Justice of the ACBC, 2019), 12.
[28] Elizabeth Delaney, "The Discipline with the Bad Reputation: Women and Canon Law", in Cornish and Dean, *Still Listening to the Spirit*, 60-63.
[29] Clare V. Johnson, "Women's Modes of Liturgical Participation", in Cornish and Dean, *Still Listening to the Spirit*, 64-71.
[30] Cheryl Camp, "To Rise Above a Whisper: Catholic Women in Interfaith Networks in Australia", in Cornish and Dean, *Still Listening to the Spirit*, 89-98.
[31] Pauline Marriott, "Perceptions of Motherhood", in Cornish and Dean, *Still Listening to the Spirit*, 111.
[32] Gemma Tulud Cruz, "An Option for Poor Women: Women and the Economy", in Cornish and Dean, *Still Listening to the Spirit*, 101-10.
[33] Liz MacKinlay, "Domestic Violence: Moving from Silence to Inclusion and Dialogue in the Australian Catholic Church", in Cornish and Dean, *Still Listening to the Spirit*, 125-31.
[34] Maree Marsh, "Women and the Sexual Abuse Crisis", in Cornish and Dean, *Still Listening to the Spirit*, 135.
[35] Marsh, "Women", 132-42.

inclusive of women and the need for Church structures and procedures to change to accommodate women and other marginalised groups.[36] Specific items included the use of inclusive language in liturgies[37] and Church documents,[38] greater participation of women in the Church's existing roles, including leadership, governance, decision-making processes and ministries,[39] and the creation of new opportunities or roles.[40] Women's participation in the diaconate[41] and lay preaching[42] were also considered.

In *Amoris Laetitia,* Pope Francis addressed wide-ranging topics, including both the "recognition of women's rights and their participation in public life"[43] and the complexities surrounding the accompaniment and care of separated and divorced Catholics.[44] In Australia, the topics of female ordination and attitudes to divorced and remarried Catholics, previously discussed in *Woman and Man,* arose during early consultations for both the Plenary Council and the Synod.[45] However, while they were not specific agenda items for either the Plenary Council's or Synod's formal sessions, they were discussed within the broader conversations about women's participation in the Church. At the Plenary Council, divorced and remarried Catholics were included in statements concerning the marginalised.[46] The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Assembly of the Synod included this matter under the discussion on "love and truth".[47]

Throughout these conversations, what is apparent is that there is no universal agreement about the extent of women's increased participation in the Church. For instance, many participants in the Plenary

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[36] Trudy Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying: Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue* (ACBC, 2019), IX, 48, 56, 77, 84, 94, 110, 111, 122; Trudy Dantis et al., *Synod of Bishops: Australian Synthesis* (ACBC, 2022), 6, 7, 8, 10, 11.

[37] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 5: Communion in Grace: Sacrament to the World* (2022), Paragraph 14c and Article 2, https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/FINAL-Decree-5-Communion-in-Grace-Sacrament-to-the-World.pdf; XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *A Synodal Church in Mission: First Session, Synthesis Report* (Vatican, October 2023), Chapter 9(q).

[38] XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Synthesis Report,* Chapter 9(q).

[39] Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying*, 77, 83, 91; XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Synthesis Report*, Chapter 9(i).

[40] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 4: Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men* (2022), Article 2, https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FINAL-Decree-4-Witnessing-to-the-Equal-Dignity-of-Women-and-Men.pdf; XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Synthesis Report*, Chapter 9(i).

[41] Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying*, 73; Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 4*, Article 4; XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Synthesis Report*, Chapter 9(n).

[42] Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying*, 84; Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 5*, Article 2.

[43] Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Amoris Laetitia* (2016), 43, https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

[44] Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 221-43.

[45] Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying*, IX, 77; Dantis et al., *Australian Synthesis*, 7; Trudy Dantis et al., *Synod of Bishops: Australian Synthesis - Continental Stage* (ACBC, 2022), 7, 8, 11.

[46] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 3: Called by Christ - Sent Forth as Missionary Disciples* (2022), 8, https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FINAL-Decree-3-Called-by-Christ-Sent-Forth-as-Mission-Disciples.pdf.

[47] XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (Vatican, May 2023), 29.

Council's consultations voiced disapproval of women's ordination while at the same time supporting the idea of expanding the role of women in the Church.[48] Similarly, the Synod identified the need to recognise and value the active contribution of women and increase their leadership in all areas of the Church's life and mission, while noting differences concerning their access to diaconal ministry.[49] Although the Petrocchi commission ruled out admitting women to the diaconate, this decision was not definitive.[50] Overall, the Synod recognised a need for "profound spiritual conversion" as the foundation for effective structural change concerning attitudes and behaviours that marginalise women.[51]

Recent Developments to Increase Women's Participation

Publications from both the Plenary Council and the Synod included actions to increase women's participation in the Church. Decree Four of the Plenary Council identified items such as listening to women's voices, creating new opportunities for women to participate, ensuring appropriate representation in all levels and types of Church decision-making structures, ensuring that women are recognised, valued and properly remunerated, implementing the findings of *Woman and Man* more fully and addressing any future changes the universal Church may make regarding women's participation in the diaconate.[52] Decree Five requested the preparation of more inclusive English translations of the liturgies and the review of existing guidelines for lay preaching.[53] Similar themes appeared in the Australian reports for the Synod of Bishops in Stages 1 and 2.[54]

Paragraph 60 of the Synod's *Final Document* reveals that Australian Catholic women's experiences are universal.[55] Globally, women make up the majority of churchgoers and participate actively in parishes, many are leaders in secular and faith-based communities and organisations, and some take on prominent roles in the Church. The Synod voiced a strong call to more fully utilise existing opportunities for lay involvement provided by Canon Law to encourage more women to undertake positions of responsibility in dioceses and ecclesiastical institutions, in Church discernment and decision-making processes and as judges in canonical processes.[56] Some recommendations, such as greater participation in leadership utilising existing opportunities and attention to Church language and images, echo those addressed by the *SJSS2000.*

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[48] Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying*, 71, 83.
[49] XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Synthesis Report*, Chapter 9(i, j).
[50] "Petrocchi Commission Says No to Female Diaconate, Though Judgment Not Definitive", *Vatican News*, December 4, 2025, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-no-judgment-not-definitive.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NewsletterVN-EN.
[51] XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Synthesis Report*, Chapter 9(f).
[52] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 4*, Article 4.
[53] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 5*, Paragraph 14.c and Article 2.
[54] Dantis et al., *Australian Synthesis*, 2, 7, 10; Dantis et al., *Australian Synthesis - Continental Stage*, 5-6, 9-12.
[55] Francis and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Final Document* (XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2024), paragraph 60, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf.
[56] Francis and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church*, paragraphs 60, 77.

Recent developments in the universal Church include opening the ministries of lector and acolyte to women and establishing the lay ministry of catechist.[57] These steps provide public recognition that charisms are distributed among all the baptised and continue the movement towards co-responsibility and synodality. The change in the ministries of lector and acolyte highlights them as shared ministries, distancing them from their historical role as steps on the path to ordination.[58] Pope Francis observed that conferring these offices to women "renders more effective in the Church everyone's participation in the work of evangelization".[59]

Another significant change at the universal level occurred when lay women and men participated as full members of the Synod on Synodality with voting rights for the first time. In this forum, lay and religious female members directly participated in decision-making rather than only providing advice. The number of roles for women in the Holy See and Vatican City State grew steadily under Pope Francis's leadership, moving from 19.2 per cent in 2013 to 23.4 per cent in 2023.[60] This shift has been supported in part by the reforms of the Curia outlined in *Praedicate Evangelium* (2022) which opened roles traditionally filled by bishops and cardinals to lay people.[61] Recent Vatican appointments of women to significant positions of the Dicastery Prefect[62] and President of the Governatorate[63] by Pope Francis and as the Secretary of the Dicastery for Consecrated Life[64] by Pope Leo XIV are three examples of women contributing more fully to the ecclesial life of the Church within the bounds of Canon Law.

In Australia, the bishops have also acted within the bounds of Canon Law to increase female participation within the Church structures. Australian lay and professed religious women were consultative members of the Fifth Plenary Council, rather than attending as auditors or observers, and comprised 50 per cent of those members who were not canonically mandated. Senior diocesan roles are increasingly being filled by women, and women are also present in a consultative capacity in areas such as the diocesan Council of Priests and the College of Consultors. At a national level, all the executive secretaries for the equivalent of today's Bishops Commissions were men at the time of the *SJSS2000's* publishing. In contrast, there is currently a mix of women and men in these roles.

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[57] Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (Dicastery for Communication, 2021); Francis, *Spiritus Domini* (Dicastery for Communication, 2021).
[58] Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Regarding Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte* (2021), 4.
[59] Francis, *Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte*, 4.
[60] "Pope Appoints Sr. Simona Brambilla as Vatican's First Female Prefect", *Vatican News*, January 6, 2025, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-01/vatican-first-female-prefect-simona-brambilla-consecrated-life.html.
[61] Francis, *Praedicate Evangelium. On the Roman Curia and its Service to the Church in the World. Apostolic constitution* (2022), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html.
[62] "Pope Appoints Sr. Simona Brambilla as Vatican's First Female Prefect".
[63] Salvatore Cernuzio, "Pope Francis: A Woman Will Head the Vatican Governatorate", *Vatican News*, January 19, 2025), https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-01/pope-francis-interview-fazio-woman-governatorate-head.html.
[64] Joseph Tulloch, "Pope Appoints Sr. Tiziana Merletti as Secretary for Dicastery of Consecrated Life", *Vatican News*, May 22, 2025, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-sr-merletti-dicastery-for-consecrated-life.html.

Spaces are being created for lay people to break open the Word outside the liturgy, as seen in the Diocese of Sale's *Sunday Reflections,*[65] and the annual Lent and Advent resources provided by the Archdiocese of Brisbane and Diocese of Wollongong. The *Australian Women Preach* podcast, which ceased in March 2025 after 210 episodes, provided a platform for women from all denominational backgrounds to preach. These measures build upon the work of the *SJSS2000,* which was described as "the first step towards a response".[66] In many instances, however, there remains "unfinished business from the action commitments made by the bishops in 2000".[67]

The *Final Document* of the Synod acknowledged the Church's need for conversion concerning the relations between men and women, recognising that "Inequality between men and women is not part of God's design".[68] In a step further along from the *SJSS2000,* the Synod requested the preparation of an annual report with an item about the laity's access to positions of authority and decision-making, including the proportion of women in these roles.[69] This was viewed as "a communication effort" to promote cultural change, while providing greater visibility to the Church's actions.[70]

As the conversation on women's participation in the Church in Australia continues in various forums, some concerns have been raised about the lack of progress on these matters.[71] To date, a systematic collation and evaluation of the practical steps taken to increase women's participation in the Church in Australia, as outlined in the *SJSS2000*, has not been undertaken. This research aims to bridge that gap by gathering evidence on the enactment of practical actions, evaluating their impact and establishing a path for future directions.

[65] "Sunday Gospel Reflections", Diocese of Sale, accessed November 25, 2025, https://www.cdsale.org.au/news/sunday-gospel-reflections.
[66] Philip E. Wilson, "Letter to Women from the Catholic Bishops of Australia", ACBC Archive, February 2010.
[67] Christopher Prowse and Vincent Long, "Foreword", in Cornish and Dean, *Still Listening to the Spirit*, xx.
[68] Francis and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church*, paragraph 52.
[69] Francis and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church*, paragraph 102d.
[70] Francis and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church*, paragraph 102.
[71] See, for example, Tracy McEwan et al., *International Survey of Catholic Women: Analysis Report and Key Findings* (University of Newcastle, 2023).

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *SJSS2000* DECISIONS

Decision 1a

That the ACBC commit itself to work to establish, where necessary, and within the divinely ordained structure and communion of the Church:

a. a better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity on existing councils, organisations and advisory bodies, at the national level.

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. The phrase "a better balance" was not further defined in the *SJSS2000*, making it a subjective term that is challenging to assess.

A better balance of women and men: Since the implementation of the *SJSS2000*, the proportion of women represented on national councils, advisory bodies and organisations has increased slightly from 40 per cent in 2004 to 44 per cent of the non-episcopal membership in 2024. This final figure reflects a slight decline from 2020, when 47 per cent of non-episcopal members were women.

A better balance of lay, religious and clergy: Fluctuations in the balance of lay, religious and clerical membership of advisory bodies have been sporadically recorded since 2004. Most recently, the 2024 figures show that the number and proportion of lay and religious participation were lower than the 2004 baseline, while clerical membership (excluding bishops) on advisory bodies increased.

Details of Progress Made

A Balance of Women and Men

In 2005, the ACBC received a report from the CACW noting the need to prioritise gender balance on national Church advisory bodies.[72] This matter was addressed in the 2006 announcement of the Conference restructure,[73] where the bishops supported reconfiguring new advisory bodies to ensure "a balance between clergy, religious, lay men and women".[74] Since that date, there has been a visible change in the composition of these bodies, particularly in the case of balancing the numbers of women and men, as shown in Table 3. Prior to the 2006 restructure, female representation on advisory bodies was 40 per cent of non-episcopal membership at the end of 2004.[75] A 2008 update found that female representation in non-episcopal positions remained at 40 per cent.[76] Following this update, the

[72] Bishops Committee for Laity, "ACBC Plenary Meeting 3-12 May 2005", minutes, May 11, 2005, ACBC Archive, motions 1-6.
[73] More information on the Conference restructure can be found in *Appendix 15* of this report.
[74] ACBC, "A Pastoral Letter on the Restructure of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference", ACBC Archive, May 11, 2006.
[75] ACBC, "Plenary November 2005, Minutes", 2005, ACBC Archive.
[76] Wilson, "Letter to Women from the Catholic Bishops of Australia".

Bishops' Commission for Church Ministry (BCCM) [77] recommended that advisory bodies did not need to be chaired by bishops and that a generic form be used for nominating new council members.

By late 2010, an eight per cent increase in women's participation was observed,[78] and in 2020, it came close to 47 per cent of non-episcopal members.[79] Since then, the proportion of women has slightly declined, with women making up almost 40 per cent of total advisory board membership and approximately 44 per cent of non-episcopal membership in 2024. Although the number of women differed across advisory bodies, the 2024 data showed that every entity had at least one female member.

Table 3: Membership of Advisory Bodies (Excluding Bishops) by Sex, 2004, 2020 and 2024

	2004 [80]		2020 [81]		2024 [82]	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Female	65	40	108	47	61	44
Male	99	60	123	53	78	56
Total	**164**	**100**	**231**	**100**	**139**	**100**

Note: Full membership details, including bishops, are available in Appendix 16.

A Balance of Lay, Religious and Clergy

At the end of 2004, there were 18 advisory bodies with 164 non-episcopal members. The mix of these members was 68 per cent laity, 13 per cent religious and 19 per cent clergy (see Table 4). By 2010, a "welcome increase" [83] in the growing diversity of membership was recognised, although corroborative tables were not provided. In 2020, the membership mix on advisory bodies was 77 per cent laity, seven per cent religious and 17 per cent clergy.

Between 2020 and 2024, the number of consultative bodies reduced from 20 to 18. Concurrently, the proportions have also reduced, with the number of lay members on advisory boards nearly halving, while the number of religious and clerical members remained constant.

[77] Holger Koblitz and Bob Dixon, *A Review of the Council for Australian Catholic Women and the Office for Participation of Women at the Request of The Bishops Commission for Church Ministry* (The Office for Employment Relations, 2011), 14.
[78] Bishops Commission for Church Ministry (hereafter BCCM), "Meeting 9 September 2010, Minutes" ACBC Archive, 2010.
[79] The report does not specify whether the count for clergy includes or excludes episcopal members; ACBC, *Response of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to 'The Light from the Southern Cross: Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia',* (published by author, 2020), 16.
[80] Commission for Australian Catholic Women (hereafter CACW), "Report to Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Through Bishops Committee for Laity, May 2005", Bishops Committee for Laity, ACBC Archive, 2005.
[81] ACBC, *Response to 'The Light from the Southern Cross'*, 16.
[82] Data collected as part of this research.
[83] Wilson, "Letter to Women from the Catholic Bishops of Australia".

Table 4: Membership of Advisory Bodies (Excluding Bishops), 2004, 2020 and 2024

	2004 [84]		2020 [85]		2024 [86]	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Lay	111	68	178	77	90	65
Religious	22	13	15	7	15	11
Clergy	31	19	38	16	34	24
Total	**164**	**100**	**231**	**100**	**139**	**100**
Number of advisory bodies	*18*		*20*		*18*	
Number of bishops on advisory bodies	*33*		*unavailable*		*14*	

Note: Full membership details, including bishops, are available in Appendix 16.

Comparing the figures across 20 years from 2004 to 2024 shows a similar number of consultative bodies (18), although Caritas (Australia), included in 2004, was excluded in 2024 following a governance restructure. Nevertheless, the proportion and number of priests and deacons increased to almost one-quarter (24%) of the non-episcopal membership by 2024, compared to 19 per cent in 2004. Consequently, there are proportionately and numerically fewer lay (65 per cent compared to 68 per cent) and religious (11 per cent compared to 13 per cent) members.

National Organisations

The original reference to organisations in Decision 1 refers to entities that are no longer part of the ACBC and, therefore, were not part of the Stage 1 data collection (see details in *Appendix 15*). However, a small amount of comparative data is available for Caritas Australia, an organisation that was part of the ACBC between 2000 and 2020, before becoming incorporated in March 2020. While Caritas was under the auspices of the ACBC, female members of the board increased from none in 2016[87] to 25 per cent in 2020.[88] In 2024, the independent organisation's board was 38 per cent female.[89] While no historical details about the make-up of the board were available, the 2024 mix was 87 per cent laity and 13 per cent clergy.[90]

[84] CACW, "Report to Bishops Committee for Laity, May 2005".
[85] ACBC, *Response to 'The Light from the Southern Cross'*, 16.
[86] Data collected as part of this research.
[87] Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *2016 Gender Equality Report* (2016), 9.
[88] Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *2020 Gender Equality Report* (2020), 9.
[89] "Our Board", Caritas Australia, accessed September 16, 2024, https://www.caritas.org.au/about/what-is-caritas/our-board/.
[90] Caritas Australia, "Our Board".

Decisions 1b and 1c

That the ACBC commits itself to work to establish, where necessary, and within the divinely ordained structure and communion of the Church:

- *b. a better balance of men and women in leadership roles at the national level.*
- *c. a better balance of men and women in professional roles within the Church at the national level.*

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. The earliest information available for those in leadership and professional roles at the national level dates to 2014. Between 2014 and 2025, the proportion of women in professional and managerial roles has declined. In 2025, while the proportion of men and women in professional roles is balanced at 50 per cent, women fill just 20 per cent of the national managerial roles.

Details of Progress Made

Leadership and professional roles at the national level focus on the employees of the ACBC's General Secretariat, the entity responsible for implementing the policies and decisions of the Conference. The employees include managers and professional staff of Commissions, Councils, national agencies and other national organisations. Employees of Caritas Australia, Catholic Earthcare Australia and Catholic Social Services Australia were counted until these became standalone organisations. Professional roles are identified according to the requirements of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (WGEA*), which utilises the Australian Bureau of Statistics' occupation classifications.[91] They include finance, human resources, media and research roles.

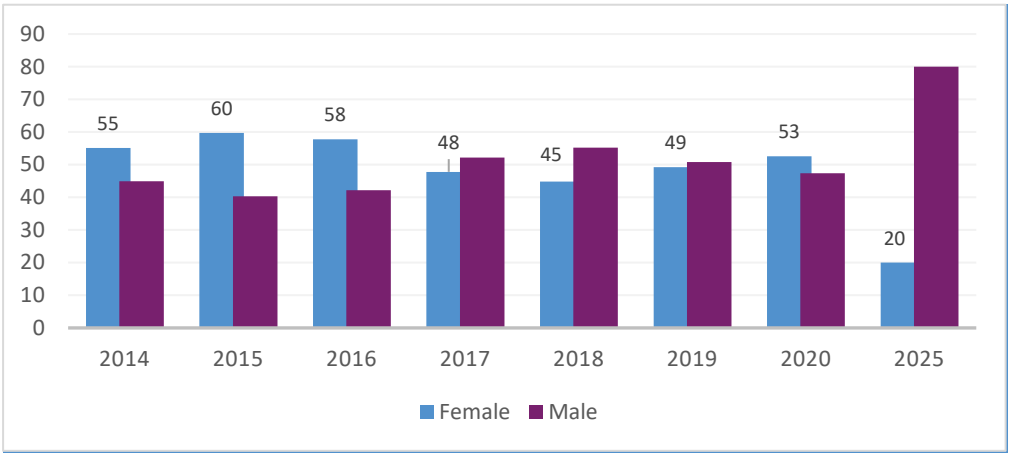
Figures from two distinct but comparable sources were utilised to assess these Decisions. WGEA reports, based on ACBC payroll records, provided historical information for the years 2014 to 2020. In recent years, the Secretariat's employee numbers did not meet the threshold for mandatory reporting, so WGEA reports were not prepared beyond 2020. Figures for 2025 were drawn from the Secretariat's payroll records, using the role definitions from the WGEA report to ensure equivalent comparisons could be made with prior periods. The Secretariat's payroll system underwent modifications that rendered it difficult to acquire comparative data for the 2021–2023 period and consequently these figures were unavailable.

[91] "2 Professionals: ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, 2022", Australian Bureau of Statistics, released November 22, 2022, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/anzsco-australian-and-new-zealand-standard-classification-occupations/2022/browse-classification/2; "2 Professionals: OSCA - Occupation Standard Classification for Australia", Australian Bureau of Statistics, released December 6, 2024, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/osca-occupation-standard-classification-australia/2024-version-1-0.

Managerial Roles

From 2014 to 2020, the WGEA reports show that the proportion of women and men in managerial roles at the ACBC fluctuated annually but stayed close to equal representation, with the proportion of such roles held by women peaking at 60 per cent in 2015. Figure 1 shows the proportion of females and males in managerial roles for selected years. In 2025, 20 per cent of these roles were filled by women.

Figure 1: Proportion of Female and Male ACBC Managers 2016-2020 and 2025 (%)

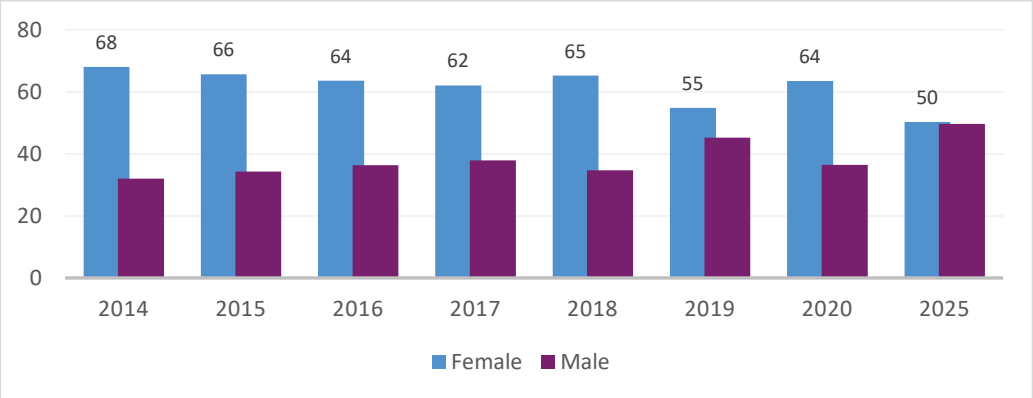


Source of Data: Selected WGEA Reports, 2016-2020, and ACBC Payroll Reports, 2025.

Professional Roles

Between 2014 and 2020, the WGEA reports show that, on average, women filled around 63 per cent of the professional roles at the ACBC (see Figure 2). While the proportion of female professionals was high, the WGEA reports record that in most years, nearly 40 per cent of them, equating to almost a quarter of the total professional group, were employed on a part-time basis. Far fewer male professionals, at most seven per cent, were employed part-time. In January 2025, the ACBC figures revealed that more women (14) than men (13) held professional roles. Of these, 43 per cent of female professionals were employed part-time. After calculating the part-time roles to full-time equivalents (FTE), the figures show that women and men were equally represented in professional roles at the ACBC in 2025, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Proportion of Female and Male ACBC Professionals 2016-2020 and 2025 (%)



Source of Data: Selected WGEA Reports, 2016-2020, and ACBC Payroll Reports, 2025.

Decision 2

That the ACBC request the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations[92] to develop policies to assist Church bodies to develop programs to promote the equality and dignity of women.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. Although the *SJSS2000* required the development of policies, the findings of the research showed that none were produced, as these were recognised as the employer's responsibility.[93] However, in 2004, the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations (ACCER) published an information paper titled *Equal Opportunity of Employment in the Church Workplace* in response to this Decision.[94]

Details of Progress Made

The ACCER information paper, *Equal Opportunity of Employment in the Church Workplace,* was produced in 2004 to assist Church employers who sought to "implement *formal* policies and programs".[95] The document served as a guide for reviewing existing practices and as a briefing document for new managers.[96] This comprehensive document included topics such as Church Teaching and relevant federal legislation, and discussed issues in developing and implementing formal equal opportunity policies and programs.[97]

ACCER's most recent publication about employment practices in the Catholic Church, *Good Works: The Catholic Church as an Employer in Australia (2015),* called for transparent recruitment procedures and the need to work towards "a balance of men and women in the workplace, especially of women in leadership positions".[98]

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[92] The Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations was replaced by the Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations in 2006.
[93] Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations (hereafter ACCER), *Equal Opportunity of Employment in the Church Workplace* (pub. by author, 2004), 1.
[94] ACCER, *Equal Opportunity of Employment*.
[95] ACCER, *Equal Opportunity of Employment*, 1.
[96] ACCER, *Equal Opportunity of Employment*, 1.
[97] ACCER, *Equal Opportunity of Employment*, 2.
[98] Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations, *Good Works. The Catholic Church as an Employer in Australia* (ACBC, 2015), 36.

Decision 3a

The ACBC commits itself, through its various committees, to foster research in the following areas:

a. contemporary ecclesiologies and their theological, catechetical and pastoral implications, especially for the participation of women in the Church.

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. Since the publication of the *SJSS2000*, some attempts have been made to foster research in contemporary theologies and their implications for women's participation. However, the preparation of *Guidelines for Engaging in Interfaith Dialogue* in 2004 appears to have been the only initiative undertaken directly in response to this Decision.

Details of Progress Made

In response to this Decision, a document entitled *Questions on Church and Ministry and Ecclesiology*[99] was circulated to "the theological associations, the theological Institutes and the Catholic Universities, seminaries and Leaders of Religious Congregations".[100] Responses were received during 2002 and 2003 and the Australian Catholic Theological Association was to address matters relating to the document at its 2003 annual meeting.[101] Further contact was made with the 'Australian Theological Association' in 2010.[102] No further information about any subsequent research undertaken is available.

The preparation of the *Guidelines for Engaging in Interfaith Dialogue* in 2004 (approved by the Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Relations in 2005)[103] was identified as one direct response to this Decision. The CACW researched and prepared the guidelines as part of establishing the Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship. Their use as national guidelines was supported by the outgoing Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Dialogue.[104]

More recently, research in this area was undertaken by the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) in collaboration with Australian Catholic University (ACU) to create *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education*[105] in 2017, followed by the 2022 publication, *Leading Formation for Mission: A Practical Guide,* that supported the leadership of women (and men) in formation for mission in Catholic education.[106]

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[99] ACBC, "Plenary November 2002, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2002.
[100] Bishops Committee for Doctrine and Morals, "Report, 6 to 14 May", ACBC Archive, 2002, Item 1.
[101] ACBC, "Plenary November 2002, Minutes"; ACBC, "Plenary May 2003, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2003.
[102] The Office for Employment Relations et al., "A Review of CACW and OPW", 14.
[103] Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Relations, "Committee Meeting Minutes", ACBC Archive, May 2005.
[104] ACBC, "Plenary May 2006, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2006.
[105] National Catholic Education Commission (hereafter NCE), *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Australia, 2017), https://ncec.catholic.edu.au/resource-hub/a-framework-for-formation-for-mission-in-catholic-education/.
[106] NCE, *Leading Formation for Mission: A Practical Guide* (National Catholic Education Australia, 2022), 5, ncec.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Leading-formation-for-mission_Digital-Final.pdf.

Decision 3b

The ACBC commits itself, through its various committees, to foster research in the following areas:

b. ministry in the Church and, in particular, the role of lay faithful and especially women in ecclesial ministries, from the scriptural, historical, theological, liturgical, sociological and canonical perspectives.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. In the years following the *SJSS2000's* publication, attempts were made to foster research in areas of ministry in the Church and the role of the lay faithful and women. Although no conclusive evidence could indicate that such research was undertaken directly in response to this Decision, more recent developments have met the requirements of this Decision.

Details of Progress Made

Minutes from the November 2002 and May 2003 Bishops Plenary meetings show that invitations to participate in research in this area were issued.[107] Responses were received but no further information on initiatives undertaken could be located.[108]

In 2011, the Office for Participation of Women (OPW) reported that the Council of Australian Catholic Women (CACW2006) and the National Council of Priests collaborated on a project entitled *Imagining Pastoral Leadership: Conversing, Reflecting and Acting Together* that looked at "the theology of community and priesthood".[109]

More recent developments have addressed this Decision. The Australian Catholic Council for Lay Pastoral Ministry commissioned research into the role of the lay faithful, culminating in the 2016 report *Exploring Lay Pastoral Ministry in the Catholic Church.*[110] This was followed by the publication of the first national resource for pastoral ministry, *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace*.[111] Historical, theological, scriptural and liturgical perspectives about the ministry are provided in this body of work.

The National Liturgical Council undertook research regarding the institution of lectors and acolytes, after access to these ministries was extended to all appropriately qualified lay faithful in *Spiritus Domini* (2021). It included the preparation of national norms and guidelines for these ministries in 2022, which were awaiting approval from Rome in July 2024.[112]

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[107] ACBC, "Plenary November 2002, Minutes"; ACBC, "Plenary May 2003, Minutes".
[108] ACBC, "Plenary November 2002, Minutes"; ACBC, "Plenary May 2003, Minutes".
[109] The Office for Employment Relations et al., "A Review of CACW and OPW", 14.
[110] Aoife McGrath et al., *Exploring Lay Pastoral Ministry in the Catholic Church* (Christian Research Association, 2016), https://nce.catholic.org.au/images/2022/Lay_Pastoral_Ministry_Research_Report_-with_preamble.pdf.
[111] BCCM, *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace* (ACBC, 2018), https://nce.catholic.org.au/images/2022/Faithful_Stewards_of_Gods_Grace.pdf.
[112] ACBC, *Ministry of Lector and Ministry of Acolyte* (forthcoming).

Decision 3c

The ACBC commits itself, through its various committees, to foster research in the following areas:

c. the theology of the human person, sexuality, marriage and family life, especially as it refers to the contemporary life of Catholic women.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. The 2003 publication *Being Human*[113] (revised 2014) fulfilled the bishops' commitment to this Decision. The *Marriage, Sexuality and the Family* project was initiated in 2002, but further details are not available. Another resource, *Walking with Love,* was sponsored by the ACBC in 2007.[114] It remains available in 2025 as the *Walking with Love* website.[115] More recently, research has been undertaken to address contemporary matters, such as voluntary assisted dying, same-sex marriage and identity and gender, which also fulfil the requirements of this Decision.

Details of Progress Made

The *Being Human* publication was found to meet the requirements of Decision 3c.[116] This document was revised and republished in 2014 and the later edition covers matters affecting the contemporary life of women, including the role of work, IVF (in vitro fertilisation), homosexuality, contraception, gender liquidity and adoption, amongst numerous others.[117]

Another project document, *Marriage, Sexuality and the Family,* was prepared and circulated to bishops for review in November 2002.[118] The project document was to be distributed to moral theologians in 2003 for discussion with the Committee of Doctrine and Morals.[119] No additional information about the project was received.

The *Walking with Love* resource was initially sponsored by the ACBC in 2007 in response to the Bishops Taskforce on Pastoral Responses to Abortion.[120] In 2025, it continues to be accessible as a website[121] that provides pastoral resources to assist individuals experiencing tensions and uncertainties about pregnancy or those who have experienced abortion. It includes the 2019 publication, *Walking with*

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[113] Gerald Gleeson, "Being Human. A Reflection Paper Commissioned by the ACBC Committee for Doctrine and Morals" (2003).
[114] "Walking with Love", accessed 10 February 2025, https://walkingwithlove.org.au/.
[115] "Walking with Love".
[116] ACBC, "Plenary November 2002, Minutes".
[117] Gerald Gleeson, *Being Human. A Catholic Understanding of what it is to be a Human Person, and why this Matters in the Great Ethical Debates of Our Time* (ACBC Committee for Doctrine and Morals, 2014).
[118] ACBC, "Plenary November 2002, Minutes".
[119] Bishops Committee for Doctrine and Morals, "Report, 6 to 14 May 2002"; ACBC, "Plenary May 2003, Minutes".
[120] "Walking with Love".
[121] "Walking with Love".

Love Practical Guide.[122]

More recently, research has been undertaken in areas such as voluntary assisted dying, assisted reproduction techniques and identity and gender. Recent publications include *Real Care, Love and Compassion–the Alternative to Euthanasia* (2015),[123] *The Catholic Church, Marriage & Same-Sex Attraction–Frequently Asked Questions* (2015),[124] *Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender* (2022, updated and revised in 2026),[125] produced by the NCEC in collaboration with the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement and the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education, and the *To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope* (2023) series of pamphlets addressing end-of-life care.[126] Additional research has been commissioned by the NCEC to address ongoing needs in sexuality education.

[122] Australian Catholic Life Council, *Walking with Love. A Pastoral Response to Abortion and Unexpected Pregnancy* (ACBC, 2019), https://walkingwithlove.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WWL-Practical-Guide-2019.pdf.

[123] ACBC, *Real Care, Love and Compassion – The Alternative to Euthanasia* (pub. by author, 2015), https://s3.ap-southeast2-.amazonaws.com/acbcwebsite/Articles/Documents/ACBC/eTheAlternativetoEuthanasia%20%5BA4%20School%20Resource%5D%2072dpi.pdf.

[124] Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council, *The Catholic Church, Marriage & Same-Sex Attraction. Frequently Asked Questions* (ACBC, 2015).

[125] ACBC, *Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender* (pub. by author, 2022), https://ncec.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Created-and-Loved.pdf; ACBC, *Created and Loved: A Guide for Catholic Schools on Identity and Gender,* 2nd ed. (pub. by author, 2026), https://ncec.catholic.edu.au/resource-hub/created-and-loved-a-guide-for-catholic-schools-on-students-identity-and-gender/

[126] ACBC, *To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope* (pub. by author, 2023), https://www.catholic.au/s/article/Euthanasia-Resources.

Decision 4a

The ACBC commits itself through the Bishops Committee for the Liturgy to study the following areas:

a. the possibility of providing at the national level guidelines and education, as well as appropriate resources, to provide rituals to be used in the absence of a priest in the prison and hospital apostolates.

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. No conclusive evidence indicated that national-level guidelines and education were prepared in the years following the *SJSS2000*'s publication, although some diocesan resources were promoted. More recent developments, however, have met some of this Decision's requirements.

Details of Progress Made

Decision 4a concerned national resources for the provision of rituals in the absence of a priest in the prison and hospital apostolates. No information was available to indicate that such national-level guidelines, education or resources were produced as a direct response to this Decision. Instead, relevant diocesan material appears to have been used.

In 2002, the Bishops Committee for Liturgy produced national guidelines titled *Sunday Celebrations In The Absence of a Priest*, which recognised various "pastoral situations", including prisons and hospitals, as places where people could not celebrate Sunday Mass.[127] However, the guidelines primarily focused on regular Sunday celebrations in parishes, with each bishop tasked with determining the conditions for applying them within their diocese.

In later years, relevant diocesan material appears to have been used to respond to this need. For example, in responding to the OPW's 2007 request for a progress report about this Decision, the then Executive Secretary of the Bishops Commission for Liturgy advised that:

> … there has been considerable activity in terms of liturgical education and formation at both national and diocesan level in liturgy since 2000. "Power Points" is a recent resource that has been published. In 2004, the Liturgical Commission in Brisbane published a resource to assist lay people engaged in hospital and institutional chaplaincies.[128]

This appears to be a reference to the Brisbane Liturgical Commission's publication *Powerful Points* (2007), which included the topic "Ministers of the Sick and Dying".[129] It was separately advised that

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[127] ACBC, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest: Directives for the Dioceses of Australia (Liturgical Documents)* (pub. by author, 2004), https://www.catholic.au/s/article/Sunday-Celebrations-in-the-absence-of-a-priest-Directives-for-the-dioceses-of-Australia.

[128] Office for the Participation of Women, "Report to the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry September 2007", ACBC Archive, 2007.

[129] Elizabeth Harrington, "Powerful Points for Liturgical Ministers", *Liturgy Lines*, 2007, https://www.liturgybrisbane.net.au/resources/liturgy-lines/powerful-points-for-liturgical-ministers/.

"this publication was a direct response to the Social Justice Statement".[130] There is no evidence to suggest that this resource was shared nationally or approved for national use.

In 2021, the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service prepared two liturgical resources for those involved in prison ministry. One of them, the *Prison Ministry Liturgy Resource,* is meant to be used as a standalone liturgy for the Prison Sunday weekend, in prison, or with a group involved with prison chaplaincy. [131] This partially meets the requirements for Decision 4a.

[130] Letter from The Executive Secretary of the National Liturgical Council to the Director of the Office for Women, 20 August 2007, in The Office for Employment Relations et al., "A Review of CACW and OPW".
[131] Bishops Commission for Social Justice Mission and Service, *Prison Ministry Liturgy Resource* (ACBC, 2021).

Decision 4b

The ACBC commits itself through the Bishops Committee for the Liturgy to study the following areas:

b. in collaboration with the Bishops Committee for Aborigines, the provision of guidelines, materials and resources directed to integrating elements of Indigenous culture into the celebration of the liturgy.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. There were no immediate responses to this Decision, although ongoing discussions were carried out over several years. More recent developments outlined below indicate that work has been, and continues to be, undertaken in this area. Much of the recent work, especially the *Resources Guides* produced by National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC), meets this Decision's requirements. However, discussions regarding the extent of the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural elements in the liturgy are ongoing and likely to continue in the future.

Details of Progress Made

In 2007, the Bishops Commission for Liturgy (BCL) reported frequent meetings with the NATSICC liturgical committee about liturgical resources for First Nations communities. The use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander symbols and rituals was discussed. At that time, it was recognised that "the process was slow and deliberate".[132]

Much has changed in the years since the 2007 report. NATSICC now provides online *Resource Guides for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday*, which contain information about integrating First Nations cultural elements into Catholic liturgies. The earliest resource from 2012 shows that the BCL prepared, distributed and endorsed their use.[133] Over time, the instructions about using cultural elements in the liturgy were modified, with the 2024 resource providing specialised sections about liturgical resources and their appropriate use.[134] It contains information about the proper use of message sticks, coolamons, clap sticks and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander designs for the altar cloth, stole and chasuble.[135]

In 2024, the ACBC approved the *Mass of the Land of the Holy Spirit* for use in the Diocese of Broome and is awaiting approval from Rome. This Mass has been celebrated for over fifty years in the Diocese of Broome in several Aboriginal languages. It was developed using a collaborative process involving Aboriginal Elders, priests and liturgical experts.

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[132] Office for the Participation of Women, "Report to the BCCM September 2007".
[133] National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (hereafter NATSICC), *By the Power of Faith, We Shall be Healed, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday 2012* (pub. by author, 2012), https://www.natsicc.org.au/assets/natsicc-liturgy-_2012.pdf.
[134] NATSICC, *Keeping the Fire Burning: Strong in Faith. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday Resource Kit 2024* (pub. by author, 2024), https://www.natsicc.org.au/assets/natsicc-2024-booklet_fa_digital.pdf.
[135] NATSICC, *Keeping the Fire Burning*.

More generally, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday resource entitled *Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Life of the Catholic Church* (2022)[136] provides information about sensitively incorporating elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into liturgical celebrations. The Fifth Plenary Council fully received and accepted its recommendations, including the appropriate use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander symbols and rituals.

The requirement from the Fifth Plenary Council that the BCL partner with NATSICC to "develop options for the liturgically and culturally appropriate use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander symbols and rituals in Catholic liturgies, with respect for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures"[137] suggests this is an ongoing process (Decree 1, Article 2). Although approval from Rome is still outstanding, advice provided for this project indicates that the National Liturgical Committee has convened a working group to respond appropriately to this Decree.

[136] NATSICC, *Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Life of the Catholic Church* (pub. by author, 2022), 7-9, https://www.natsicc.org.au/assets/embracing_final_reduced.pdf.
[137] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 1: Reconciliation: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts* (2022), Article 2, https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FINAL-Decree-1-Reconciliation-Healing-Wounds-Receiving-Gifts.pdf.

Decision 4c

The ACBC commits itself through the Bishops Committee for the Liturgy to study the following areas:

c. the drawing up of guidelines concerning the use of inclusive language in the liturgy, prayer, pastoral and social life of the Church.

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. The *Statement of Principles: Language and the Liturgy*, published by the ACBC in May 2001, affirmed the use of inclusive language in the liturgy. This document remains current.[138] The 2024 approval of several scriptural translations for liturgical use in Australia also supports the use of inclusive language in the liturgy.

No other information was found to indicate that formal guidelines concerning the use of inclusive language in prayer and the pastoral and social life of the Church were prepared.

Details of Progress Made

The *Statement of Principles: Language and the Liturgy* (May 2001) states, "Good Australian English must be used in liturgical celebrations in this country".[139] The statement's opening line recognised that Australian English "is inclusive and non-discriminatory in its reference to human beings" when used well. These guidelines remain current, with a revision in 2025 pending approval.

In 2024, a *Revised List of Scripture Translations Approved for Liturgical Use in Australia* was accepted at the Bishops May 2024 Plenary meeting. These biblical translations were approved to provide "alternative translations in situations where inclusive language is needed, or where simplified translations were necessary for use in Masses with children".[140]

The use of inclusive language was mentioned in two decrees of the Plenary Council, where it was recognised that language can be used both to create inequality (Decree 4)[141] and foster inclusion (Decree 5).[142] The Plenary Council requested the preparation of a new English translation of the Roman Missal that was true to the original text and contained inclusive language.[143] Work in this area continues, with the ACBC joining the Irish and New Zealand bishops conferences to produce a new edition of the Lectionary using the Revised New Jerusalem Bible as the text. One of the guiding aims for this Bible translation is to "show that the message of the Bible is directed to women and men equally, despite the inbuilt bias of the English language".[144]

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[138] ACBC, "Statement of Principles: Language and the Liturgy (2001)", May 2001, https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/acbcwebsite/Articles/Documents/ACBC/Statement-of-Principles-Language-and-the-Liturgy-2001.pdf.
[139] ACBC, "Statement of Principles: Language and the Liturgy (2001)", 1.
[140] Bishops Commission for Liturgy, "What version of the Bible is used at Mass?", accessed November 27, 2025, https://www.catholic.au/s/article/What-version-of-the-Bible-is-used-at-Mass.
[141] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 4*, Paragraph 6.
[142] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 5*, Paragraphs 11 and 14c.
[143] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 5*, Paragraph 14c.
[144] Henry Wansbrough, ed., *The Revised New Jerusalem Bible, Study Edition* (Image, 2019), x.

No information was found to indicate that guidelines concerning the use of inclusive language in the broader prayer, pastoral and social life of the Church were prepared. In 2007, the OPW reported that while they recognised difficulties present at that time in using inclusive language within the liturgy, they "hoped" that no such problems would prevent using inclusive language in "issuing guidelines, reports, statements, pastoral documents and letters".[145] At that time, the Executive Secretary of the National Office for Liturgy advised that although the translation of liturgical texts was governed by directives from the Holy See, pastoral and social documents prepared in Australia were not subject to them and could be composed "with a view to meeting local conventions in written Australian English".[146] The 2024 revised guidelines for using inclusive language in the liturgy recognise that its use is "essential" to ensure that the texts are addressed to all listeners and encourage participation.[147] To date, however, there appears to be no current statement encouraging such use in areas of Church life other than the liturgy.

[145] Office for the Participation of Women, "Report to the BCCM September 2007".
[146] Letter from The Executive Secretary of the National Office of Liturgy to the Director of the Office for Women, 20 August 2007, in The Office for Employment Relations et al., "A Review of CACW and OPW".
[147] ACBC, "Statement of Principles: Language and the Liturgy", rev. February 2024, 1.

Decision 4d

The ACBC commits itself through the Bishops Committee for the Liturgy to study the following areas:

d. the establishment of guidelines to assist with the understanding and implementation of Canons 766 and 767 concerning lay preaching.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. The *Directive for Preaching by Laypersons* was published in 2003 and remains in place.[148] The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia decreed a review of the Directive's provisions and guidelines, which is awaiting *recognitio* from the Vatican.

Details of Progress Made

The *Directive for Preaching by Laypersons (Liturgical Documents)* was published in May 2003. It provides guidelines for understanding and implementing Canons 766 and 767 concerning lay preaching. Lay preaching may occur where it "would be advantageous, according to the provisions of the Episcopal conference".[149] Under the guidelines, diocesan bishops may permit lay preaching if it is necessary or useful in certain circumstances. The guidelines were included in the 2007 *Pastoral Handbook for the Dioceses of Australia for Sunday Celebrations of the Word and Sunday Celebrations of the Hours*.[150]

The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia decreed that the ACBC review the 2003 *Directive for Preaching by Laypersons* guidelines (Article 2)[151] suggesting that there is more work to be done. This matter is currently awaiting *recognitio* from Rome.

[148] ACBC, "Directives for Preaching by Laypersons (Liturgical Documents)", accessed November 27, 2025, https://www.catholic.au/s/article/Directives-for-Preaching-by-Laypersons.
[149] ACBC, "Directives for Preaching".
[150] Office for the Participation of Women, "Report to the BCCM September 2007".
[151] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 5*.

Decision 5a

That the ACBC commits itself through its committees to draw up policies of care to respond to the pain of people and groups of people within the Church who are struggling with the implications of Church teaching:

a. by providing pastoral and spiritual support for those suffering the pain of a failed marriage or divorce and those who have entered into another marriage.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. The publication of the 2006 document *Divorce and the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* fulfilled the requirements of this Decision.

Details of Progress Made

The document *Divorce and the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* was published in 2006 to provide support for those "touched by the pain" of marriage breakdown, and it included information about remarriage.[152] It accompanied a separate publication called *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* (2006). A revision of the *Marriage* publication was released in 2020,[153] while the 2006 *Divorce* publication remains current.

[152] Office for the Participation of Women, "Report to the BCCM September 2007".

[153] Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions*, (ACBC, 2020), https://shop.catholic.au/Marriage-in-the-Catholic-Church-frequently-asked-questions-Download-p774815252.

Decision 5b

That the ACBC commits itself through its committees to draw up policies of care to respond to the pain of people and groups of people within the Church who are struggling with the implications of Church teaching:

b. by the provision of guidelines to assist in the pastoral care of those who are finding difficulty in understanding and accepting the Church's teaching on the restriction of ordination to males.

Evaluation

This Decision was not implemented. While this subject was discussed many times, and several proposals emerged until 2011, no guidelines have been subsequently issued.

Details of Progress Made

At the time of the *SJSS2000's* publication, the responsibility for implementing this Decision rested with the Bishops Committees (the equivalents of today's Bishops Commissions). Minutes of various Committee meetings show that this matter was nominated as one area of research to be undertaken in response to the *SJSS2000.* Work was delegated to the Bishops Committee for Doctrine and Morals in June 2004.[154] The topic continued to be considered with some priority until at least 2011. Discussions included proposals for a working party to be organised and a statement to be written to address this Decision. However, no actions were taken and no pastoral guidelines were issued.

Ordinatio Sacerdotalis (1994) continues to present the Church's official teaching on ordination, restricting it to men alone.[155] Since the promulgation of the *SJSS2000,* discussions about alternative forms of ordained ministry, including the ordination of women to the diaconate and priesthood, have appeared in various consultations in the Catholic Church in Australia, such as the discussions for the Plenary Council[156] and in Australian documents prepared for both sessions of the Synod on Synodality.[157] The Synod's *Final Document,* approved by Pope Francis, noted that "the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open".[158] While this remains the case, in 2025 the Petrocchi Commission ruled out admitting women to the diaconate for now. However, it is not possible to "formulate a definitive judgement"[159] and more study in this area is required.

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[154] Geraldine Hawkes, "Letter to Bishop Gerard Holohan, 24 June 2004", CACW, ACBC Archive, 2004.
[155] John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis, apostolic letter* (Holy See, 1994), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html.
[156] Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying*, 6, 64, 68, 69-70.
[157] Dantis et al., *Australian Synthesis*, 7; Dantis et al., *Australian Synthesis - Continental Stage*, 9; Trudy Dantis et al., *Synod of Bishops Australian Summary 2024 Consultation* (ACBC, 2024), 4.
[158] Francis and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church*, paragraph 60.
[159] "Petrocchi Commission", *Vatican News.*

Decision 5c

That the ACBC commits itself through its committees to draw up policies of care to respond to the pain of people and groups of people within the Church who are struggling with the implications of Church teaching:

c. by the provision of appropriate pastoral statements concerning Catholic teaching on such areas as sexuality, marriage and family planning.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. The document *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions*, published in 2006 and revised in 2020, fulfilled the requirements of this Decision.[160] Research undertaken in the *Being Human* project covered matters of sexuality, marriage and family planning and fulfilled the requirements of this Decision.[161] Recent developments show further progress being made in this area.

Details of Progress Made

As reported earlier, the document, *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* was published by the Bishops Commission for Family and Life in 2006 and revised in 2020.[162] In the period since the release of the *SJSS2000,* other national statements about Church teaching in the areas of sexuality and marriage have also been published. Publications about marriage include *What is Marriage* (2014), *Don't Mess with Marriage* (2015) and *The Catholic Church and Same-Sex Marriage* (2020), which remain current. Matters about sexuality, marriage and family planning, including IVF and contraception, were discussed in *Being Human* (2014). More recently, the document *Created and Loved* (2022, republished in 2026), produced for use in Catholic schools, addresses matters of anthropology, sexuality and gender and is listed as a key document.[163]

Broader developments in the area of safeguarding have included the document *Pastoral Principles and Guidelines for the Support of Mothers and Children When the Children are Fathered by Clergy Outside Marriage* (2023), presented to the ACBC at the November 2023 Plenary.[164] Additionally, a global first document, titled *Guidelines for Responding to Complaints of Sexual Abuse of Religious Women by Clergy*, is being developed in 2025.

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[160] Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement, *Marriage in the Catholic Church*; *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* (2006) was identified as a companion to ACBC, *Divorce and the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions*, (pub. by author, 2006), 3, https://www.mn.catholic.org.au/media/1685/acbc_divorce_booklet.pdf.

[161] Gleeson, *Being Human (2014)*.

[162] Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement, *Marriage in the Catholic Church*.

[163] ACBC, *Created and Loved;* ACBC, *Created and Loved*, 2nd ed.

[164] Commission for Professional Standards and Safeguarding, *Submission to Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond* (2024).

Decision 6a

That the ACBC commits itself to foster at a national level, educational possibilities to assist in the implementation of the recommendations of this report:

a. by fostering programs of professional preparation and supervision for women and men involved in ministry.

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. Professional preparation programs launched in 2016 are fostered through the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Centre for Liturgy and endorsed by the ACBC. While evidence supports the fostering of supervision programs for religious and clergy in ministry, no conclusive evidence was found regarding national supervision programs for lay women and men.

Details of Progress Made

Programs of Professional Preparation

In 2016, the ACBC endorsed the ACU Centre for Liturgy as a response to *Sacrosanctum Concilium #44*, which decreed that Liturgical Commissions be supported by an Institute for Pastoral Liturgy. The Centre for Liturgy resulted from a collaboration between the ACBC, ACU and the National Liturgical Commission, and currently offers formation and training programs for "clergy, pastoral associates, religious educators, parish ministers and professionals involved in preparing and celebrating liturgy".[165] The Centre also established *Liturgy Nexus*, an online networking site for professional Catholic liturgists and those working in liturgy, sacraments and the sacred arts.[166]

Recent developments that meet the need to prepare lay women and men in ministry include national guidelines for the institution of Lector and Acolyte prepared by the Commission for Liturgy in 2024, which await approval from Rome.[167] The NCEC also offers support by promoting scholarship programs designed to grow the capacity of women in ecclesial ministries.

Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship

A major program that was identified by the OPW as a response to this Decision was the Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship. It started in 2006 as a fully-funded program supported by the ACBC, dioceses and religious congregations.[168] Seven programs have been delivered with the eighth offering running over 2024 and 2025. In this iteration, the focus was on "Formation for missionary leadership" and the program was partially funded by the ACBC with the participants contributing the balance of

[165] Australian Catholic University, "ACU Centre for Liturgy", accessed January 23, 2025, https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/acu-centre-for-liturgy.
[166] Australian Catholic University, "Liturgy Nexus", accessed January 23,2025, https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/acu-centre-for-liturgy/liturgy-nexus-and--liturgy-nexus-for-schools.
[167] ACBC, *Ministry of Lector and Ministry of Acolyte*.
[168] The Office for Employment Relations et al., "A Review of CACW and OPW", 15.

the costs.[169]

Supervision for Women and Men in Ministry

Since the publication of the *SJSS2000*, several developments have occurred in this area. Two recommendations from the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (Recommendations 16.25 and 16.45) highlighted the provision of professional supervision for all people in religious or pastoral ministry. Responses to these recommendations were addressed by the ACBC's 2023 report on actions taken.[170] The Report noted the recent implementation of mandatory standards for professional supervision through the development of the documents *National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, Edition 2* (2022) and CRA's *Risk Management Strategy* (2021), which primarily focus on clergy and religious in ministry roles.

Our Common Mission (2022), a standard for all people in ministry, affirms that people have a responsibility to "have professional/pastoral supervision with a registered, independent supervisor if in a ministry role".[171] However, the adoption of this framework is not currently enforced for all Church entities, resulting in significant gaps for the laity.[172] While safeguarding training is now a regular practice for all people in ministry, no conclusive evidence exists to demonstrate that programs supporting supervision for lay women and men in ministry have been fostered nationally.

[169] " Young Catholic Women's Fellowship", National Centre for Evangelisation, accessed November 27, 2025, https://nce.catholic.org.au/events/young-catholic-women-s-fellowship.
[170] ACBC, *Report of Actions Taken in Response to the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (pub. by author, 2023), 43.
[171] Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd, *Our Common Mission* (2022), 1, https://www.acsltd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Our-Common-Mission_combined-FINAL-OCT.pdf.
[172] Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd, *Our Common Mission*, 6.

Decision 6b

That the ACBC commits itself to foster, at a national level, educational possibilities to assist in the implementation of the recommendations of this report:

b. by the promotion and publication of models of best pastoral practice concerning the involvement of women in the life of the Church.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. The task was assigned to the Commission for Australian Catholic Women (CACW) and its successors and has been successfully implemented through various projects that emerged from 2005 onwards, some of which continue today.

Details of Progress Made

The Constitution for the CACW included the responsibility for developing, selecting and disseminating examples of best practices for the participation of women in areas other than in employment.[173] This responsibility was acted upon and is included in the CACW's 2002 Action Plan.[174]

The CACW and its successor utilised several avenues to select and promote models of pastoral practice concerning women's involvement in the life of the Church. These included the publication of an anthology of Australian Catholic women's stories titled *And the Dance Goes On* (2005), newsletter articles such as the *Inspirational Women* series (circa 2015-2019), the *Teleforum* series (2008-2009), a national photographic exhibition showcasing 40 Australian Catholic women (2010) with an accompanying book and the promotion of female speakers at colloquiums. Annual International Women's Day resources also included items that promoted women's involvement in the Church. The CACW was itself recognised as developing best practice when its 'Leadership for Mission' program was recognised by the Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life as a model of good practice for lay formation.

The success of implementing this Decision is evident in the current activities of various national bodies where the promotion and publication of best pastoral practices concerning women in the life of the Church have become the norm. Some examples include *CathNews,* the NCE's *Women in Leadership* series on Evangelise+, the 2019 *Stirring the Waters Colloquium* and the continued support for the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship program. The NCEC promotes best practices through its website, conferences and events, such as the Australian Catholic Education Conference and the Formation for Mission gatherings.

[173] ACBC, "Draft Constitution of the Commission for Australian Catholic Women, 2002" ACBC Archive, 2002.
[174] CACW, "2002 Action Plan", ACBC Archive, 2002.

Decision 6c

That the ACBC commits itself to foster at a national level, educational possibilities to assist in the implementation of the recommendations of this report:

c. by fostering continued study of the theology and practice of collaborative ministry as a contribution to the training of people involved at all levels in Church leadership.

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. While some information on an immediate response was identified, several later developments have occurred, which partially meet the requirements of this Decision.

Details of Progress Made

Following the publication of the *SJSS2000*, some information is available about attempts made in this area. In 2003, the CACW invited the rectors of six seminaries to work with them to fulfil their mandate or suggest other ways the Council could play a role in the seminaries' work.[175] Simple steps to initiate collaborative ministry, such as seminarians becoming familiar with the contents of the *SJSS2000*, were recommended. No information on the response to those recommendations was received. Other evidence of broader developments includes, for example, Frank Devoy's work for the National Commission for Clergy Life and Ministry, published in his 2005 article, *Collaboration, Consensus & Communion: "Matters of the Heart …"*.[176]

Decision 6 continued to be mentioned as a priority in the CACW2006 Minutes in February 2010 and August 2011. In 2011, the distribution of a resource card promoting the concept of collaborative ministry to all parishes in Australia was acknowledged as a response to this item.[177] Additionally, the *Imagining Pastoral Leadership* program identified "a focus on collaborative ministry" as a key theme; however, it was acknowledged that further work was required.[178] No further information on work done in this area was received.

In recent years, developments in 'synodality' and a 'synodal style' of working and being Church[179] have deepened and expanded the concept of collaborative ministry. Decree 6 of the Plenary Council called

[175] Therese Vassarotti, "Letters to Seminaries", ACBC Archive, January 17, 2003.
[176] Francis W. Devoy, "Collaboration, Consensus & Communion:'Matters of the Heart …'", *Australian Ejournal of Theology*, no. 4 (2005), https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20051019041044/http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/37047/20051019-0000/dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_4/devoy.htm.
[177] The Office for Employment Relations et al., "A Review of CACW and OPW", 16.
[178] The Office for Employment Relations et al., "A Review of CACW and OPW", 16.
[179] See, for example, Francis and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church*.

for various strategies that foster collaboration (Article 1e) and synodality (Article 3).[180]

The BCELM has developed new initiatives to further education and training in collaborative ministry, fostering various opportunities, including the 'Young Women's Leadership for Mission' (ongoing), the Ministry of Catechist formation program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catechists (2022), the *Evangelise* conference (2022) and the publication of *Evangelisation: Encounter, Discipleship, Mission* (2023). A related statement on understanding and developing charisms called *Gifted for the Mission: An Introduction to Charisms* was published in 2025, with an accompanying video series on *Evangelise Plus*. The ACU Centre for Liturgy provides resources for all those involved in pastoral ministry and *Liturgy Nexus* acts as a communication network for those working in liturgy.

[180] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 6: Formation and Leadership for Mission and Ministry,* (2022), https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FINAL-Decree-6-Formation-and-Leadership-for-Mission-and-Ministry.pdf.

Decision 7a

That concerning Indigenous Catholics in Australia, the ACBC asks:

a. that the Bishops Committee for Aborigines enters into dialogue with Australian Indigenous peoples about suggested actions arising from the Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. However, the actions taken in response to this Decision did not result in resources that could be used nationally.

Details of Progress Made

The implementation of Decision 7 was discussed at a joint meeting of the Bishops Committee for Aborigines (BCA) and NATSICC in November 2004. A later report noted that the state of progress for Decision 7 was unknown. There was a belief among some NATSICC Councillors that the *Woman and Man* report had not been inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and that the research "was not a true reflection of the situation".[181] No other actions undertaken at a national level by the BCA or its successors were reported.

In 2009, at the Bishop's invitation, the CACW2006 visited the Diocese of Darwin "to fulfil the requirements of Decision 7 in the 2000 Social Justice Statement".[182] Members of the CACW2006 travelled to at least four locations, including Darwin and Bathurst Island, to participate in local meetings (henceforth called the "2009 Darwin consultations").[183] Although dialogue had been initiated between CACW2006 members and four groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Diocese of Darwin, the topics discussed remain unknown, and the subsequent report was prepared for diocesan use rather than to inform decision-making at the national level.[184] While some evidence suggests that the report was distributed to all bishops,[185] other reports indicate that no feedback from the visit was provided to the CACW.[186] The report itself was not located.

[181] Bishops Committee for Aborigines and the NATSICC, "22 November 2004 Briefing and Minutes", NATSICC Archive, 2004.
[182] BCCM, "Meeting 3 September 2008, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2008.
[183] Council for Australian Catholic Women (hereafter CACW2006), "Meeting 28-29 August 2008, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2008.
[184] CACW2006, "Meeting 4-5 February 2010, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2010.
[185] The Office for Employment Relations et al., "A Review of CACW and OPW", 16.
[186] CACW2006, "Meeting 4-5 August 2011, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2011.

Decision 7b

That concerning Indigenous Catholics in Australia, the ACBC asks:

b. that in responding to the findings of the Report, priorities be determined by Australian Indigenous people in relation to the findings, advice be sought from Australian Indigenous peoples about the processes and protocols in relation to proposed action, and regional differences be addressed.

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. Some consultations were undertaken between national Councils, Committees or Commissions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups in fulfilment of the requirements of this Decision. However, no details could be found to determine whether all the elements of this Decision were implemented.

Details of Progress Made

The BCCM identified the 2009 Darwin consultations as fulfilling Decision 7, although, as previously noted, the final report was only for diocesan use and was not made accessible to the ACBC for wider distribution and action.[187] At best, the final report's contents could be shared nationally through "informal spoken feedback".[188] In the absence of a report, it is unclear whether all of Decision 7b's elements were addressed during the consultation. Furthermore, since it engaged just a few communities in one diocese, its conclusions were limited to that region. The vagueness of the language of this Decision, therefore, makes it unclear whether these actions only partially fulfilled the requirements of the Decision, or fully implemented it as the bishops concluded.

Meeting Minutes from the CACW2006 and BCCM reveal that the 2009 Darwin consultations influenced future discussions. For example, in 2009, CACW2006 discussed increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. An existing Councillor volunteered to stand down to provide a vacancy for the position.[189] At a meeting in early 2010, Decision 7 was designated a priority for the CACW2006 and meeting minutes confirmed that Councillors considered ways to implement it.[190]

An earlier group of CACW2006 Councillors had been made aware of the cultural traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, including, in October 2006, the need for at least two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives on the Council.[191] Furthermore, the custom of representation was made known to the BCA in 2004.[192] However, no documents addressing this requirement or advising a protocol change could be found.

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[187] CACW2006, "Meeting 4-5 February 2010, Minutes".
[188] CACW2006, "Meeting 4-5 February 2010, Minutes".
[189] BCCM, "Meeting 23 November 2009, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2009.
[190] CACW2006, "Meeting 4-5 February 2010, Minutes"; CACW2006, "Meeting 27-28 May 2010, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2010; CACW2006, "Meeting 4-5 November 2010, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2010.
[191] CACW2006, "Meeting 26-27 October 2006, Minutes", ACBC Archive, 2006.
[192] Bishops Committee for Aboriginees (hereafter BCA) and Natioinal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (hereafter NATSICC), "22 November 2004 Briefing and Minutes".

The 2009 Darwin consultations appear to have influenced the awareness for change most significantly. Consulting with even a few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic groups increased the understanding of their cultural practices among the 2009-2010 CACW2006 Councillors. Although cultural traditions were raised at the national level, and some circumstantial evidence exists to indicate that the knowledge was passed on, no formal document outlining such protocols appears to have been developed.

Decision 7c

That concerning Indigenous Catholics in Australia, the ACBC asks:

c. that the Bishops Committee for Aborigines and the Bishops Committee for Doctrine and Morals make research available to the bishops in response to requests received from Indigenous Australians and others for married clergy and women deacons.

Evaluation

This Decision has been partially implemented. No immediate action was taken, although topics related to married clergy and women deacons continue to receive attention and some recent developments partially fulfil the requirements of this Decision.

Details of Progress Made

In 2004, advice was provided that the Bishops Committee for Doctrine and Morals was awaiting the result of research regarding this Decision as initial discussions had resulted in polarised opinions which needed to be resolved before further work could be done.[193] No further evidence indicated that any research was made available to the Committee.

In recent years, the matters of married clergy and women deacons have continued to be considered. Both topics were discussed in the consultation stages of the Plenary Council[194] and the Australian Diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality.[195] The *Final Document* of the Synod on Synodality did not mention married clergy in the Latin rite, apart from permanent deacons, and noted that "women's access to the diaconate remains open".[196]

Some progress has been made recently towards implementing this Decision, as married Aboriginal men have been ordained as permanent deacons. At the time of the *SJSS2000*'s promulgation, Deacon Boniface Perdjert Pirrimngiparl, married to Numple Brigette, had been a permanent deacon for 26 years, having been ordained in 1974 in the Diocese of Darwin.[197] Another married man, Deacon John Bosco was ordained in Darwin in 2007,[198] and Deacon Clinton McGoldrick, married to Karley, was the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander man to be ordained a permanent deacon in the Archdiocese of Brisbane in 2022.[199]

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[193] BCA and NATSICC, "22 November 2004 Briefing and Minutes".
[194] Dantis et al., *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying*, 6, 64, 68, 69-70.
[195] Dantis et al., *Australian Synthesis*, 7; Dantis et al., *Australian Synthesis - Continental Stage*, 9; Dantis et al., *Synod of Bishops Australian Summary 2024 Consultation*, 4.
[196] Francis and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church*, paragraph 60.
[197] "A Tribute to Deacon Boniface Perdert", NATSICC, accessed November 28, 2025, https://www.natsicc.org.au/a-tribute-to-deacon-boniface.html.
[198] "Deacon John Bosco Celebrates 10 Years", Pat Mara, accessed November 28, 2025, https://darwin.catholic.org.au/deacon-john-bosco-celebrates-10-years/.
[199] Heather Khym, "Archdiocese of Brisbane Ordains First Indigenous Man to Diaconate", *Aleteia* (2022), https://aleteia.org/2022/12/01/archdiocese-of-brisbane-ordains-first-indigenous-man-to-diaconate.

Decision 8

That the ACBC establish a Commission for Australian Catholic Women.

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. The Decision was fulfilled with the announcement of the Commission for Australian Catholic Women (CACW) and its secretariat on 11 December 2000, followed by its formal commissioning on 15 June 2001. This action was identified as "one of the major decisions of the Social Justice Statement".[200]

Details of Progress Made

The establishment of the CACW and its secretariat was announced on 11 December 2000 and they were formally commissioned on 15 June 2001.[201] The CACW reported to the Bishops Committee for the Laity and had a full-time secretariat to support its activities.

Geraldine Hawkes was appointed as the first chair of the CACW by the ACBC and chaired its first meeting on 2 February 2001 in Sydney. Therese Vassarotti was appointed as the first Executive Officer on 10 May 2001.[202]

Restructures following Conference Reviews

Mandated reviews of the ACBC occur every five years. External reviews, to examine the ACBC's structures and functions, including its finances, are required every ten years. Internal reviews are undertaken halfway between the external reviews to examine the implementation of the previous external review's outcomes and any other aspects that require attention.[203]

Changes following the 2006 Review

Following a mandated review in 2006, the bishops announced a reconfiguration of the Conference in May 2006 in *A Pastoral Letter on the Restructure of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*.[204] The restructure retired 19 Bishops Committees and their work was to be undertaken by 12 new Bishops Commissions, each served by advisory bodies.

Several existing bodies, including the CACW, were retained in a manner that emphasised their advisory nature, including a name change from Commission to Council.[205] The Council for Australian Catholic Women (CACW2006) was established as a permanent advisory council to the BCCM.[206] It was mandated to provide advice and make recommendations to the BCCM.

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[200] ACBC, "Draft Constitution of the CACW".
[201] ACBC, "Draft Constitution of the CACW".
[202] Davis and Lucas, "Ten Years On", 153.
[203] "By-laws to the Statutes of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference as amended November 2022", 2022, 6.6 Review of Conference.
[204] ACBC, "Plenary May 2006, Minutes".
[205] ACBC, "Plenary May 2006, Minutes".
[206] ACBC, "Draft Commission for Church Ministry Mandate, 2006", ACBC Archive, 2006.

As part of the process, the CACW Secretariat became the Office for the Participation of Women (OPW) and was mandated to provide administrative support to the CACW2006. Whereas the CACW Secretariat was "responsible and answerable to the Commission through the Chairperson",[207] the BCCM directed the work of the OPW to implement the recommendations of the *SJSS2000* and the OPW Director reported to the Bishop's Delegate for the Participation of Women from the BCCM, rather than the new Council.[208]

Changes following the 2016 Review

A review of ACBC finances led to another Conference restructure at the end of 2019.[209] The mandate for the National Centre for Evangelisation (NCE) was expanded to include the work of the OPW, together with the Office for Lay Pastoral Ministry and the Office for Youth. At the same time, the bodies responsible for each of these offices, including the BCCM, were replaced by the newly established BCELM. The BCELM oversaw the work of the NCE and was advised by the Council for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry (CELM). On 31 December 2019, the CACW2006 ceased operating and its work continued under the new structure.[210]

As of 1 January 2020, the BCELM assumed responsibility for the "active participation of all the baptised in the life of the Church", with specific functions to guide and support the activities of the Church through nominated groups of Catholics, including women and men (Item 3.1.4).[211] Its work was to be influenced by the priorities identified by the outgoing Councils for women, youth and laity.[212] Details about those priorities were not provided.

The BCELM liaised with 20 key national and international bodies (listed in *Appendix 17*) to support its mandate in 2024. While these include the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, there is no advisory body listed in the mandate that explicitly focuses on women's participation. In 2025, consultation took the form of quarterly online meetings between the BCELM's Delegate for Women and female members of the BCELM Advisory Council to explore ongoing ways to support women in the Church in Australia. This has included regular International Women's Day statements, the ongoing management of the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship, the inclusion of women and relevant topics in BCELM events and resources, and the commissioning of this research project.

[207] ACBC, "Draft Constitution of the CACW".
[208] ACBC, "Draft Commission for Church Ministry Mandate".
[209] CACW2006, "women.catholic.org.au", former website, archived 2020, section "From the Office (Newsletter): Changes at the Bishops Conference".
[210] CACW2006, "women.catholic.org.au", section "Changes at the Bishops Conference".
[211] ACBC, "Mandate of the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry", November 2021, https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/acbcwebsite/Mandates/Mandate-Evangelisation-Laity-and-Ministry.pdf.
[212] CACW2006, "women.catholic.org.au", section "Changes at the Bishops Conference".

Practical actions are undertaken by the NCE to fulfil its mandate to assist the BCELM in meeting its responsibilities.[213] Current examples of these, which have continued to support the participation of Australian Catholic women in various ways, include:

- coordinating and promoting the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship
- providing regular articles on Catholic women and their activities in *The Bridge* newsletter
- creating and maintaining the Catholic Women Australia Facebook Page
- including a resource page for women on the NCE website
- engaging women as specialist speakers at national conferences
- producing the "Women's Leadership" series available on *Evangelise+*
- hosting the National Women's Consultation in March 2021.

[213] ACBC, "Mandate of the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry", 8.

Decision 9

That the Commission for Australian Catholic Women be established according to detailed guidelines (as fully outlined in Appendix 1).

Evaluation

This Decision has been fully implemented. The outline presented in Decision 9 formed the foundation for establishing the Commission for Australian Catholic Women, with a few minor changes.

Details of Progress Made

The *Constitution for the Commission for Australian Women (Constitution)* was approved at the May 2002 Plenary and was based on the contents of Decision 9.[214] Some notable additions included modifications to responsibilities. According to the *Constitution*, the CACW was deemed responsible for facilitating strategic planning, rather than monitoring it, and for developing best practices in addition to selecting and disseminating them.

The *Constitution* did not specify Decision 9's requirements that the CACW be able to dialogue with diverse groups to develop a specialised understanding of women's issues. Instead, it was "committed to operating within the framework of dialogue, mutual understanding and Christian love".[215] In accordance with Decision 9, a full-time Executive Officer was appointed to assist the CACW. The Executive Officer reported to the CACW and was a member of the Commission.

After the 2006 ACBC restructure, the *Constitution* was replaced by the BCCM's *Mandate of Advisory Bodies: Council for Australian Catholic Women*.[216] The CACW2006 had the opportunity to review the draft mandate, and its suggestion to replace phrases like "to act, to promote" with "to recommend" was adopted in the final draft.[217] Under the mandate, the CACW2006 provided advice in three areas and made recommendations concerning two topics to the BCCM. Its responsibilities to select projects to implement the actions of the *SJSS2000* and to direct the work of the OPW staff were transferred to the BCCM.[218] As detailed in the evaluation of Decision 8, on 1 January 2020, the work of the CACW2006 was transferred to the CELM, the new advisory body of the BCELM, while the NCE took on the work of the OPW.

[214] ACBC, "Draft Constitution of the CACW".
[215] ACBC, "Draft Constitution of the CACW".
[216] ACBC, "Draft Commission for Church Ministry Mandate", 10.
[217] CACW2006, "Meeting 26-27 October 2006, Minutes".
[218] ACBC, "Draft Commission for Church Ministry Mandate", 10.

ADOPTION OF THE *SJSS2000* PROPOSALS

Shortly after the promulgation of the *SJSS2000,* the CACW recognised that the Proposals covered several themes and grouped them accordingly.[219] These themes were adopted for use in the Stage 2 survey and interviews to increase the ease of evaluating them as five small groups of related Proposals rather than one long, ungrouped list of 31. Thematic titles were updated for contemporary language and each Proposal was numbered for easy identification. Respondents were invited to submit their responses by theme or individual proposal number to streamline their work and reduce duplication of evidence.

This section of the report follows the thematic listing of the numbered Proposals used in Stage 2 rather than the order of the *SJSS2000.* Each Proposal has been evaluated individually in a similar manner to the Decisions. As indicated earlier in the report, 20 dioceses (71%) responded in Stage 2. Information was also received from three religious congregations, with two respondents providing information about MPJPs. The lack of responses from all dioceses somewhat limits the extent of understanding of the overall implementation of the proposals. What follows, therefore, is an assessment based on evidence received from respondents.

[219] CACW, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus - A Resource for Dioceses*, (pub. by author, 2004).

THEME 1: WITNESSING TO THE EQUAL DIGNITY OF WOMEN AND MEN

This theme incorporates the following proposals:

1. A better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity be included on existing councils, organisations and advisory bodies.
2. A better balance of men and women be appointed to leadership roles in the Catholic Church.
3. In dioceses where pastoral councils are not established and where the Bishop judges their formation to be appropriate, they be formed, and include a balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity so that women's participation in decision-making and leadership may be increased.
4. A database of Catholic women and their qualifications and skills be developed to help promote the participation of women in the Catholic Church, especially their involvement in decision-making processes and leadership roles.
5. That qualified women be encouraged to act as Church spokespersons and as guest speakers at Church conferences, ceremonies and functions.
6. That women's needs in relation to participation in the Church be made a financial priority for the Church.
7. Bishops, when pointing to the signs of the times, acknowledge positive developments in the role and status of women.
8. More women be appointed to marriage tribunals and, where necessary, be funded to undertake specialist training.
9. The employing authority give just remuneration and employment conditions for women in the Church as a priority.

Proposal 1

A better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity be included on all existing councils, organisations and advisory bodies.

Evaluation

This Proposal was widely adopted, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Efforts focused on achieving gender balance on councils and advisory bodies. As with Decision 1, the phrase "a better balance" remains undefined, making consistent assessment difficult. Progress includes restructuring councils, introducing gender parity policies and appointing women to leadership roles. More recently, synodal initiatives and diocesan renewal processes have renewed focus on inclusive representation, including cultural diversity and younger voices.

Details of Progress Made

The responses from dioceses indicated that, even at the time of the *SJSS2000's* publication, some were already considering the importance of achieving gender balance to ensure a wide range of perspectives in discussions and decision-making. Over the years, several dioceses have made notable progress.

One regional diocese acted swiftly, restructuring its Diocesan Pastoral Council in 2001 to include women and offering leadership training to lay women. This initiative expanded in 2002 with broader consultative reforms. A gender parity policy was proposed in 2007, followed by guidelines in 2008. By 2010, lay women were formally involved in synodal planning and female representation on one parish council increased from 20 per cent to 45 per cent. A 2015 review found that women made up 64 per cent of parish ministry volunteers, prompting calls for greater male involvement. In 2022, the diocesan Council for Women emphasised leadership, inclusion and diverse voices, drawing inspiration from the Pentecost story.

Another diocese demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting the laity, particularly women, in decision-making bodies, as evidenced by the appointment of two women to the Curia. Following a recommendation from its 2020–2021 Review of Governance, diocesan committee details were made publicly available to encourage transparency and diversity. One Archdiocese provided evidence of its Councils, where gender diversity was more apparent, including appointments of women as advisors to the College of Consultors and as consultative members of the Council of Priests. Despite this, diocesan discussions highlighted the urgent need to achieve greater equality in all areas. To address this, the Archdiocese established a full-time role to support co-responsible participation of lay women and men and committed to forming a synodal mission/pastoral council with diverse representation, including clergy, religious, laity, persons with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and lay people from cultural communities.

Other dioceses showed varying degrees of progress. One archdiocese reported that at least one or two women were included on all Committees and Councils, though it lacked data on committee size or the mix of lay, religious and clergy members, making a thorough assessment difficult. Another diocese mandated the inclusion of a married couple on the board of a house of discernment for young

men, offering a unique example of inclusive practice. These examples demonstrate that many dioceses have made strides, particularly in providing opportunities for women to participate. As indicated earlier in this report, a 2020 survey of Catholic dioceses revealed that significant proportions of women held roles as Chairs (55%) and members of Pastoral Councils (45%), as well as members of safeguarding councils (49%).[220]

MPJPs also exemplify inclusive membership in decision-making among women and men, clergy, religious and laity, although most Australian MPJPs have largely lay membership. A 2023 survey showed that 97 per cent of members were non-ordained and all MPJPs had at least two female canonical stewards. The proportion of women on boards ranged from 29 to 100 per cent, and was particularly high in Councils overseeing all-female schools.

The lack of progress in some dioceses, particularly where Diocesan Pastoral Councils are absent, raised concerns among some participants that more diverse voices are not contributing to the life and mission of the diocese. In such cases, the dominant voices are those of bishops and priests, leaving the voices of women absent. Participants also emphasised the need to avoid tokenistic representation and suggested that a diverse selection of individuals be chosen, not merely those who reflect the bishop's views. Recommendations included granting women decision-making capacity on traditionally clerical councils, such as the Council of Priests, and considering quotas for other groups, including youth, the elderly, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, alongside the balance of women and men.

Interview participants from both Eastern and Western rites advised that women were present on contemporary diocesan bodies. In 2025, women chair diocesan councils and advisory bodies, including compulsory finance councils, and serve on the Curia in some dioceses. This represents a significant shift from the early days of female involvement in a diocesan council, when women were assigned to the secretary's role due to the genderisation of roles.

The interviews revealed that lay and religious women and men are being listened to and effectively contributing to the decision-making process at the diocesan level. Furthermore, in some areas, the representative mix is expanding to include people of various ages and from diverse cultural and other backgrounds. One participant noted, however, that this was not consistently implemented and has "continued off and on". The contributions of women and men to decision-making are recognised as working synodally.

At the parish level, interview participants suggested that women's involvement in decision-making varies. In some places, they are highly active, whereas in others, there remains room for them to utilise their skills and contribute fully.

[220] Boland et al., *The Light from the Southern Cross,* 171, 176.

Proposal 2

A better balance of men and women be appointed to leadership roles in the Catholic Church.

Evaluation

This Proposal achieved wide adoption, supported by generally moderate to strong implementation. Women have increasingly been appointed to leadership roles in diocesan structures, education and pastoral ministries. As with Proposal 1, the phrase "a better balance" remains undefined, making it difficult to determine whether the intended goal has been met. While progress is evident, it remains uneven and lacks formal reporting systems. Recent diocesan plans and synodal commitments aim to ensure gender balance in governance and decision-making, signalling a stronger commitment to inclusion.

Details of Progress Made

Steady progress in this area was evident in some dioceses. For example, one regional diocese reported an increasing number of women in various leadership roles. As of May 2025, the Executive Directors of Education, Centacare and the diocesan childcare organisation were all women. Table 5 illustrates the proportion of women in leadership roles in 2000 and 2025 in the diocese, highlighting the growth over this period.

Table 5: Percentage of Diocesan Leadership Roles Filled by Women in a Regional Diocese

Role	2000 (%)	2025 (%)
School Principal	47	88
Assistant Principal Religious Education (APRE)	-	74
CEO Office Staff	68	76
Diocesan Staff	50	83
Childcare Administration Office – all roles [1]	-	99
Centacare Board/Management [2]	40	45

[1.] Diocesan responsibility for the childcare organisation commenced in 2020. [2.] The total number of people in board or management roles declined while the number of women in these roles remained unchanged.

Furthermore, progress within the diocesan team also included the appointment of women as Directors of Finance and of Clergy Formation and Ministry. While aiming to maintain gender balance, the diocese observed a growing enthusiasm among staff to pursue APRE positions—particularly among men. Previously, the diocese had introduced a novel leadership model in several parishes between the early 2000s and 2016 where female lay and religious Pastoral Leaders worked collaboratively with semi-retired priests. One Pastoral Leader later assumed national responsibilities, serving on the Council for Australian Catholic Women, including a term as its Chair.

Several other dioceses provided current data (as of May 2025) on women in leadership across their diocesan entities. In one diocese, at least half of the leadership teams in the Chancery, CatholicCare and diocesan education offices were women, along with 75 per cent of the Religious Education Coordinators. A 2023 decision to involve more women in seminarian formation led to a shift in the seminary faculty from being entirely male clergy to one that included two women by May 2025. Another regional diocese reported that by 2020, women held over 50 per cent of leadership roles in diocesan bodies, including schools and shared services.

Since 2000, women have held a wide range of leadership roles across dioceses, including:

- Diocesan Chancellor and Vice Chancellor
- Advisor to the Archbishop
- Chief Operating Officer
- Archdiocesan or diocesan office director or department manager in the areas of:
    - Aboriginal Catholic Ministry
    - Adult faith formation
    - Advisor to the Archbishop
    - Chief Operating Officer
    - Diocesan Caritas Offices
    - Diocesan Childcare
    - General Counsel
    - Governance and Corporate Services
    - Human Resources
    - Interdiocesan Tribunal of the Catholic Church
    - Justice, Ecology and Development
    - Liturgy
    - Mission
    - Pastoral care including Directors, Coordinators and Pastoral Associates
    - Pastoral Life and Mission
    - Safeguarding
    - Youth Ministry
- Deputy Master at Catholic Theological College
- Compulsory board members of a vocational discernment facility
- CEO of Villa Maria Homes (Aged Care)
- CEO, Chair, member and directors of Centacare/CatholicCare bodies
- Executive Director, Director, Commissioner and a Chair of Diocesan Education bodies
- Diocesan council role (in addition to pastoral councils)
- Director and Trustee of MPJPs

In several dioceses, these were the first female appointments to such roles.

MPJPs reported that between 2013 and 2018, women comprised 50 to 60 per cent of members on trustee councils and boards. At the micro level, there was greater variation in the proportion of women appointed as canonical stewards (between 29 per cent and 100 per cent) and board directors (0-100%) by individual MPJPs.

Despite this progress, gaps remain in some areas. One participant noted difficulty in identifying any visible change in gender balance at the parish level, particularly on compulsory finance committees, suggesting that more intentional decision-making is needed. One archdiocese acknowledged the ongoing need to ask how women could be included in every level of the Church's decision-making process. As with Proposal 1, it was also observed that appointing like-minded individuals when increasing the number of women in leadership does not necessarily diversify the voices represented.

The interview data affirmed that the inclusion of women in diocesan leadership roles has been a fairly consistent process. Women are appointed to these positions across both Eastern and Western eparchies and dioceses. However, in the absence of formal reporting systems, there is limited evidence regarding the balance of women and men at this level.

The evidence indicates that women have been appointed in recognition of their capabilities and professionalism, rather than token gestures. Their presence is acknowledged as a part of an evolving environment where women have a place and a voice. In some dioceses, there was a clear commitment to appointing women to leadership positions, though this was not always part of a formal program or systematic effort. One participant recalled the need to regularly highlight gender disparities when filling roles for new projects, noting that recruiters often nominated men for most positions due to an unconscious bias. In another case, some appointments were perceived as reinforcing the status quo rather than challenging it.

One participant observed that, although the Synod on Synodality identified women's involvement in leadership and decision-making as a pressing need, progress has been "patchy", particularly at the parish level. The presence of Church leaders with less egalitarian views than those expressed in the *SJSS2000* was seen as a contributing factor to this lack of change.

Participants also provided examples from the education sector—a field where most employees are women—illustrating different approaches to leadership appointments. In one diocese, a deliberate and successful effort was made to increase the number of women in school leadership roles. In another, departing school principals who were religious women and men were replaced predominantly by male principals. While it was unclear whether this reflected an attempt to balance leadership roles, the interview participant noted that although female leadership and women's knowledge were valued, support for female leaders was not applied consistently.

Proposal 3

In dioceses where pastoral councils are not established and where the Bishop judges their formation to be appropriate, they be formed, and include a balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity so that women's participation in decision-making and leadership may be increased.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Some dioceses established Diocesan Pastoral Councils (DPCs) shortly after the *SJSS2000* to reflect gender and role balance, though many of them were later disbanded or went into hiatus. Synodal processes have prompted renewed efforts to form or re-form councils with inclusive membership, reflecting the spirit of co-responsibility. However, implementation remains inconsistent, and the absence of councils in some dioceses continues to limit opportunities for women's participation in decision-making.

Details of Progress Made

Two dioceses advised that they established DPCs shortly after the release of the *SJSS2000*, although both bodies have since been decommissioned. Another diocese reported a longstanding commitment to gender balance on consultative diocesan councils, with inclusive practices predating the *SJSS2000*.

In a previous study commissioned by the NCPR, 14 of the 16 dioceses that responded reported the creation of DPCs prior to the year 2000.[221] Five reported having functioning DPCs when the *SJSS2000* was promulgated, and one diocese reported a continuously functioning DPC until 2021, when the report was published.[222] The most significant factors that influenced the existence of Australian DPCs were the local ordinary's "attitude, energy, and enthusiasm".[223]

The need to inform and educate clergy on an ongoing basis—particularly priests from overseas—to support diverse advisory bodies was identified by one regional diocese as part of its response to this Proposal. This was addressed through clergy in-services and seminars. The same diocese reported that seminarians are taught the value of gender balance on consultative committees at both diocesan and parish levels. One archdiocese revealed that this matter was discussed during episcopal visitations and conversations with parish priests.

Another NCPR study using data from dioceses revealed that by 2018, ten dioceses had DPCs, with significant proportions of women holding roles as Chairs (55%) and members of such councils (45%).[224]

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[221] Damien John Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils: An Australian Historical Study* (pub. by author, 2021), 23, 63, https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Report_Diocesan-Pastoral-Councils_-Damian-Gleeson.pdf.
[222] Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils*, 23, 63.
[223] Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils*, 82.
[224] Boland et al., *The Light from the Southern Cross,* 171, 176.

In response to the current evaluation, some dioceses reported more recent developments. One diocese formed its DPC within the last decade while an archdiocese that did not yet have a DPC reported it was aiming for at least 40 per cent representation of women in leadership and governance roles.

All responding dioceses supported inclusive governance models with their diocesan and/or parish councils. Two reported a focus on gender balance, while another detailed the broader mix outlined in the *SJSS2000*, which included female, male, religious, lay and clergy members. One regional diocese noted that inclusive membership ensured a wide range of views informed decision-making.

More recently, DPCs are emerging as a fruit of synodality. Two recent examples are the announcements of DPCs being formed in one archdiocese and re-formed in a regional diocese as part of the diocesan renewal journeys. In both instances, the process affirms a commitment to drawing together lay, religious and clergy, by encouraging participation and providing links for nominating DPC members or submitting expressions of interest—in the spirit of the *SJSS2000*.

The interviews highlighted the formation of additional regional diocesan councils in recent years, comprising women and men, laypeople, religious and clergy. While these councils may not have been established in direct response to the *SJSS2000*, their membership profiles align with its vision. Positive experiences were also noted in some parish and deanery councils and other diocesan bodies. However, in certain cases, changing the representative mix on councils proved challenging, while in others, delays in planning hindered their establishment.

Proposal 4

A database of Catholic women and their qualifications and skills be developed to help promote the participation of women in the Catholic Church, especially their involvement in decision-making processes and leadership roles.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was limited and generally weak. Limited diocesan and national-level initiatives were made to create databases of Catholic women and their skills, with no evidence of ongoing maintenance. Current reliance on informal networks and social media limits visibility for some qualified women, while in other instances, renders databases redundant. A renewed focus on structured talent identification could provide a stronger basis for future implementation.

Details of Progress Made

A recommendation stemming from a diocese's operational review was to develop a talent bank of prospective council and committee members by advertising openly through channels such as parish bulletins or pastoral councils. A similar approach was recommended for deaneries in an archdiocese. It is unknown whether the recommendations in either of these dioceses were implemented or if the data collected was stored for future reference. It was also unclear whether these diocesan projects were ongoing or 'one-off' initiatives.

One regional diocese adopted this Proposal, but instead of collecting names of potential candidates, it focussed on monitoring its employment practices. A database was created to track the number of women employed across diocesan agencies and to identify changes. This initiative arose from a request by the diocesan women's council.

At the national level, the OPW developed a database of Catholic women, detailing their qualifications and skills. It invited women with expertise in particular areas to sign up, with the intent of being "prepared to share their gifts with others on boards, panels, as guest speakers, presenters and facilitators".[225] There was, however, no evidence to suggest that this database still exists or if it had been further developed.

Some interview participants were aware of the national database but did not recall using it, while others believed it had never been developed. In practice, informal systems operated, where women were approached because they or their families were known locally. This was identified as problematic, as it excluded skilled women who were less outgoing or unknown. In today's context, some noted that social media profiles could render such a database redundant.

[225] Staff Writers, "Giving Women More Presence", *The Catholic Leader*, February 28, 2015, https://catholicleader.com.au/past-features/giving-women-more-presence/.

Proposal 5

That qualified women be encouraged to act as Church spokespersons and as guest speakers at Church conferences, ceremonies and functions.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, with weak to moderate implementation. Women have been engaged as guest speakers at Church events, conferences and forums. They have also contributed as presenters in theological, pastoral and social justice contexts, with technological advances amplifying their visibility through livestreaming and podcasts, thereby increasing the impact beyond what was initially imagined. The appointment of women as official Church spokespersons remains less common, with the exception of some female guest speakers, school principals and women in other key roles. Recent diocesan initiatives, including women-led podcasts and synodal presentations, indicate a growing recognition of women's voices.

Details of Progress Made

This Proposal was adopted in a variety of ways by several Eastern and Western dioceses or eparchies. One archdiocese reported that female guest speakers regularly act as their Church spokespersons and provided a list of key diocesan events featuring female presenters and a regional diocese reported that female principals serve as spokespersons for their schools. However, these interpretations and recognitions are not widely shared. One respondent observed that while women act as official spokespersons for MPJPs, they have not held this capacity in Australian dioceses.

Many dioceses provided extensive evidence of qualified women engaged to speak at Church events. These included local, national and international female experts across various fields, as well as representatives from other faith traditions. One diocese remarked that this practice has helped promote women's presence in theological discourse.

Technological advances over the last 25 years have likely amplified the impact of this Proposal on women's participation beyond what was envisioned when the *SJSS2000* was published. Many events are now hosted in hybrid formats—combining both in-person and online elements—or are exclusively livestreamed. Recordings of these events are made available to a broader audience for extended periods, increasing the visibility of women's contributions. In addition to engaging women as guest speakers, one metropolitan diocese reported women's involvement in a podcast—an emerging medium that further enhances visibility and which was not imagined in 2000.

A few interview participants reported serving as spokespersons for their dioceses and fulfilling speaking engagements at various Church events, although suggesting that factors such as personal beliefs and expertise were more likely to influence participation than being a woman. Some noted that many women in the pews are unknown and their skills are underutilised in this area. One participant observed that while there is a growing recognition of more women participating as spokespersons and event speakers, the absence of an organised approach means there is still a tendency to engage men, reflecting patterns seen in wider society.

Proposal 6

That women's needs in relation to participation in the Church be made a financial priority for the Church.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Women's participation needs were prioritised through funding for leadership programs, scholarships and formation opportunities. Recent diocesan planning and initiatives include funding for postgraduate study and leadership formation, indicating a renewed commitment to making women's participation a financial priority. However, adoption remains uneven, and some dioceses report limited resources for these initiatives.

Details of Progress Made

Information provided by some dioceses indicated that women's participation needs were prioritised financially and addressed in various ways over time. Early responses to the *SJSS2000* included leadership training for women (2001) and training for DPC members, highlighting women's inclusion in decision-making within a regional diocese (2005). In 2004, one archdiocese established a staffed Office for Women in response to a request from its diocesan women's advisory committee. The local archbishop acknowledged the value of this funding, noting that enhancing women's leadership was key to fostering inclusion and welcome in parishes. Limited evidence from the ACBC archives suggests that dioceses contributed to the funding of the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship in its early years.

More recent developments were also reported. In the early 2020s, diocesan Councils for Catholic Women were formed in two dioceses. One metropolitan Council undertook a range of activities including advocacy, theological seminars, newsletters and book clubs. Another archdiocese established a Women's Think Tank to draft proposals for its diocesan synod, which were later incorporated into action plans. These included the creation of a diocesan role focused on the full and co-responsible participation of lay women and men in the diocese.

Additional diocesan initiatives further support this Proposal. These include, in one diocese, a Catholic Women's podcast hosted by women and funding for a few women to complete formal qualifications, such as the ACBC Leadership for Mission Program. Another archdiocese shared plans for a pilot program to support postgraduate study for women and men committed to sharing their skills within the diocesan community. Elsewhere, a diocesan Women's Conference was hosted to empower women with the knowledge and support needed to address contemporary challenges while deepening their faith and understanding of their unique contributions.

The interviews revealed another example of a financial commitment that was prioritised, namely a diocese establishing an award to honour female leaders. However, in the absence of universal adoption, contrasting views emerged regarding this Proposal. One participant strongly asserted that no funds were allocated for women's training, in contrast to the financial support provided to seminarians to study abroad. In another instance, funding was noted as lacking in some areas, particularly in theology.

Proposal 7

Bishops, when pointing to the signs of the times, acknowledge positive developments in the role and status of women.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, with moderate to strong implementation. Bishops have acknowledged positive developments in the role and status of women, particularly through the expansion of opportunities for them to assume new roles, as reflected in diocesan publications and national statements such as the Plenary Council decrees. Women have increasingly assumed leadership positions across multiple areas of Church life—including diocesan governance, health care, social services and education—as well as within broader Australian society. However, adoption remains uneven, with some perceiving progress to date as limited.

Details of Progress Made

Evidence provided about the adoption of this Proposal revealed that positive developments were acknowledged in articles highlighting women's participation, particularly when women assumed roles that had previously been unavailable to them.

One example, featured in two newspaper articles, recognised lay involvement—especially that of a woman—as reflective of contemporary developments. During a priest shortage in 2004, a woman was appointed to lead a parish, a role she held until 2013, when overseas clergy were contracted to address the shortage. Her leadership was seen as impactful, introducing a new model of parish life; however, it was not continued or replicated elsewhere.

Women's contributions in other areas of Church life were also recognised. These included appointments to significant diocesan roles such as Vicar for Religious in 2014, the establishment of a Women's Think Tank and the inclusion of female speakers at Church events. A regional diocese reported that over 90 per cent of its Catholic Education Mission and Learning team was female, although in contrast to approximately 20 per cent in its Information Technology team. In another diocese, a Ministry of Lay Ecclesial Women program was established by the bishop to support women's fuller participation in diocesan leadership and to foster the feminine dimension of faith.

At the national level, the preamble to Decree Four of the Plenary Council offers further evidence of the bishops' recognition of the evolving role and status of women. It notes that since the early twentieth century, growing awareness of the equal dignity of women and men has shaped Australian society, while also acknowledging that inequality persists and that further progress is needed.[226] While developments in this area are acknowledged to the point that it is believed to be the norm in one archdiocese, some still consider that there has been little or no change.

[226] Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, *Decree 4*, 1.

Proposal 8

More women be appointed to marriage tribunals and, where necessary, be funded to undertake specialist training.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Women have served in tribunal roles—including as auditors, assessors and judges—and, in some cases, received funding for specialist training. Recent appointments and diocesan plans to support postgraduate study in Canon Law indicate ongoing progress, though comprehensive data on the number and proportion of women in these roles is lacking.

Details of Progress Made

Several responses were received in support of this Proposal, indicating that women have taken on roles across all aspects of tribunal operations—including as administrators, auditors, assessors, defenders of the bond and judges. In one case, clear progress was evident and showed a diocese reported that its first female tribunal appointment occurred in 1987 and that today, the majority of personnel in the Interdiocesan Tribunal for NSW and the ACT are lay women. This same diocese also noted that funding has been made available for women to undertake specialist training, with some completing their Licentiate in Canon Law at overseas institutions and others participating in the Institute of Tribunal Practice, which has been offered in Australia since 1977.

In other dioceses, implementation has been more limited and inconsistent. For example, one diocese reported that the possibility of recruiting women for canonical roles and funding their training was discussed at a Clergy Life and Ministry meeting in 2009, but no follow-up action was documented. Specific examples of women in tribunal roles were provided by other dioceses, including appointments as Directors of Interdiocesan and Diocesan Tribunal Offices and as Tribunal Coordinators. However, no information was available regarding the number or proportion of women currently serving in these roles.

Reports on funding for specialist training were similarly sparse. One religious congregation noted that some dioceses financed training for women to work in tribunals, though no further details were provided. One archdiocese expressed its intention to support postgraduate qualifications in various fields, including canon law.

Some viewed tribunal training as consistent with the broader goal of increasing the number of women studying canon law. However, one female interviewee who was invited to join the tribunal expressed uncertainty about whether the diocese would have funded her training had she accepted its invitation to join the tribunal.

Proposal 9

The employing authority give just remuneration and employment conditions for women in the Church as a priority.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Compliance with national employment legislation and equitable pay practices supported implementation. Measures included equitable pay policies, transparent recruitment processes and parental leave provisions. Recent payroll reviews and gender equity audits demonstrate proactive efforts to address pay gaps. However, isolated cases of inconsistent remuneration and unjust employment practices highlight the need for continued vigilance.

Details of Progress Made

Several responses were received to this Proposal, indicating that concrete steps have been taken to ensure that the Church and its employers provide fair remuneration and employment conditions for women. Some dioceses demonstrated consistent progress. For example, one regional diocese identified ACCER's guidelines in 2001 as a practical tool for reviewing employment conditions and recommended a review for all diocesan employees. In 2009, it examined the salaries of women in parish roles and explored wage equity, followed by a 2010 review of diocesan school employment policies to assist flexibility and equity in women's pay.

Another archdiocese provided a detailed account of current measures to support just employment practices for women. These included formal policies and strategies, such as equitable and inclusive hiring, inclusive workplace practices, transparent performance management systems and equal access to professional development. A payroll review was conducted in the archdiocese in 2023 to identify and address any gender pay gaps in equivalent roles.

A further example of diocesan action included the implementation of a parental leave policy by an urban diocese in 2024. One respondent noted that Church employers are required to comply with Australia's legislative framework, which mandates fair remuneration and employment conditions for all employees—including women—suggesting that such practices may be more widespread.

Conversely, concerns were raised about inconsistent implementation. One participant cited a case where a lay Pastoral Associate's role was dissolved following the appointment of a priest to lead the parish, which was perceived as an example of unjust employment practice.

The experiences shared by an interviewee highlighted further inconsistencies. A religious woman worked full-time in one diocese for over two years without pay and was eventually back-paid with a lump sum. Later, she worked full-time in another diocese for a longer period for no pay, according to the arrangement between her order and the diocese. Although the diocese eventually paid her at an unspecified point, neither diocese provided the full stipend. Current procedures identify stipends as

congregational rather than individual payments,[227] and inconsistencies in payment were seen as barriers to just practices. Other experiences shared by interviewees show that lay women have been treated differently. One woman who began her ministry 25-30 years ago was initially paid the equivalent of a religious sister's stipend, whereas in 2025, she received the same salary as lay male employees in similar roles. This trend toward more equitable remuneration for women was also evident in another diocese and an archdiocese. There is a perception that this matter has been addressed more regularly in recent years through annual WGEA reporting.

[227] "Stipends", Catholic Religious Australia, accessed 13 January 2026, https://www.catholicreligious.org.au/stipends

THEME 2: PARISH PASTORAL ASSOCIATES

This theme incorporates the following proposals:

10. The role of parish Pastoral Associate be actively developed and promoted by the Bishops where appropriate.
11. Women's participation in parish life be increased through the employment of more lay women in the role of Pastoral Associate.
12. Where it does not occur, parish Pastoral Associates receive fair contracts.

Proposal 10

The role of parish Pastoral Associate be actively developed and promoted by the Bishops where appropriate.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses in the early years and the initial implementation was strong; however, more recent implementation has been limited and generally weak. Dioceses actively promoted Pastoral Associate roles, though numbers have since declined and many dioceses have discontinued these positions due to financial constraints, shifting priorities and the growth of specialised ministries. However, the significance of the Pastoral Associate role is widely recognised and recent efforts to reinvest in lay leadership formation suggest potential pathways to revitalise this ministry in newer ways.

Details of Progress Made

Evidence of gatherings of Pastoral Associates and meetings with clergy points to an active ministry in the early 2000s across several dioceses. This momentum has declined sharply in recent years, leading to the discontinuation of these roles in many areas.

Examples of the decline were notable. In one diocese, references to Pastoral Associates ceased after 2005, as women in ministry were shifted under the Social Justice group. Another diocese disbanded its association of pastoral ministers in 2024 after four decades of service. In a third diocese, coordinated support was once available, with clergy appointed to accompany Pastoral Associates. The diocese also contributed staff and other support to the Pastoral Ministry Network, which offered formation for pastoral ministry for several years. However, the 2024 Diocesan Pastoral Plan made no mention of Pastoral Associates, despite acknowledging their past contributions. Similarly, one archdiocese reported discontinuing its Ministry Formation Program for lay Pastoral Associates in 2012.

Current evidence of dioceses promoting these roles was limited. One archdiocese was an exception, where Pastoral Associates participated in formation courses in 2021, leading diocesan initiatives to create welcoming parishes and receiving training in communication and cultural awareness for pastorally sensitive issues.

The interviews signalled that financial constraints in parishes and dioceses, as well as shifting priorities, have been major factors in the decline. One religious congregation reported that one of its religious sisters lost her role as a Pastoral Associate due to a lack of funding. It was observed, however, that resources would likely have been found to bring a priest from overseas, raising concerns about clericalism and the undervaluing of women's contributions. Other factors included a lack of clarity about the role and the growing presence of overseas clergy unfamiliar with local contexts.

In many cases, Pastoral Associate roles had been replaced by more specialised positions, such as sacramental coordinators, catechists and parish managers. The growing emphasis on the permanent diaconate was also seen to have displaced Pastoral Associate roles, a change that disproportionately affected women since the diaconate is reserved for men.

Where Pastoral Associates remained, their roles varied widely and lacked consistency. Many served as volunteers, with minimal support and often without access to formation or professional development. Reports highlighted unrealistic expectations, limited co-responsibility and gender bias from clergy, underscoring the need for systemic investment in training, mentoring and support networks.

Despite the decline, the significance of Pastoral Associates in strengthening parish life and community engagement was still recognised. Some interview participants called for urgent reinvestment in this ministry to ensure sustainable leadership and equitable treatment within ecclesial structures.

Proposal 11

Women's participation in parish life be increased through the employment of more lay women in the role of Pastoral Associate.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was limited and generally weak. While women historically served as Pastoral Associates, the role has largely disappeared, replaced by specialised positions such as sacramental coordinators and youth ministers. Reasons provided include financial constraints, lack of formation funding and shifting priorities. Women continue to serve in parish pastoral ministries, often under different titles. Recent diocesan plans to identify new lay leadership roles provide further opportunities, but investment in women's ministry remains limited.

Details of Progress Made

Many dioceses reported appointing lay and religious women as Pastoral Associates, though reliable data to confirm these trends was scarce. One diocese provided detailed figures: in 2009, 21 of 22 Pastoral Associates were women, six were religious, 13 received a wage or stipend and eight served voluntarily. By 2020, 14 of 17 were women, three of whom were religious; nine were paid, five were volunteers and an additional 12 assisted voluntarily. This, however, was an isolated example.

As fewer dioceses employed women as Pastoral Associates and numbers continued to decline, little or no funding was reported for the formation of lay people for this role. Other factors contributing to the decline in women holding these positions included a reported lack of interest among lay women with career aspirations and financial needs that parishes could not meet. Additionally, there were missing generations of younger women who were not actively engaged in parish life and did not view these roles as aspirational. Overall, the lack of employment opportunities for lay women and men trained in ministry was emphasised, though some exceptions existed. Two archdioceses reported formation programmes in place for current and future lay leaders. At the same time, two other dioceses had actions in their diocesan plans to support pastoral assessments and discernment processes to identify new lay leadership roles, thereby increasing capacity for ministry and mission.

Historically, parish Pastoral Associates served across diverse ministries, including caring for youth, families, liturgy, sacramental programs, RCIA, outreach, grief support, parish-school liaison and leadership in parishes without a resident priest. As roles have become more specialised, women are being employed in these capacities under different titles. For example, one diocese estimated that, using various equivalent terms, nearly every parish employed one or more lay people, some of whom were engaged as volunteers. Of its 14 people employed under titles such as Parish Administrator, Parish Assistant, Pastoral Associate, Sacramental Coordinator or Youth Worker, 11 were women.

The interviews confirmed that Pastoral Associates are rarely seen in some regions, with participants noting the role was largely absent from their experience. Parish employment has shifted toward specialised positions such as youth ministers, sacramental coordinators and family educators, replacing the former generic Pastoral Associate role. In some cases, these specialised roles are held by women, particularly young mothers, who act as links between parish and school communities.

Proposal 12

Where it does not occur, parish Pastoral Associates receive fair contracts.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Efforts to provide fair contracts and employment guidelines for Pastoral Associates varied widely, with some developing extensive processes and others making only sporadic efforts. Recent evidence suggests improved employment standards in certain dioceses, but gaps remain—particularly in parishes with limited resources—underscoring the need for stronger diocesan oversight.

Details of Progress Made

Dioceses can no longer rely on religious sisters and brothers to fill Pastoral Associate roles—whether voluntarily or for a stipend—and must find ways to adequately fund the employment, which often requires greater financial resources. These roles are typically paid for by parishes, which generally have fewer financial resources than diocesan offices. As a result, fair remuneration has often been patchy and inconsistent.

Some dioceses have adopted this Proposal, with much progress evident. For example, one diocese took the issue of fair contracts seriously, developing employment guidelines, contract processes and conditions—a professional approach that continues today. One archdiocese reported that its current strategic leadership and governance plan included employment equity.

The lack of centralised diocesan data on the number of Pastoral Associates employed by parishes, their roles, or working conditions made it difficult for dioceses to evaluate their employment standards. However, records from the previous two years in one diocese indicated that wage and salary levels were similar to those of other parish support staff.

There was evidence of sporadic efforts elsewhere. One diocese reported chancery discussions in 2007 about hiring female Pastoral Associates, but no budget was approved. In 2009, recommendations included improving clarity, leave entitlements and pay scales for Parish Pastoral Associate contracts. However, there was no evidence that these were implemented.

Other dioceses clearly struggled. An archdiocese noted that in parishes with limited resources, pastoral ministry roles were often deprioritised in favour of administrative staff. Those who still served worked minimal hours, often without remuneration aligned with their qualifications or leadership responsibilities.

The interviews confirmed the inconsistency of adoption across dioceses. One former Parish Pastoral Associate described the excellent standards and financial arrangements in their archdiocese as of 2018, including expectations for professional development. A second participant noted that fair contracts are the norm for parish employees, given the current legal requirements in place. However, a third participant indicated that while earlier efforts for fairer contracts had been successful, this was no longer the case.

THEME 3: FORMATION FOR LEADERSHIP IN MISSION AND MINISTRY

This theme incorporates the following proposals:

13. Clergy, religious and lay people be encouraged and trained to exercise their ministries in a more collaborative way.
14. Bishops request each theological institute or faculty and adult education centre in Australia to explore the theological and pastoral implications of the Report, for example through public lectures, faculty seminars and published papers.
15. If and where it does not occur, funding be provided for the employment and training, including in ethics, of those involved in hospital ministries.
16. Clergy and others in leadership positions in the Church be given the opportunity for continuing education in keeping with other professions.
17. Where it does not occur, qualified women be employed as educators, counsellors and formation personnel in seminaries and/or theological institutions.
18. Lay women as well as lay men act as marriage celebrants in accordance with canon 1112.
19. Where it does not occur, qualified and experienced women be involved in pre-marriage programs.
20. Greater attention be given to the education of clergy, religious and laity towards attitudinal change in recognising equal value, equal rights of women and men within the lay faithful of the Church.
21. The Bishops promote contemporary Catholic female role models, especially for young women.
22. A range of faith education opportunities, including formation in liturgy, be provided for women in rural communities.

Proposal 13

Clergy, religious and lay people be encouraged and trained to exercise their ministries in a more collaborative way.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Shared formation programs and workshops promoting collaborative ministry among clergy, religious and laity were clearly evidenced in many dioceses. Recent initiatives include diocesan strategic plans for co-responsible leadership and scholarship programs for lay formation. However, implementation remains uneven, and shared formation for clergy, religious and lay ministers is still limited.

Details of Progress Made

Steady progress in collaborative ministry was evident in several dioceses. One demonstrated a wide range of initiatives between 2001 and 2024, including shared leadership workshops, seminars and retreats for clergy and lay people, joint formation events for sacramental preparation and adult faith formation, joint pastoral planning and pastoral placement programs and the renewal of leadership models for ministry. In the same diocese, the long-standing Diocesan Association of Pastoral Ministry—created to encourage communication and resource sharing for lay people, religious sisters and deacons—was closed in 2024 after 40 years and replaced with the *Called & Gifted* discernment process to reinvigorate collaborative ministry.

Several archdioceses have taken steps towards collaboration. One archdiocese intentionally promoted collaboration by establishing an Archdiocesan working group representing key stakeholders in formation to enable collaboration and efficiencies in implementing its strategic plan. Additionally, it was also recommended that a full-time Executive Officer for Participation role be established within the Episcopal Office to design, implement and resource a strategic plan for the full co-responsible participation of lay women and men in the life and mission of the Church. Another archdiocese reported initiatives to encourage communities to be locally grounded, collaborative and open to new expressions of faith and mission—although specific details were not provided. Likewise, as part of its five-year pastoral plan, another archdiocese offered a Parish Pastoral Council formation program through workshops and seminars, with its first consultation drawing around 50 attendees, including priests, deacons and laypeople.

Several dioceses demonstrated varied approaches to collaborative formation. For example, in one diocese, schools and parishes shared responsibility for sustaining and strengthening the Catholic identity of the school community through ongoing staff formation, clergy and lay-led planning for liturgies and joint participation in key events to model collaborative ministry. This was supported by frameworks and resources for inducting and forming new leaders in school and parish settings. In another diocese, Catholic education worked closely with the diocese to promote and train lay people for Church ministry roles.

Some dioceses also showed progress in renewing their formation courses, with mixed success. One archdiocese launched a pathway program in 2022 to recognise theological studies formally, with a large portion of the participants being women. Efforts were also evident through diocesan funding of scholarships to promote more inclusivity in theological studies. In another diocese, collaboration with an education institution opened theological formation to clergy, seminarians and laity. Recently, another diocese financially supported six women to undertake postgraduate studies in scripture, theology and pastoral practice. Conversely, the closure of a long-standing program in one archdiocese created a significant gap in leadership development and it was reported that a new resource remained underutilised and poorly understood.

One religious congregation raised an important observation about collaboration, noting the lack of collaborative formation between seminarians and lay ministers, describing the absence of shared financial and academic seminary resources as a missed opportunity to foster a community of practice grounded in real-world experiences.

Interview participants suggested that despite various efforts, implementation of collaborative formation remained inconsistent across different dioceses. For example, in one regional/rural diocese it was estimated that more than 200 people participated in a Christian formation course that included elements of ecclesiology and the theology of the Church, delivered by lay and ordained facilitators. In contrast, another diocese reported that such training was offered only to clergy. Elsewhere, collaboration was emphasised in principle but without creating additional opportunities for shared formation.

Several examples of collaborative ministry illustrated how it operated in different contexts. In small parishes in one regional/rural diocese, partnerships between priests and women were essential to address pastoral needs, with priests recognising the necessity of lay involvement. At the diocesan level, another diocese reported how clergy and seminarians collaborated with those in the diocesan offices. More broadly, it was suggested that the Church has moved towards operating more collaboratively as evidenced by the Plenary Council and the Synod.

Women's involvement in collaborative ministry has been particularly notable, with interviewees pointing to increasing participation of lay women in leading Sunday liturgies in the absence of a priest, as well as serving as readers, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist and ministers to the sick. It was further noted that the judicious institution of lay women (and men) as lectors and catechists could further promote their involvement, given the broader responsibilities associated with these roles and the need for appropriate formation, preparation and training.

Proposal 14

Bishops request each theological institute or faculty and adult education centre in Australia to explore the theological and pastoral implications of the Report, for example through public lectures, faculty seminars and published papers.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was limited and generally weak. While there are indications that some requests may have been made, no direct evidence was found to confirm formal action by dioceses. Progress has largely occurred through isolated initiatives within diocesan education sectors. More recently, some dioceses have proposed new research and formation pathways—such as postgraduate education and inclusive theology programs—signalling a renewed focus on this area.

Details of Progress Made

Few responses were received for this Proposal, and none provided evidence that dioceses formally requested theological institutes or faculties to explore the theological and pastoral implications of the *Woman and Man* report.

However, some activity was evident in diocesan education sectors. For example, Catholic education in a regional diocese reported that the implications of *Woman and Man* were considered shortly after the release of the *SJSS2000*. A four-part classroom resource for senior students was produced in 2001 by a collaborative team led by a lay woman, with contributions from diocesan representatives, school leaders and clergy. The continued use of inclusive language in readings and prayers—particularly at diocesan gatherings—was also seen as an indication of significant discussion of matters related to the Report in schools at the time, although no records were available to confirm this.

More recent progress has occurred in some dioceses, albeit some in loosely related ways. One archdiocese invited parishes to form or strengthen social justice groups, suggesting book clubs that study Catholic Social Teaching documents, including the ACBC's Social Justice Statements. Another archdiocese proposed new research to explore the theological foundations underpinning the multiple understandings of women in the Church. It also outlined plans to support postgraduate education and formation for lay women and men in areas such as the role of women within the Church and inclusive theology.

Interview participants who addressed this Proposal recalled that some work was undertaken in the initial years. More recently, one participant observed that the request for educational bodies to explore *Woman and Man's* theological and pastoral implications has returned to focus.

Proposal 15

If and where it does not occur, funding be provided for the employment and training, including in ethics, of those involved in hospital ministries.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Several dioceses provided training and support through diocesan programs, CatholicCare and hospital partnerships. External, self-funded training was also available in some cases. Ethics training was provided in a few instances, though overall implementation remained uneven.

Details of Progress Made

Several dioceses made efforts to support hospital ministries through funding and training initiatives, although implementation varied and remained limited in some areas. Some dioceses reported a consistent approach. For example, in one diocese, CatholicCare coordinated the hospital chaplaincy program, providing lay, religious and ordained Catholic chaplains with ongoing professional training throughout the year, including participation in formation days and access to clinical supervision.

An archdiocese reported that a large Catholic hospital organisation, which is the sole Catholic organisation providing acute hospital services, invested significantly in ongoing training and formation for its caregivers, of whom 80 per cent are women. Its comprehensive ethics training addressed general and specific matters, including the clinical and pastoral care of those contemplating voluntary assisted dying. Outside the hospital network, clinical pastoral education training was available in the archdiocese through a major public hospital.

Three regional dioceses reported initiatives, such as diocesan scholarships for postgraduate study in theology, scripture and pastoral practice, including the Clinical Pastoral Education course, which supported some lay and ordained hospital chaplains. In one diocese, prior to COVID-19, up to 600 volunteers were reported to be involved in the regional hospital's pastoral care team, many of whom were Catholic women, although this number declined to 30 immediately following COVID-19, and no subsequent efforts to improve the situation were evident.

Despite these efforts, one participant noted that many laymen and women serving in hospital ministries remained unable to administer sacraments, such as anointing of the sick, which was perceived as limiting their capacity to provide comprehensive pastoral care. It was suggested that expanding sacramental permissions could strengthen continuity of care, thereby enhancing the Church's pastoral ministry.

Proposal 16

Clergy and others in leadership positions in the Church be given the opportunity for continuing education in keeping with other professions.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Continuing education opportunities were offered through retreats, workshops and formation programs. Some dioceses offered structured pathways for lay leaders. However, implementation was uneven, with some dioceses relying on ad hoc initiatives and others planning new programs to address gaps. A consistent national approach was not evident.

Details of Progress Made

Several dioceses provided continuing education opportunities for clergy and other Church leaders, although the extent and consistency of these initiatives varied. In some places, the evidence showed that structured programs were sustained over many years, while in others, formation occurred sporadically or was recently reintroduced after periods of inactivity.

Submissions from two regional/rural dioceses included timelines detailing the educational opportunities provided since 2000. In one regional diocese, a long-standing practice offered regular opportunities for clergy and lay leaders to participate in formation programs, including annual retreats, leadership workshops and joint meetings with diocesan priests. In another diocese, educational and formation offerings to a group of leaders and pastoral associates developed over time, settling into a pattern of structured formation and retreat days. Two examples from a third diocese showed that a short, three-day course open to lay women and men, clergy and seminarians was well attended and that the formation of a group of female leaders was sustained for several years until the numbers became too small to continue.

Several dioceses reported initiatives that combined in-person and online learning. For example, one diocese hosted public lectures and conversations with prominent speakers from at least 2014, while another provided induction programs for priests new to the diocese, followed by encouragement to undertake Clinical Pastoral Education.

Catholic Education Offices in two dioceses reported offering comprehensive continuing education programs for Catholic school leaders, including formal studies, professional learning and in-house formation, aimed at strengthening leadership capacity and ensuring alignment with the Catholic mission and values.

Elsewhere, gaps were noted. One archdiocese acknowledged that the closure of its previous formation program created a significant void, prompting plans to introduce new initiatives in 2025. Another archdiocese identified the need for resources to support governance and leadership formation, particularly for emerging leaders. One regional/rural diocese reported rebuilding its Chancery staff, with new roles focused on the formation of all Catholics, particularly parish leaders.

Interview participants confirmed that while some dioceses maintained structured systems for ongoing formation—compulsory for clergy and lay leaders in some instances—others relied on ad hoc opportunities. Formation for lay leaders was evident in some dioceses but absent in others, with participants highlighting the importance of providing training on mission and values, especially for lay leaders recruited from secular environments who lacked familiarity with ecclesiology. The MPJPs noted that formation was treated as a gift in their organisations, in contrast to the limited opportunities available in parish contexts.

Although various efforts were made to provide continuing education for clergy and lay leaders, there was no consistent national approach. Participants observed that learning to work collaboratively with women in leadership often occurred informally, suggesting that structured formation in this area would be beneficial.

Proposal 17

Where it does not occur, qualified women be employed as educators, counsellors and formation personnel in seminaries and/or theological institutions.

Evaluation

Adopted by several dioceses, supported by generally moderate implementation. Women have been employed as educators, counsellors and formation personnel in seminaries and theological institutions, and some have held senior roles. Guest lecturing by women was common, and several dioceses introduced initiatives to increase lay involvement in formation. However, implementation varied, and restrictions on certain roles—such as formators—remained in place, limiting full adoption.

Details of Progress Made

Submissions indicated that this Proposal was adopted in several seminaries and theological institutions, with women employed in senior roles and engaged as guest lecturers. One archdiocese actively promoted qualified women as educators through various initiatives and leadership appointments, with women establishing and directing key formation programs, including the Adult Faith Formation Centre and the Catechist Formation Program. At the same time, a religious sister served as Director of the Centre for Liturgy. Another archdiocese developed a strategic plan for ministry and leadership formation that promoted co-responsibility and collaboration, with pathways for greater lay involvement in seminarian formation. This plan aimed to expose future clergy to formative experiences of modern family life, financial responsibility, conflict resolution and multicultural engagement. In a third archdiocese, women served as formators and psychologists at the regional seminary, a theological university and theological colleges. Female theologians and pastoral leaders were regularly engaged as speakers and facilitators for clergy workshops and residential conferences.

Similar responses were received from other dioceses. In one urban diocese, the council overseeing a house of vocational discernment for men consists of a director, two lay persons experienced in issues of Christian formation and a married couple. In another diocese, women were employed as formators and psychologists, two women served on the seminary faculty, including one as Academic Dean, and numerous female guest lecturers delivered workshops and courses. Seminarians were prepared for ministries, such as lector and acolyte, alongside lay women and men, ensuring these roles were not perceived as exclusive steps toward ordination. Elsewhere, the constitution of a theological institution was amended to allow the principal's role to be filled by any appropriately qualified Catholic person, rather than an ordained male.

Interview participants confirmed that women were employed as educators, counsellors and formation personnel in seminaries and theological institutions, with some holding senior positions such as President, Academic Dean and Dean of Studies. However, according to interviewees, the presence of women in these roles varied, and men continued to dominate most positions. Restrictions also applied to formator roles, which were reserved for ordained clergy under *the Ratio Fundamentalis*, although other roles were developed to involve lay people more broadly.

Proposal 18

Lay women as well as lay men act as marriage celebrants in accordance with Canon 1112.

Evaluation

This Proposal has not been adopted. While Canon 1112 provides a pathway for lay women and men to assist at marriages in the absence of priests, repeated attempts to obtain Vatican approval were unsuccessful. Early efforts at both national and diocesan levels did not result in any appointments and subsequent requests were refused. Although the idea of lay marriage celebrants has resurfaced in recent years as part of discussions on co-responsibility, it remains unrealised.

Details of Progress Made

Attempts to adopt this Proposal were rare and ultimately unsuccessful, despite repeated efforts at both national and diocesan levels to secure permission for lay marriage celebrants under Canon 1112.

Canon 1112 restricts the delegation of lay people to assist at marriages to situations where there are a lack of priests.[228] Two steps are required before any delegation can occur: first, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference must vote in favour of this action for individual bishops, a group of bishops, or all the diocesan bishops who are members of the Conference; second, individual bishops must seek permission from the Holy See. In addition, the lay person must be capable of instructing the couple and able to conduct the liturgy properly.

One diocese reported that around 1997, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference voted to allow diocesan bishops to request permission from the Holy See to delegate lay people to assist at marriages. The Holy See granted permission for one diocese; however, no appointments were made within the required two-year period, and the facility was revoked during the Vatican's review. Later reports in 2009 indicated that subsequent requests by the Conference were refused, including two specific proposals to appoint Catholic women as marriage celebrants in parishes without priests.

At the diocesan level, several dioceses and two religious congregations confirmed that lay women and men were not delegated to assist at marriages. Another archdiocese advised that the idea of lay people serving as marriage celebrants had never been seriously explored. While lay Catholics acted as civil marriage celebrants in some dioceses, they did not act as marriage celebrants in accordance with Canon 1112.

Despite these setbacks, the idea has persisted. In 2009, the CACW in one archdiocese advocated for the greater involvement of women in Church roles, including for them to serve as marriage celebrants in parishes without priests. More recently, the concept re-emerged during an archdiocesan Synod in 2024, where permitting lay people to preside at Catholic weddings, in line with associated procedures, was identified as a possible pathway to a more co-responsible Church.

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[228] *The Code of Canon Law in English Translation,* (The Canon Law Society Trust, 1983), 1112, https://canonlawabstracts.uk/html/code_of_canon_law.html.

Lay women and men who already lead marriage preparation programs were recognised as potential candidates for this ministry as they meet Canon 1112's requirement about the ability to instruct couples. Recommendations for future consideration included ensuring proper recognition of lay celebrants within the community and providing remuneration comparable to that of priests who preside at weddings.

Proposal 19

Where it does not occur, qualified and experienced women be involved in pre-marriage programs.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, with moderate to strong implementation. Women have been actively involved in pre-marriage programs, most often as part of married couples who facilitate courses. While participation varied across dioceses, evidence shows that women contributed to diocesan and parish-based programs, as well as online initiatives. Their involvement was generally consistent with the intent of the Proposal, although it was primarily in partnership roles rather than as sole facilitators.

Details of Progress Made

Women (and men) have been actively involved in pre-marriage programs across dioceses, primarily as part of married couples who facilitate courses.

In one urban diocese, the pre-marriage program was supported by four educator couples employed on a casual basis. They led weekend courses that were presented jointly by husband-and-wife teams, with a female Natural Fertility educator providing guidance to engaged couples. The *SmartLoving Engaged Online* program complemented these efforts, supported by volunteer sponsor couples who accompanied participants throughout the process.

In another archdiocese, plans were developed for a network of organisations working in marriage education and enrichment programs to deliver marriage preparation for engaged couples and ongoing support for married couples.

Interview participants from both the Eastern and Western rites confirmed women's involvement in these programs. In most instances, women were involved with their husbands as married couples. In addition to the diocesan initiatives, parish-based programs also operated in several locations.

Proposal 20

Greater attention be given to the education of clergy, religious and laity towards attitudinal change in recognising equal value, equal rights of women and men within the lay faithful of the Church.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Opportunities for learning about the equal value and rights of women and men were provided through education programs, formation activities and public events. However, progress was uneven and often limited to isolated initiatives. Most recently, it has been noted that there is a growing perception that attitudinal change requires further attention. Overall, while the intent of the Proposal was acknowledged, its objectives were only partially achieved.

Details of Progress Made

Across dioceses, various initiatives have been undertaken over the years to promote attitudinal change regarding the equal value and rights of women and men, though progress has differed significantly.

In 2001, one diocese identified this Proposal as foundational to all others, viewing it as a challenge to recognise women's skills and enable their full participation in the life of the Church. In 2010, actions taken in one regional diocese to facilitate attitudinal change included providing education on the equal value and rights of women and men, and, in 2011, an archdiocesan women's commission hosted a series of talks exploring women in scripture, roles available under canon law and contemporary contributions. In 2021, a remote diocese's social justice group collaborated with the Catholic Women's League to host an International Women's Day event, while in 2022, a regional diocesan Council for Women emphasised agency, leadership and inclusion in its activities. More recently, in May 2025, an archdiocese that had faced widespread resistance to implementing the SJSS2000 actions stated that attitudinal change required further attention.

Formation programs also addressed this issue. Seminarians in one diocese were taught about the importance of gender balance on parish and diocesan committees, especially during pastoral placements, while clergy seminars and in-service days included sessions to help priests from overseas adapt to local practices. In another archdiocese, women's voices were encouraged through opportunities to share their experiences and insights about leadership, mission and their role in the life of the Church and by recognising their expertise across diverse professional and ecclesial settings.

Beyond diocesan initiatives, Catholic schools in one diocese promoted equal dignity by ensuring diverse educational opportunities for female students, including greater access to subjects in science, technology, engineering and maths and pathways to higher education. These actions led to more young women entering fields traditionally dominated by men.

Interview participants noted that attitudinal change was gradual, and often generational, with expectations for continued progress. They also highlighted persistent challenges such as clericalism—among both clergy and laity—which fostered perceptions of privilege and limited lay participation, particularly for women. This dynamic affected how roles were understood and exercised, reinforcing the need for ongoing education and cultural change.

Proposal 21

The Bishops promote contemporary Catholic female role models, especially for young women.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Actions to promote contemporary Catholic female role models included leadership appointments, public recognition and visibility at events. While progress was evident through initiatives such as exhibitions, awards and youth programs, implementation was uneven and often dependent on local leadership priorities.

Details of Progress Made

Numerous initiatives were undertaken across dioceses to promote contemporary Catholic female role models, particularly for young women, through leadership appointments, public recognition and visibility at events.

One example reported was the appointment of a young woman to lead a Diocesan Synod after previously heading the diocesan Catholic youth ministry, sending a strong message about lay female leadership. In a regional diocese, consecutive bishops have encouraged female leadership in youth ministry since the early 2000s. Other examples included women appointed to the Curia in one diocese and a religious sister who served as a Parish Pastoral Coordinator in another.

Women in management positions were also highlighted. One archdiocese indicated that women currently held 56 per cent of their management positions, while another diocese acknowledged female members of Pastoral Councils and directors of education boards.

Beyond appointments, dioceses promoted role models through events and exhibitions. A photographic exhibition organised by the Office for the Participation of Women in 2010 showcased Australian Catholic women and toured nationally. More recently, *the Great Women of Faith* portrait exhibition hosted by an archdiocese in 2024, featured 24 Catholic women who had made significant contributions in their communities, education or health, including St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, Venerable Mary of the Sacred Heart Glowrey and Eileen O'Connor. The pop art style of the exhibition sought to inspire contemporary women in relation to the role of Catholic women of faith.

Bishops promoted contemporary Catholic female role models by inviting women leaders from overseas to deliver public addresses in one diocese, while in another, a Catholic women's conference hosted by an archdiocese and a Catholic university showcased female diocesan leaders and professors and examined the legacy of saints such as St Mary Magdalene. Her relevance as a role model for contemporary women was evident in a regional diocese that awards the Mary Magdalene Award to local women who demonstrate exceptional leadership.

Interview participants identified youth festivals as regularly modelling joint male and female leadership through emcee roles—a forum not previously imagined in the *SJSS2000.* The Young Catholic Women's Fellowship was also seen to play a key role in developing women as future leaders and role models.

Proposal 22

A range of faith education opportunities, including formation in liturgy, be provided for women in rural communities.

Evaluation

This Proposal achieved wide adoption, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Activities expanded beyond rural communities to include regional and urban areas. Numerous initiatives provided women with opportunities for faith education and liturgical formation through diocesan programs, parish-based activities and national events. Access was further broadened through online resources, although digital exclusion remained a challenge for some rural Australians. Despite these efforts, implementation was uneven, and dioceses acknowledged that faith formation in rural and regional areas continued to require ongoing attention and sustained investment.

Details of Progress Made

Respondents broadly defined the term 'rural' as areas outside the capital and major cities. Consequently, a wide range of initiatives was undertaken to provide faith education opportunities for women in rural communities in many dioceses, including those covering remote, rural and regional areas of Australia. These efforts spanned diocesan, parish and independent programs and evolved to include both in-person and online formats.

Regional and rural dioceses hosted numerous events, such as joint formation sessions for sacramental preparation and adult faith formation in 2003, a two-day retreat titled *Celebrating Women's Stories* in remote Western Australia in 2008 and regional workshops across several parishes in 2015.

Employment of dedicated personnel supported these initiatives. For example, in the early 2000s, adult faith education coordinators were appointed in a regional diocese, and, in 2024, another diocese assigned a religious sister to a rural ministry role to work with priests and parishioners. Parish-based liturgy formation programs were also provided in a diocese that included rural areas, often in collaboration with schools that served as accessible spaces for liturgical celebrations and family formation activities.

Long-term programs were developed to sustain formation. One remote diocese offered a three-year spiritual direction course, with accommodation provided during intensive sessions. Graduates could receive up to 50 per cent credit toward a Graduate Diploma in Spiritual Direction at a local university. This program followed an earlier initiative that ran from 2006 to 2012. Another regional diocese reported large numbers of women participating in formal faith education programs led by the Adult Faith Education team over several decades and, more recently, offered theology scholarships for postgraduate study in scripture, theology and pastoral practice, supporting six women in this program.

National initiatives also contributed to educational opportunities for women in rural communities. The CACW hosted a conference in Cairns in 2005 and invited rural women to attend its *Stirring the Waters* colloquium in Adelaide in 2019. Other activities included diocesan women's conferences, synodality events and collaborative programs between diocesan offices and Catholic universities.

Online resources have expanded access for rural women, although digital exclusion remains a challenge for some rural Australians.[229] Initiatives such as the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship and website 'formation.org.au', developed by Catholic Mission, have provided additional opportunities for rural women to engage in formation.[230]

Other Catholic organisations, including MPJPs, have offered extensive formation programs that opened pathways to leadership roles to women in all geographical areas, though parish-based encouragement was often lacking. Initiatives by religious congregations included the opportunity for mature-aged Catholic women to undertake undergraduate or postgraduate study programs with financial support, mentoring and spiritual direction and for lay women and men to join an order's oblates formation program.

Despite these efforts, dioceses acknowledged that faith formation in rural and regional areas continued to require focused attention. One archdiocese had recently developed an in-house resource that was identified as the primary source of faith formation for those in rural areas, though it was thought to be underutilised and poorly understood. Recommendations for future action in some dioceses included ongoing formation for lay leaders and young people to enable them to take on roles in liturgy and leadership.

[229] "Research Confirms the Internet is Near Universal in Australia", Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, published August 19, 2025, https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/department/media/news/research-confirms-internet-near-universal-australia.
[230] "Our Work," Formation.org.au, accessed November 28, 2025, https://formation.org.au/our-work/; "Our People," Formation.org.au, accessed November 28, 2025, https://formation.org.au/our-people/.

THEME 4: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES IN THE LIFE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

This theme incorporates the following proposals:

23. Priests in their training develop further understanding, both through studies and experience, of Australian Indigenous spirituality, culture and history, especially of the region where they will minister.
24. Dioceses, parishes and all Catholic organisations recognise and promote equality and inclusivity for Australia's Indigenous peoples.
25. That Australian Indigenous women be included as part of decision-making, especially in judgments and decisions which affect them.
26. The reunion and rebuilding of Australian Indigenous families, fragmented as a result of "the stolen generation" phenomenon, be fostered; and that the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and ACLRI (The Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes) consult with NATSICC and other appropriate organisations to determine how effective current processes are and what further action would be welcomed.
27. The appropriate authorities in the Church investigate more employment opportunities for Australian Indigenous women in a range of roles and tasks in the Church.
28. National and diocesan liturgical commissions, in consultation with NATSICC and other appropriate organizations, encourage the involvement of Australian Indigenous women in sharing their stories and charisms to build up Catholic spirituality.

Proposal 23

Priests in their training develop further understanding, both through studies and experience, of Australian Indigenous spirituality, culture and history, especially of the region where they will minister.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, with moderate to strong implementation. Many dioceses reported initiatives to help priests deepen their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality, culture and history. These included structured cultural formation programs, immersion experiences, workshops and training opportunities delivered by Aboriginal Catholic leaders and ministry teams. Some dioceses integrated these efforts into Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), while others linked them to community celebrations such as NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) Week and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday. Despite much progress, some limitations in clergy attitudes still exist.

Details of Progress Made

Over the past 25 years, engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has progressed in various ways, with more recent initiatives being particularly notable. Those dioceses with substantial Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations particularly reported notable progress on this Proposal.

One remote diocese implemented a structured program of Aboriginal inculturation and cultural formation for all priests. This included mandatory cultural competency components led by NATSICC and Aboriginal Catholic leaders. Ongoing formation occurred at clergy meetings through updates and engagement with the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Team. Urban priests were also offered opportunities to spend time with priests ministering in remote Aboriginal communities. To further support this work, the diocese established an Aboriginal Deanery.

Another rural diocese developed Aboriginal cultural immersion programs for priests arriving from overseas, designed to teach them local culture, family structures and protocols. This included guidance on respecting mourning practices and adapting to community customs during funerals and celebrations. Parish representatives assisted priests in understanding language and traditions as part of this developing program.

In a regional diocese, the induction program for overseas priests included time in a rural parish with various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministries. Another diocese reported a clergy formation day in 2007 and a formation program in 2010, both incorporating Aboriginal spirituality, storytelling and historical contexts. In one archdiocese, a 2017 workshop on Aboriginal Spirituality was hosted by the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry and the diocesan adult faith formation team. Cultural immersion for priests was also linked to broader community celebrations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday and NAIDOC Week, with outdoor Masses encouraging participation and inclusivity.

Many programs involved Aboriginal presenters and/or trainers. Diocesan Aboriginal ministry teams, NATSICC and prominent First Nations individuals were among those who led these sessions. Two

dioceses reported that their diocesan school offices offered priests training opportunities. In an urban diocese, under its RAPs, priests were invited to participate in cultural competency courses, attend lectures by prominent First Nations people and join meetings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministry representatives and local community members. A regional diocesan education office offered similar opportunities, including Walk on Country experiences. In two other dioceses, First Nations officers in Catholic education worked extensively with schools and clergy to build understanding of Aboriginal culture and spirituality. However, it was observed that in some areas, the presence of Aboriginal Catholic Ministry had declined, limiting collaborative activities.

Two archdioceses acknowledged the importance of acting on this Proposal. One incorporated a strategy into its RAP to provide parishes, communities and agencies with access to localised cultural learning and formation focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and spiritualities. The other recognised that while cultural safety training was readily available, there was a need to motivate priests to adopt and promote it at the parish level to create culturally safe environments.

There was some evidence of the impacts of these initiatives. An urban diocese reported that many diocesan priests had developed strong relationships with Aboriginal groups, resulting in practical outcomes. One parish hosted three Aboriginal ministries and services on its grounds, including one created through collaboration between local Aboriginal leaders, a university professor and a former parish priest. Several of the parish priests and parish social justice groups were proactive in connecting with these ministries. Elsewhere in the diocese, a priest provided workshops and wrote about Aboriginal spirituality to promote and form social justice groups.

While much progress was made, some limitations in clergy attitudes were evident, with one participant noting that clergy were too busy to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality, which became just another thing that they could not manage.

Proposal 24

Dioceses, parishes and all Catholic organisations recognise and promote equality and inclusivity for Australia's Indigenous peoples.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, with moderate to strong implementation. Significant progress was evident in cultural recognition, participation and dialogue. Actions included introducing RAPs, establishing consultative bodies and integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices into decision-making processes. Symbolic and liturgical practices—such as Welcome to Country, acknowledgement plaques and inclusion of local First Nations symbols in celebrations—were common. Catholic dioceses, agencies and schools employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and some provided support for families and students. Future plans indicated ongoing efforts to improve practices in this area.

Details of Progress Made

Several dioceses evidenced efforts to promote equality and inclusivity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, reflecting a growing commitment to cultural recognition, participation and dialogue within the life of the Church. Pope John Paul's visit in 1986 and, more recently, the efforts by NATSICC members were recognised as initiatives that promoted progress in this area. Diocesan-led projects included establishing the Diocesan Aboriginal Pastoral Council in one remote diocese, ensuring that Aboriginal voices contributed directly to decision-making. Elsewhere, the operation of Aboriginal Catholic Ministries along with other programs were designed to foster inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the life of the Church and the broader community.

RAPs were introduced in two dioceses and one diocesan education system, providing structured strategies and implementation plans supported by dedicated coordinators. In one example, the RAP covered the entire diocese, removing the need for individual agencies, parishes and communities to produce their own plans.

Other diocesan actions included cultural formation programs for communities, online homilies and reflections celebrating Aboriginal spirituality and voices, and participation in national NATSICC conferences. Practical steps were taken to ensure remote Aboriginal communities were heard in public policy consultations, with one rural diocese hosting sessions with Aboriginal community groups and incorporating responses into formal submissions after the government process omitted segments of the community. In another archdiocese, the Opening the Doors Foundation supported the inclusion of First Nations students in schools of their choice.

Parishes across several dioceses contributed through symbolic and liturgical actions, such as incorporating Welcome to Country and Aboriginal symbols into celebrations, participating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday and Reconciliation Week and displaying acknowledgement plaques. Some parishes collaborated with Aboriginal organisations to develop acknowledgements in local languages and others received diocesan resources to incorporate elements of local First Nations ritual, tradition and culture into Catholic liturgy and prayer.

Church organisations reinforced these efforts by offering pastoral support for Aboriginal families. Centacare ministries in two archdioceses assisted in sacramental preparation, supported Sorry Business (funerals), promoted culturally significant events such as NAIDOC Week and Sorry Day and provided spaces for truth-telling.

Catholic dioceses, agencies and schools employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and volunteers. Some reports indicated that further work was needed to support workers in areas of literacy and finance and in negotiating bureaucratic systems that were alien to them. Some Catholic organisations, such as Caritas and Mercy Works, provided support to First Nations organisations, while education offices in two dioceses had special support teams for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

While progress made in many areas was appreciated, some participants believed there was more to be done. For example, while the work done through the Plenary Council was appreciated, there was some consternation that these issues had taken a very long time to be raised and acted upon. Another barrier recognised was the sustained efforts required to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at a practical level to ensure concrete outcomes.

Future plans in one archdiocese included expanding lay ministries through lay preaching and lay-led liturgies for marriages, baptisms and funerals, to foster increased participation of all people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics. In another diocese, the pastoral plan included continuing dialogue with First Nations communities and encouraging parishes and diocesan entities to acknowledge Country appropriately.

Proposal 25

That Australian Indigenous women be included as part of decision-making, especially in judgments and decisions which affect them.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have been included in decision-making processes through leadership roles on councils, advisory bodies and education teams, as well as participation in cultural and pastoral initiatives. While some dioceses demonstrated strong and sustained efforts, others have offered only limited or informal opportunities. Although progress was evident, representation remained uneven and often depended on local leadership priorities.

Details of Progress Made

Efforts to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in decision-making were evident across dioceses and organisations, though the extent and nature of involvement varied. In most cases, the responses equated leadership roles with decision-making. However, instances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women contributing to decision-making in other forums were also provided.

Remote dioceses appeared to excel in this area through sustained initiatives. In one remote diocese, Aboriginal women's inclusion in decision-making was strongly supported. Most members of the Diocesan Aboriginal Pastoral Council were women, while First Nations women held leadership roles on other diocesan councils and on Catholic Aboriginal Leadership Teams in remote schools. They also served in formal leadership positions within CatholicCare and Catholic education.

A second remote diocese established a First Nations Catholic advisory council in 2006, with most members being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders. This council advised the bishop on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters and provided culturally appropriate religious experiences. Cross-agency discussion groups were often hosted in Aboriginal communities, where topics included how the Church could assist local First Nations' families. Highly qualified Aboriginal women contributed to decision-making through their roles in First Nations education services teams, particularly when decisions affected their work. A third remote diocese reported that they had recently established such a Council.

Other examples include Aboriginal women joining diocesan teams to plan NAIDOC Week activities in 2002 and Sorry Day events in 2005. In the Catholic Schools Office of an urban diocese, Aboriginal women were involved in the RAP project and served on the executive steering team. Another diocesan organisation engaged First Nations representatives to ensure the cultural accuracy and appropriateness of proposed educational programs.

One archdiocese reported that First Nations women were included in decision-making as part of its commitment to inclusive leadership. Another archdiocese proposed future actions to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for decision-making, mentoring and succession planning.

The relevance of this Proposal was illustrated by the story of an Aboriginal woman who held leadership roles in diocesan schools. As an Aboriginal Liaison Officer, she improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, strengthened family engagement through home visits and promoted inclusion—actions that were widely recognised as transformative.

Despite these positive developments, a religious congregation observed a decline in First Nations representation in diocesan and parish structures. Another participant noted difficulties engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women on councils because their priorities, timeframes, and cultural practices were not understood.

Proposal 26

The reunion and rebuilding of Australian Indigenous families, fragmented as a result of "the stolen generation" phenomenon, be fostered; and that the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and ACLRI consult with NATSICC and other appropriate organizations to determine how effective current processes are and what further action would be welcomed.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Practical steps—such as providing documentation for redress claims, hosting healing workshops and supporting truth-telling forums—demonstrated genuine efforts to foster reconciliation and rebuild families affected by Stolen Generation traumas. However, no evidence was found of a coordinated national review or the development of additional strategies to strengthen these efforts.

Details of Progress Made

Several dioceses and organisations reported initiatives aimed at reuniting and rebuilding Aboriginal families impacted by the Stolen Generation phenomenon, although their scope and approach differed. One remote diocese demonstrated an ongoing commitment by providing practical assistance to survivors participating in the national redress scheme. This included supplying documentation and other evidence required to verify claims from individuals who had lived in Church-run boarding houses. The diocese also settled a class action and issued a formal apology to those who had suffered trauma at the hands of the Church.

An archdiocese incorporated plans into its 2018 RAP to collaborate with Catholic organisations, including the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, to deliver comprehensive support programs for members of the Stolen Generations. Another urban diocese hosted Caritas Australia's Red Dust Healing programs and workshops which address a wide range of issues including the impact of the Stolen Generations. Its diocesan schools' First Nations cultural team also provided ongoing support for families as needed. At the parish level, one community offered affordable rent to a First Nations service that employed a full-time worker focused on justice issues, including family reunification.

In addition, an archdiocese recognised the importance of truth-telling as part of the healing process. Members of the Stolen Generations shared their stories at diocesan forums, enabling communities to learn from their experiences and foster reconciliation.

However, some dioceses found this process challenging. One archdiocese acknowledged that it was still struggling to provide a just response, describing the issue as "complex" and "messy", with no straightforward solution.

The research team did not identify evidence of national agencies reviewing the effectiveness of current processes or determining additional actions, as originally requested in the *SJSS2000*.

Proposal 27

The appropriate authorities in the Church investigate more employment opportunities for Australian Indigenous women in a range of roles and tasks in the Church.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were employed in a variety of roles, including cultural advisory positions, pastoral services and education support teams. Some dioceses developed programs to prepare First Nations women for leadership and ministry roles, while others incorporated employment strategies into RAPs. Despite these efforts, there remains a need for intentional, sustainable strategies to strengthen inclusion.

Details of Progress Made

Efforts to create more employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were evident across several dioceses, though the extent and sustainability of these initiatives varied.

In one remote diocese, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were employed in a range of roles, including cultural advisory positions, pastoral services and leadership roles within Catholic organisations. The diocese noted an increase in recent years as a result of sustained efforts to create a more representative and inclusive workforce. Nevertheless, the diocese recognised the need for culturally appropriate and sustainable employment pathways. It had partnered with a local ecumenical college to provide culturally grounded programs to equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for leadership in the Church and the community. More recently, it began developing programs to prepare graduates for paid roles in the Church or community pastoral support.

Other dioceses reported similar initiatives to employ Aboriginal women in ministries such as Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, cultural centres and diocesan education offices. Roles included First Nations advisory council Project Officer, Cultural Advisor and members of student support teams. One archdiocese employed an Aboriginal woman in pastoral services for an Aboriginal community and commissioned another to create artwork for archdiocesan use.

In one urban diocese, a diocesan school incorporated strategies into its RAP to increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in response to staff requests to expand cultural diversity. These efforts included identifying additional positions and participating in external surveys to inform employment strategies. Another organisation in the same diocese offered employee assistance programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the workplace.

While these initiatives demonstrated progress, there were limitations in the availability of employment opportunities beyond cultural roles. One interview participant recognised this as a challenging process, noting that their employment efforts were often ad hoc rather than intentional, underscoring the need for structured, ongoing strategies to ensure inclusion and sustainability.

Proposal 28

National and diocesan liturgical commissions, in consultation with NATSICC and other appropriate organizations, encourage the involvement of Australian Indigenous women in sharing their stories and charisms to build up Catholic spirituality.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted nationally, and by some dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women contributed meaningfully to liturgical resources, cultural initiatives and faith-sharing activities, with involvement that included creating artwork, composing hymns, leading liturgies and participating in truth-telling forums and educational programs. While these efforts enriched Catholic spirituality and promoted cultural understanding, adoption across dioceses was ad hoc and lacked a consistent national framework to ensure ongoing engagement.

Details of Progress Made

Initiatives to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in sharing their stories and charisms to enrich Catholic spirituality were evident at both national and diocesan levels, though approaches varied.

At the national level, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women contributed to the creation of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday. For example, PollyAnne Carter created the artwork[231] and Dolly McGaughy wrote and sang hymns featured on the NATSICC website.[232] Women and men also shared stories about Catholic and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality on NATSICC's Liturgy Resources launch page.[233]

In some dioceses, opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to share their stories were provided through various means. One archdiocese hosted truth-telling forums open to all, where women spoke about their faith journeys and the Holy Spirit's presence in ancestral customs and traditions. Elsewhere, an archdiocese invited its Aboriginal Catholic Ministry director to speak at parish and diocesan liturgical celebrations and events.

In one regional diocese, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women contributed to the planning of Reconciliation liturgies (2003), presented at a diocesan spirituality conference (2004) and led school liturgies and reconciliation activities (2008). Another remote diocese reported that their cultural encounter days included yarning circles where women shared stories and charisms. Their contributions extended to professional development programs, Year 12 graduation liturgies and

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[231] NATSICC, *Sent Forth in Strength and Hope. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday Resource Kit 2025* (pub. by author, 2025), 3, https://www.natsicc.org.au/2025-atsi-sunday.html.
[232] "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday Resources", NATSICC, accessed November 28, 2025, https://www.natsicc.org.au/2025-atsi-sunday.html.
[233] "Liturgy Resources", NATSICC, accessed November 28, 2025, https://www.natsicc.org.au/liturgy-resources.html.

spirituality retreats.

Other initiatives in an urban diocese included collaboration between the diocesan education office and Aboriginal cultural teams to ensure religious education curricula respected First Nations peoples' spirituality. At the parish level, an Aboriginal woman shared stories about the symbols and traditions used in the installation of an artwork. In 2016, elders from the local Aboriginal corporation, who were members of the Stolen Generations, shared their stories with students and university audiences, forming the basis of pastoral care lessons.

THEME 5: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS OF RESPECT AND COMPASSION

This theme incorporates the following proposals:

29. The range of pastoral and professional services provided by the Catholic Church and the wider society for women, especially support during pregnancy, miscarriage, postnatal depression, marital breakdown and separation, be more widely made known and, where necessary, expanded.
30. Support for solo mothers be given through greater inclusion of solo parents in Church life.
31. At every opportunity, the spokespersons for appropriate Catholic bodies oppose the unjust treatment of women in social and economic life.

Proposal 29

The range of pastoral and professional services provided by the Catholic Church and the wider society for women, especially support during pregnancy, miscarriage, postnatal depression, marital breakdown and separation, be more widely made known and, where necessary, expanded.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, with moderate to strong implementation. Dioceses provided a range of pastoral and professional services through agencies such as CatholicCare, Centacare and diocesan school offices. Many dioceses addressed the areas identified in the Proposal, including pregnancy support, miscarriage care and assistance during marital breakdown. Recent initiatives have expanded services to include domestic violence support, grief counselling and outreach to rural communities. While progress is evident, implementation remains uneven, and some dioceses report gaps in promoting these services within parish life and addressing contemporary needs.

Details of Progress Made

Respondents to this Proposal provided numerous examples of pastoral and professional services offered by diocesan offices and associated entities such as Centacare, CatholicCare and diocesan school offices to support women in the various categories identified in this Proposal. Information was also provided about activities undertaken to promote these services. For example, in May 2025, CatholicCare's offerings were promoted through one urban diocese's website and in both online and print editions of its newsletter. Two urban dioceses operated drop-in centres that provided referrals to other services. Between 2018 and 2020, another diocese promoted Natural Family Planning sessions using flyers, while in 2015, a regional parish partnered with Centacare to run pregnancy support workshops addressing crisis support and stigma.

A few dioceses detailed how they promoted domestic violence services—an area not addressed in the *SJSS2000* but closely aligned with these proposals. These examples offer valuable insights into effective methods for disseminating information. In 2018, one urban diocese produced a domestic violence booklet with pastoral care guidance and contact details for Catholic and community service providers; it was updated two years later and later translated into several languages to expand its reach. Local Catholic and community providers served as panellists at ecumenical domestic violence forums organised by one archdiocese in 2016 and 2017 and a related DVD was distributed to interested parties. Additionally, two dioceses promoted the 2022–23 Social Justice Sunday Statement on domestic and family violence, *Respect: Confronting Violence and Abuse*. This Statement, that included pastoral information and contact details for Catholic and secular services, was publicly launched in one archdiocese and formed the basis of discussion groups in another regional diocese. Beyond domestic violence initiatives, some dioceses offered other services that expanded upon those mentioned in the Proposal. Programs were provided to support grieving women and to assist women who had undergone abortions. Extending support outside city areas occurred in one regional diocese when CatholicCare partnered with a local secular provider to deliver mobile outreach to rural parishes.

A diocesan school's office identified the items in this Proposal as being implemented in their employment policies and practices, which provide for parental leave and family support, flexible working arrangements, support services for domestic and personal crisis and counselling and referral services.

However, gaps remain. One archdiocese noted that pregnancy services and support for single parents remain underfunded and require greater attention. Areas identified for future expansion included education, women's rights, addressing the gender pay gap and compassionate outreach. An interview participant observed that in the parishes of one diocese, there is almost no reference to CatholicCare's services, suggesting its offerings are not "infused" into parish life. Similar siloed arrangements were noted in another diocesan organisation, prompting calls to dismantle these structures. This separation was echoed by a senior Church leader who assumed such work occurred only in healthcare contexts. Another participant noted the difficulty of supporting women when offerings are limited in areas such as birth control, observing that Natural Family Planning programs do not meet the needs of most women in contemporary society.

Proposal 30

Support for solo mothers be given through greater inclusion of solo parents in Church life.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by some dioceses, but implementation was limited and generally weak. Implementation remains inconsistent and is often limited to practical assistance such as accommodation, childcare support and wraparound services. There is little evidence of systematic strategies to foster the participation of solo parents in liturgical, pastoral and leadership roles. Overall, progress has been uneven, and inclusion tends to occur informally rather than through structured diocesan or parish programs.

Details of Progress Made

The inclusion and support of single parents in Church life have been addressed in various ways across dioceses, ranging from pastoral care initiatives to practical assistance. An urban diocese provided information, indicating that support for single parents was in place even before the *SJSS2000* was promulgated. A dedicated ministry offered accommodation and pastoral care, and the pastoral team had a broad mandate that included offering prayer days, seminars and community education to foster inclusion. However, no evidence confirmed whether these initiatives continued beyond the early years. In recent years, the diocesan schools have committed to creating spaces where all families feel welcome. Women, including single parents, are encouraged to participate and contribute, though there is no specific strategy targeting single-parent families. Instead, engagement of all families is treated as a guiding principle. Another agency in the same diocese reported introducing staff discounts for childcare fees, which encouraged parents, particularly mothers, to participate in this segment of the Church's workforce. While these measures are not explicitly aimed at single parents, they reflect broader efforts to accommodate diverse family structures, including single-parent families.

Other dioceses reported practical support initiatives. One urban diocese provided safe accommodation and wraparound services for young mothers for up to two years. In another archdiocese, a childcare centre operated by a religious order offered inclusive services for children from varied backgrounds, including single-parent families. A regional diocese acknowledged the long-standing role of the St Vincent de Paul Society in supporting families of all types.

Conversely, some dioceses noted gaps. One archdiocese admitted that insufficient attention had been given to supporting single parents compared to other areas of pastoral care. Another regional diocese reported few or no parish programs for solo parents or those experiencing family breakdown and its recommendations did not include measures to promote their participation in the life of the Church.

Interview participants expressed mixed views on the inclusion of solo parents. While some observed that single parents are now part of parish life like everyone else, others saw little change in attitudes. Participants agreed that a welcoming church community could be beneficial for single parents who sometimes need practical support such as childcare or assistance with difficult tasks. Examples of inclusion were noted, such as single parents employed as parish secretaries, though questions remained about their involvement as sacramental coordinators or in marriage preparation.

Proposal 31

At every opportunity, the spokespersons for appropriate Catholic bodies oppose the unjust treatment of women in social and economic life.

Evaluation

This Proposal was adopted by several dioceses, but implementation was inconsistent, ranging from weak to strong. While some dioceses and agencies have spoken out against the unjust treatment of women, actions have been sporadic and, in some cases, lacked visibility. Past initiatives included pastoral letters, domestic violence education resources and anti-trafficking advocacy. There was a need expressed for stronger public expressions of compassion and justice, noting that the Church often excels in private care but struggles to address issues openly. Greater consistency and proactive engagement remain necessary.

Details of Progress Made

Advocating for women and promoting relationships of respect and compassion remain ongoing priorities for the Church and its agencies. One diocese reported that the unjust treatment of women continues to be an issue in society in 2025, and staff and volunteers in their CatholicCare organisation speak up against the unjust treatment of women when they advocate on behalf of women across all their services.

Past activities demonstrate broader engagement with this Proposal. These included pastoral letters supporting women facing unplanned pregnancies and violence, pro-life public rallies, promoting the work carried out by ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans) and implementing actions undertaken to oppose domestic violence as outlined in Proposal 29. Other actions opposing domestic violence were also reported. Some years after the promulgation of the *SJSS2000*, in 2007, a regional bishop issued a pastoral letter encouraging support for women who had experienced violence. In addition to hosting ecumenical forums, an archdiocese's women's commission produced a DVD to educate and inform communities about domestic violence, distributed to all schools and parishes with a letter of endorsement from the archbishop.

Despite these efforts, some limitations persist. One archdiocese observed that its own response to the three proposals under the theme *Building Relationships of Respect and Compassion* was underfunded and lacked visibility. Areas identified for improvement included expanding the understanding and support for women's rights, addressing abuse, implementing cost-of-living measures and ensuring fair pay and working conditions. Specific priorities included closing the gender pay gap and valuing female employees appropriately.

Interview participants reinforced these concerns, emphasising the importance of speaking at every opportunity, even when conversations were sometimes uncomfortable. One participant noted that this Proposal presents challenges for the Church, which excels in private compassion and forgiveness but struggles with public expressions of these values in matters concerning women—such as abortion, domestic violence and gender issues. It was suggested that women facing these issues need kindness in public forums and that both women and men should be involved in decisions about public statements.

CONSOLIDATED FINDINGS: PROGRESS ON DECISIONS AND PROPOSALS

This chapter provides a consolidated review of the implementation of the nine Decisions and 31 Proposals outlined in the *SJSS2000*. It synthesises findings from the preceding detailed sections, offering a high-level snapshot of progress and gaps over the past 25 years.

Decisions

Stage 1 of this study evaluated the implementation of the Decisions listed in the *SJSS2000* that the ACBC was committed to enacting. Only three of the nine Decisions were fully implemented. The remaining six have some fully implemented components and others that have only progressed partially or not at all. Table 6 summarises the progress made on each component of the nine Decisions.

Table 6: Evaluation of the Implementation of the *SJSS2000's* Nine Decisions

Decision	Implementation status
1a	**Partially** Implemented
1b & 1c	**Partially** Implemented
2	**Fully** Implemented
3a	**Partially** Implemented
3b	**Fully** Implemented
3c	**Fully** Implemented
4a	**Partially** Implemented
4b	**Fully** Implemented
4c	**Partially** Implemented
4d	**Fully** Implemented
5a	**Fully** Implemented
5b	**Not Implemented**
5c	**Fully** Implemented
6a	**Partially** Implemented
6b	**Fully** Implemented
6c	**Partially** Implemented
7a	**Fully** Implemented
7b	**Partially** Implemented
7c	**Partially** Implemented
8	**Fully** Implemented
9	**Fully** Implemented

From the list, the main Decisions 8 and 9, regarding the establishment of the Commission for Australian Catholic Women (CACW) and its Secretariat in 2001, were priorities implemented without hesitation. Given that the CACW was responsible for progress on the other Decisions, it is likely that

decision-makers at the time expected these to be implemented gradually in the coming years. Subsequent work by the CACW led to the full implementation of Decisions 2, 3c, 4d, 5a and 5c, 6b, and 7a, and partial implementation of Decisions 3a and 7b. More recent work by other Commissions and Councils of the Conference has led to the completion of Decisions 3b and 4b and has furthered work on Decisions 1b and 1c, 4a and 4c, 6a and 6c and 7c.

Proposals

Stage 2 of the study evaluated the implementation of the 31 Proposals listed in the *SJSS2000* that were recommended to dioceses and eparchies. Table 7 summarises the progress made on each of the 31 Proposals.

Table 7: Evaluation of the Adoption of the *SJSS2000's* 31 Proposals

Proposal	Scope of Adoption & Strength of Implementation
Theme 1: Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men	
1	**Widely adopted**, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
2	**Widely adopted**, with ***moderate to strong*** implementation
3	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
4	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak*** implementation
5	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***weak to moderate*** implementation
6	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
7	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***moderate to strong*** implementation
8	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
9	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
Theme 2: Parish Pastoral Associates	
10	Adopted by **several** dioceses early, with strong initial implementation and ***weak recent*** implementation
11	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak*** implementation
12	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
Theme 3: Formation for Leadership in Mission and Ministry	
13	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
14	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak*** implementation
15	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
16	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
17	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***moderate*** implementation
18	**Not adopted**
19	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***moderate to strong*** implementation
20	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
21	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with weak to strong implementation
22	**Widely adopted**, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
Theme 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the life of the Catholic Church	
23	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***moderate to strong*** implementation
24	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***moderate to strong*** implementation

Proposal	Scope of Adoption & Strength of Implementation
25	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
26	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
27	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation
28	**Adopted nationally**, and by **some** dioceses with ***weak to strong*** implementation
Theme 5: Building Relationships of Respect and Compassion	
29	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***moderate to strong*** implementation
30	Adopted by **some** dioceses, with ***weak*** implementation
31	Adopted by **several** dioceses, with ***weak to strong*** implementation

The evaluation of the Proposals reveals a differentiated pattern of adoption and implementation across dioceses. A small number of Proposals were **widely adopted**, although the strength of implementation varied considerably. These were the actions taken to promote a better balance of women and men in councils and leadership roles (Proposals 1 and 2) and the provision of faith education opportunities for women in rural communities (Proposal 22). While uptake of these Proposals was broad, implementation ranged from weak to strong and was shaped by local priorities, resources and leadership commitment.

A larger group of Proposals were **adopted by several dioceses**, with implementation typically uneven and variable in strength. These addressed establishing or strengthening Diocesan Pastoral Councils and improving gender and role balance (Proposal 3), encouraging qualified women to act as Church spokespersons and guest speakers (Proposal 5), appointing and funding training for women in marriage tribunals (Proposal 8), fostering collaborative ministry and formation for leadership and employing women in seminaries and theological institutions (Proposals 13, 16 and 17), promoting contemporary Catholic female role models (Proposal 21), advancing cultural education for clergy and promoting equality and inclusivity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Proposals 23 and 24), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in decision-making processes that affect them (Proposal 25), expanding and promoting pastoral and professional services for women, particularly in situations of vulnerability (Proposal 29) and opposing the unjust treatment of women in social and economic life (Proposal 31). While some dioceses demonstrated sustained and intentional practice in these areas, others implemented initiatives on a more ad hoc or short-term basis.

Several Proposals were **adopted by some dioceses**, reflecting more limited uptake and generally weaker or uneven implementation. These included employing female Parish Pastoral Associates and ensuring fair contracts (Proposals 11 and 12), requesting theological institutes and adult education centres explore the theological and pastoral implications of *Woman and Man* (Proposal 14), involving qualified and experienced women in pre-marriage programs (Proposal 19), developing a database of Catholic women and their skills (Proposal 4), prioritising women's needs through financial resourcing (Proposal 6), supporting attitudinal change regarding the equal value and rights of women and men (Proposal 20), fostering the reunion and rebuilding of families affected by the Stolen Generations (Proposal 26), increasing employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Proposal 27), and supporting solo mothers through greater inclusion in Church life (Proposal 30).

Where these Proposals were addressed, actions were typically localised, depended on particular leaders or agencies and were not embedded as ongoing diocesan practice.

Two Proposals exhibited **distinctive patterns of adoption**. The development and promotion of Parish Pastoral Associate roles (Proposal 10) was **adopted by several dioceses in the early years**, but implementation weakened over time and declined significantly in more recent years, reflecting changing pastoral priorities, financial constraints and structural shifts. Initiatives to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to share their stories and charisms to enrich Catholic spirituality (Proposal 28) were **adopted nationally and by some dioceses**, though implementation remained inconsistent and uneven across contexts.

One Proposal was **not adopted**. The appointment of lay women and men as marriage celebrants in accordance with canon 1112 (Proposal 18) did not proceed, reflecting structural and canonical constraints that limited diocesan capacity to act in this area.

Several factors influenced this uneven progress. Unlike the Decisions, the Proposals were not mandatory, leaving their adoption largely dependent on local leadership priorities. In some cases, financial limitations and competing pastoral priorities often hindered dioceses' ability to invest in initiatives. Where implementation was strongest, it was typically supported by sustained episcopal leadership, the influence of women religious, and deliberative and creative diocesan or organisational strategies. In the absence of accountability mechanisms and consistent resourcing, however, many Proposals were implemented partially, intermittently or not at all.

To understand the uneven progress in greater depth, the following chapter explores the key factors that influenced implementation—both positive drivers and persistent barriers. This analysis provides essential context for shaping future strategies and ensuring that the vision of the *SJSS2000* continues to evolve in response to contemporary needs.

FACTORS INFLUENCING IMPLEMENTATION: SUPPORTS AND BARRIERS

This chapter examines the factors that influenced the implementation of the *SJSS2000* Decisions and Proposals. It identifies key supports that enabled progress and barriers that limited or delayed action. The analysis draws on findings from Stage 1 research and insights gathered from Stage 2 interviews.

Positive Drivers of Implementation

Interview participants reflected on what worked well in their contexts, the supports that aided implementation of the Decisions and Proposals and the resources that were utilised.

1. **Increased Leadership Opportunities and Women-Led Initiatives**

Many participants observed that opportunities for women to take on leadership roles across diverse areas of Church life had increased over the years. This shift encouraged more women to put themselves forward and created pathways for new ministries and leadership roles. Initiatives led by women—often designed for and with women—were highlighted as particularly successful and supported by strong local networks.

2. **Practical Support and Resourcing by Bishops**

Practical support and resourcing commitments by bishops in some dioceses were seen as highly influential. Financial resources allocated to programs, councils, conferences and meetings signified the importance placed on women's participation and lay involvement. Symbolic gestures, such as public endorsement of these initiatives, also had a positive impact.

3. **Influence of Women Religious and MPJPs**

The influence of women religious and religious institutes—and more recently MPJPs—was repeatedly emphasised. Women religious were described as role models and "champions" who conveyed the sense that there were no barriers for women. Their impact has been most evident when bishops and parish priests actively supported, nurtured and affirmed their ministry.

4. **Broader Attitudinal Shift in the Church**

Several interviewees noted a broader attitudinal shift across the Church in Australia toward women and lay involvement, some of which they attributed to the original *Woman and Man* research. This shift had been broad, from ordained and lay, and was described as moving from a clerical model to one that valued co-responsibility in Christ's mission.

5. **Positive Experiences of Collaboration**

In many cases, relationships between lay people and clergy were described as constructive, with clergy—including bishops—listening to and acting on women's advice. Some participants suggested that seminary formation and ongoing clergy education had increasingly incorporated an appropriate theology of ministry, fostering this collaborative approach, and this needed to continue.

6. **Acknowledging Context and Privilege**

Finally, participants acknowledged that their reflections often came from their own—often privileged—experiences and might not represent all contexts. While they could identify many things that had worked well over the past decades, they agreed that this work needed to continue and evolve.

Barriers to Implementing Decisions

The analysis identified four primary reasons for the lack of implementation or partial progress on certain Decisions, as outlined below.

1. **Impact of ACBC Restructures (2006 and 2016)**

Conference restructures shifted priorities and responsibilities between entities, resulting in a loss of continuity and institutional memory. This led to partial implementation of some actions and a lack of clarity about what remained outstanding. For example, Decision 1 (a, b and c) initially achieved progress toward a better balance of the membership of national councils, organisations and advisory bodies, but without formal policies or mandates, diversity has since declined. Similar gaps affected research-related actions (Decision 3a) and the development of guidelines for specific topics (Decisions 4a and 5b).

2. **Ambiguous Language**

Vague wording in some Decisions hindered effective implementation. Decision 1's phrase "a better balance" lacked measurable criteria, making progress difficult to assess. Decision 7's requirement for implementation by "Australian Indigenous peoples" provided no detail on which groups to involve or the scope of engagement, allowing minimal consultation (e.g., in one diocese) to be seen as sufficient.

3. **Focus on Liturgy and Clerical Ministry**

At times, actions related to liturgical matters and clerical roles often took precedence over other commitments. This contributed to partial progress on Decisions 4c (inclusive language), 6a (supervision programs) and 6c (education in collaborative ministry). Recent developments in synodality may provide momentum to address these gaps.

4. **Complexity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement**

Actions requiring dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Decisions 4b, 7a and 7c) progressed slowly due to the complexity of discussions and the time needed for culturally appropriate processes. While long implementation timeframes were unavoidable, recent initiatives show promising signs of more meaningful participation.

Barriers To Implementing Proposals

The Proposals were not mandatory, so implementation varied widely across dioceses. Interview participants were invited to identify any challenges encountered when implementing the *SJSS2000* actions and to comment on barriers that continue to limit lay participation, particularly for women. Their responses have been consolidated in the sections below.

1. The Optional Nature of Lay Participation

A widespread observation was that lay involvement in decision-making and leadership roles remained largely optional and contingent on the preferences of local leadership. Participation varied across dioceses and could change over time, sometimes resulting in the dissolution of councils or other bodies that had previously facilitated inclusion. While documents such as the *SJSS2000*, other Social Justice Statements, the Plenary Council Decrees and Synod on Synodality resources encouraged greater participation, these ideals were only adopted where local support existed. At times, some lay people struggled to imagine themselves undertaking roles traditionally held by clergy, and the polarisation of views on women's participation—both historically and in the present—made finding common ground difficult.

2. Cultural and Attitudinal Barriers

Persistent cultural bias—both conscious and unconscious—was identified as a significant obstacle. This bias was perceived as being reinforced through exclusionary language and, for some participants, by the concept of complementarity, which emphasised differences rather than reciprocity between women and men. Resistance to synodality was viewed by some as another manifestation of cultural bias, driven by fears that it would increase women's participation in leadership and decision-making. A few perceived the resistance to describing God using feminine terms as part of the same cultural barrier.

Interview participants, both male and female, observed that women involved in ecclesial structures often faced limitations, such as not being heard or experiencing opposition to their contributions and authority simply because they were women. They were often perceived as outsiders who needed to break down barriers, as non-ordained, or as subservient, or unequal. In other instances, a persistent clerical mindset that resisted the inclusion of laity in Church leadership and governance was identified as another significant barrier.

3. Role Stereotypes and Gendered Expectations

Attitudes also shaped the types of roles women were offered. For example, men were considered suitable for finance councils, while women were steered toward pastoral councils or domestic duties. Qualified women's contributions were sometimes dismissed rather than welcomed as part of the discourse. Childless or single women were also reported to face challenges in being accepted as valid actors in Church circles because they did not fit traditional norms.

4. Practical Constraints and Funding Limitations

Priorities and funding often limited lay participation, as resources were directed elsewhere. Financial constraints meant qualified lay people were sometimes considered too costly to employ or train. A

few participants believed these limitations were greater when lay people were excluded from planning processes.

5. **Fatigue and Declining Volunteerism**

Tiredness and exhaustion among some emerged as another significant challenge. Participants cited the continual need to adapt to new visions introduced by incoming leaders, the pressure of implementing fresh initiatives and the demands of safeguarding compliance which often overshadowed core pastoral work. Efforts to promote change and inclusion added further strain. Volunteer numbers had declined in many areas—particularly among older Catholics—following the impacts of COVID-19 and the Royal Commission.

6. **Lack of Vocational Discernment for Women**

The absence of structured vocational discernment for women was also highlighted. Without clear pathways, women's gifts were often overlooked, limiting their opportunities for active involvement. In some regions, participation in liturgical roles by women had declined, with male deacons and male altar servers increasingly taking their place. Defining lay participation narrowly—as attendance at Mass and other sacraments—was seen as restrictive. While some welcomed greater leadership roles for women, others felt this emphasis overlooked the broader and diverse experiences of women within the Church.

7. **Obstacles and Negative Experiences**

Other accounts revealed obstacles faced by female leaders. Some were criticised for failing to comply with protocols that had not been communicated, while others worked in environments where their decisions could be overturned by bishops who disagreed with them. Several women reported experiencing poor treatment, misogyny, personal attacks and resistance because they held views different from those of ordained men. One participant noted that these behaviours, while damaging, were not as severe as the death threats she had received.

Two Catholic female leaders described being treated differently from men. One woman's leadership was questioned because she was perceived as a mother who needed to prioritise her young children; her husband was even asked how he would manage her travel absences. Another woman observed that roles within a major synodal process were distributed along gender lines, with female theologians assigned administrative tasks rather than the expert roles they had been appointed to fill.

One participant described her experience at a global Church gathering of trying to change a system that was not receptive to women's leadership or participation, realising that change was required at multiple levels to break poorly formed ecclesial habits of the past. A final observation by some participants was that no adequate explanation had been provided for why women cannot be ordained as priests or admitted to the diaconate.

7. Positive Experiences and Supportive Leadership

Despite these challenges, many positive stories were also shared. Women who held leadership roles often spoke of strong support from bishops, priests and community members. Male participants described working collaboratively with women and implementing recruitment strategies to ensure the best candidates were chosen for roles.

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

This chapter explores the current context of the Catholic Church in Australia, reflecting on how historical commitments and recent developments have shaped present realities. It draws on interview responses to explore the lived experience of the *SJSS2000*, highlighting personal impacts, emerging trends in women's participation and actions taken to overcome barriers and plan for the future.

Personal Influence and Current Impacts

When asked whether the implementation of the *SJSS2000* influenced their participation in or experience of the Church, and what impact it currently had, many participants observed a positive effect on their participation. Several identified links between the *SJSS2000* and their employment in the Catholic Church. They pointed to specific actions that shaped their involvement, including the provision of female role models, funding for women's education and the creation of an environment that focused on skills. Participation in programs such as the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship also had a lasting positive influence.

For one participant, engagement with the *SJSS2000* in the years immediately following its promulgation had influenced positive change. However, once that engagement ceased, those changes became fixed rather than continuing to develop.

Participants also noted that the document's focus on nurturing gifts continued to provide a foundation for new initiatives. It offered confidence to implement these initiatives well and served as a framework for action. As a Social Justice Statement, it was seen as strengthening roles, providing purpose and offering assurance of working collaboratively with the bishops because of their commitment to such statements in general.

Despite these positive outcomes, some participants believed that the *SJSS2000* did not influence their participation or experience of the Church. They attributed their involvement in the Church either to their own initiative or to broader societal changes rather than to the document itself.

Others reported negative experiences. Some described feelings of alienation and exhaustion resulting from the ongoing struggle to define women's role in the Church and the inability to make a clear commitment to equality. Participation was discouraged when women were criticised for speaking about their experiences and beliefs. One participant expressed anger that the Church had not undergone the cultural shift needed to value people's skills rather than their sex.

Actions Taken Beyond the *SJSS2000*

While the focus of this study was on evaluating the implementation of the Decisions and Proposals outlined in the *SJSS2000*, it was essential to acknowledge that over the past 25 years, dioceses, religious congregations, MPJPs and other Church entities have undertaken additional initiatives to enhance lay participation—particularly women's involvement—that were not explicitly listed in the original document.

Interview participants were invited to identify historical and current actions that went beyond the original commitments, with the intention of exploring other avenues rather than creating an exhaustive list. Their responses are summarised in the range of activities listed below.

Expanding Lay Participation

- The establishment of programs such as *Called and Gifted* and the Areté Centre for developing gifts and ministries, which have attracted significant participation from women.
- Expanded opportunities for lay people to engage in formative experiences through programs such as *Alpha*, *The Bethany Way* and similar initiatives.
- Intentional focus on achieving equal representation on Diocesan Pastoral Councils, influencing the mix on Parish Pastoral Councils.
- The inclusion of diverse groups on MPJP councils and boards.
- The introduction of multiple diocesan councils to balance out the diocesan decision-making structures.
- The establishment of diocesan leadership teams comprising agency heads—including education, social services, the Catholic Development Fund, parish and other diocesan representatives—to foster a united vision.
- Advancing diocesan work required to install lectors, acolytes and catechists ahead of formal requests to avoid delays.
- The development of diocesan pastoral plans that emphasise the inclusion of diverse groups, including women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally diverse communities.

Promoting Women's Visibility and Participation

- The formation of national and diocesan women's networks supported by paid staff.
- The launch of initiatives such as the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship and mentoring programs for emerging female leaders.
- Genuine attempts to include all groups of women in national consultations, such as the Plenary Council.
- The creation of awards such as The Magdalene Award to recognise women's contributions.
- The promotion of the activities and events of women's committees, councils and commissions established in several dioceses.
- Increased appointments of female chancellors in diocesan structures.

Innovative Engagement

- Innovative platforms such as the *Australian Women Preach* podcast that amplify women's voices in preaching and theological reflection.
- Enabling women to lead diocesan Synods and other major consultations.
- The provision of scholarships through religious congregations and dioceses for women to undertake theological and leadership studies.

- Providing parish teams with access to coaching and mentoring programs to support leadership formation.
- Mentoring programs for young women, drawing on the wisdom and expertise of older Catholic women.
- Leveraging digital platforms and social media to connect women's networks and share resources widely.

These examples highlight the breadth and creativity of initiatives undertaken beyond the original *SJSS2000* commitments, demonstrating a willingness to adapt to emerging needs, foster inclusion and respond to contemporary challenges. While not part of the original framework, these actions have attempted to advance co-responsibility and strengthen the participation of women and men in the Church's mission. Their impact underscores the importance of ongoing innovation, collaboration and dialogue as the Church continues its journey toward greater equality and shared leadership.

Addressing Challenges and Planning for the Future

Interview participants were also asked to identify actions and decisions that could increase lay participation or overcome barriers and suggest future initiatives.

Several participants emphasised the need for a faithful adoption of synodal practices as essential for strengthening lay involvement in decision-making. They highlighted the importance of targeted and ongoing formation for lay people and valuing their contributions in ministries as key strategies for overcoming barriers.

Many suggestions built on the actions outlined in the *SJSS2000*. These included using inclusive language in the liturgy, continuing efforts to promote attitudinal change (seen as a continuous process), promoting lay marriage celebrants and introducing structured programs and formation for lay preaching.

Other suggestions expanded the original *SJSS2000's* actions, such as mandating diocesan and parish pastoral councils, providing clear explanations when advice from advisory bodies was not followed, revising the lectionary to include inclusive language for God and positive biblical stories about women, instituting lectors and acolytes, enhancing liturgical music practices to encourage fuller and more active participation, and working with seminary rectors to prepare seminarians for collaborative and respectful engagement with lay people, including women.

Participants also identified new pastoral priorities, particularly in marriage and family, noting the need to review and expand the original Proposals to address current realities. These included supporting families affected by domestic violence, assisting couples experiencing infertility, supporting groups for lay men and accompanying parents and families—especially those that included non-Catholic members—in faith formation. Adequate resourcing for marriage preparation for Catholic couples and for their ongoing support was also mentioned. Forming young people to respect the distinctiveness of all vocations and ministry roles—lay and ordained alike—was considered essential.

Additional ideas to increase lay participation—particularly for women—included using a broader range of images for God, intentionally planning for lay inclusion and acting on those plans, avoiding stereotypes that define Catholic women, addressing cultural barriers that hinder participation in male-dominated spaces, and recognising diverse forms of engagement. Some participants also called for ending the use of complementarianism where it created false divisions between women and men, discerning between authentic Catholic tradition and entrenched ecclesial habits, promoting more lay men and women (rather than clerics) as chairs of boards and councils, and challenging the notion that only males image Jesus in broader Church language. Other suggestions included new ministries to promote the common good, assist diverse cultural communities, and improve social cohesion in the wider society.

A few participants suggested admitting women to priestly ministry, or at least to the diaconate, as a sign of genuine commitment to full participation in a Church centred on liturgy and symbols. One diocese recommended mentoring programs for female leaders after hearing of the challenges women faced in leadership roles. Finally, participants agreed that the leadership of bishops was essential for meaningful and lasting change.

Synod on Synodality and Women's Participation

Matters relating to women's participation in the life and leadership of the Church have been a consistent focus throughout the global Synod on Synodality. A recent development in this ongoing process is the release, in March 2026, of the Final Report of Study Group 5, *The Participation of Women in the Life and Leadership of the Church*. This report was published after the completion of the data collection for the present evaluation, but prior to its finalisation, and therefore provides an important contemporary point of reference.

The Study Group 5 Final Report affirms the need to deepen women's participation across diverse ecclesial contexts and observes that progress in this area must be grounded in careful analysis of local circumstances and structures. It notes that approaches to fostering women's participation cannot be uniform, given the significant variation in ecclesial life, governance arrangements, cultural contexts and pastoral priorities across dioceses and regions worldwide. Rather, efforts to strengthen women's involvement are best informed by evidence-based reflection on local realities.[234]

This emphasis closely aligns with the findings of the present evaluation. As demonstrated throughout this report, the implementation of the *SJSS2000* Decisions and the adoption of its Proposals over the past 25 years have been shaped to a significant degree by local leadership, resources, culture and historical context.

Read together, the *SJSS2000* evaluation and the Study Group 5 Final Report offer complementary insights. The evaluation provides a detailed account of Australia's experience in responding to

[234] General Secretariat of the Synod, "Study Group N. 5, The Participation of Women in the Life and Leadership of the Church, Final Report", (Vatican, March 2026), 9-10, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/process/implementation/10workinggroups/final-reports/sg5/SG-5_ENG_Final-Report.pdf

commitments made in 2000, highlighting both achievements and enduring gaps. The Study Group 5 Final Report situates these experiences within a broader ecclesial conversation, reinforcing the importance of local discernment, synodal practice and intentional leadership in supporting women's full and co-responsible participation.

In this way, the two documents may be read in dialogue with one another, offering a foundation for reflection on both past commitments and future priorities. Their combined insights can assist the Church in Australia—at national, diocesan and local levels—to discern initiatives and practices, both longstanding and emerging, that foster the participation of all the baptised—women and men, lay, religious and ordained—in the life and leadership of the Church.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this review was to ascertain the extent to which the Decisions and Proposals outlined in the *SJSS2000* had been implemented over the 25 years since the document's publication. There were four key areas of exploration:

1. What progress has been made in implementing the nine Decisions listed?
2. Where do the gaps lie? What are the critical areas that still need to be attended to?
3. How have dioceses received the 31 Proposals? Which of these have been addressed? Which ones are yet to be implemented?
4. Are there any new areas for the participation of women that the research has uncovered?

This evaluation was undertaken as a formative review, using evidence-informed judgments to assess both the extent of implementation and the emerging outcomes of the Decisions and Proposals. Findings were interpreted using consistent criteria and with attention to the diverse contexts, capacities and responsibilities operating across the Catholic Church in Australia.

Key Themes Emerging from the Research

The findings of this review reveal a mixed picture: while significant progress had been made in some areas—such as the establishment of the Commission for Australian Catholic Women, the development of pastoral resources, and initiatives promoting inclusive leadership—other commitments remain only partially realised or have not been addressed at all. Taken together, these findings indicate that progress was shaped by the presence or absence of intentional leadership, sustained resourcing and clear accountability structures.

Achievements

At the national level, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference fully implemented significant commitments, including establishing the Commission for Australian Catholic Women and its Secretariat, which prompted progress in several areas. Other achievements included the development of pastoral resources for marriage and family life, guidelines for lay preaching and initiatives promoting inclusive liturgy and integrating local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural elements into liturgical celebrations. Research projects addressing theology, ministry and the human person were completed, and models of best pastoral practice for women's participation were widely disseminated.

At the diocesan level, several proposals were widely adopted, notably through programs that fostered women's participation and provided leadership formation, mentoring and education initiatives. Dioceses promoted women as guest speakers, acknowledging their evolving role. Cultural inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples advanced through liturgical resources and Reconciliation Action Plans. Faith formation opportunities for rural women expanded, and pastoral services addressing pregnancy, family breakdown and domestic violence were widely promoted.

Persistent Gaps

While some Decisions were assessed as fully implemented, many were only partially realised, and most Proposals showed uneven adoption and varied implementation strength across dioceses.

Nationally, efforts to achieve gender balance on councils and in leadership and professional roles were inconsistent and lacked measurable criteria. Research into contemporary ecclesiologies and guidelines for rituals in the absence of a priest was limited, with only isolated initiatives at the diocesan level. Inclusive language guidelines focused mainly on liturgy, leaving broader pastoral and social contexts unaddressed. Pastoral care guidelines for those struggling with the Church's teaching on male-only ordination were never issued despite early discussions. Programs for professional preparation and supervision, and study of collaborative ministry, were only partially realised, with gaps in lay supervision and shared formation. Dialogue and research concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics' priorities and requests for married clergy and women deacons were also only partially addressed. These gaps highlight the need for renewed commitment and structured accountability to ensure these foundational actions are completed.

Implementation of the proposals varied widely across dioceses, with many adopted only in part or by a limited number of dioceses. Gender balance on councils and leadership roles progressed unevenly, while the development of a national database of Catholic women's skills was attempted but not sustained. Financial prioritisation of women's participation needs and fair contracts for pastoral roles were inconsistently applied, and the employment of more lay women in pastoral ministry largely disappeared. Requests for theological institutes to explore the report's implications and funding for hospital ministry training were only partially fulfilled. Lay women and men acting as marriage celebrants was not adopted, even when, in some cases, Vatican approval was reported to have been received. Education for attitudinal change, promotion of female role models, and the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in decision-making were implemented unevenly, often depending on local leadership priorities. Other proposals—such as fostering employment opportunities for First Nations women and opposing unjust treatment of women in social and economic life—were addressed sporadically and lacked visibility.

Influencing Factors

Where progress occurred, it was driven by strong episcopal leadership, women-led initiatives and practical resourcing. The influence of women religious and MPJPs, combined with a growing emphasis on synodality and collaborative ministry, created pathways for inclusion. However, structural changes, ambiguous language and cultural and attitudinal barriers—such as clericalism and gendered expectations—limited consistent implementation. Financial constraints, the optional nature of proposals, the absence of structured vocational discernment for women and declining volunteerism compounded these challenges. Learning how to properly include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the life of the Church required time, sensitivity and dialogue, and a commitment to creating positive change. These factors were further compounded by the ongoing negative experiences and obstacles faced by female leaders.

The findings also suggest an intergenerational impact, with formation pathways and visible female role models influencing the expectations and participation of younger women and men, even where structural change has been limited.

These findings should be understood in light of the evaluation's scope and constraints, including gaps in historical records, the optional nature of diocesan responses and the absence of systematic grassroots perspectives.

Benefits and Future Directions

Overall, the *SJSS2000* provided a strong foundation for promoting women's participation in the life and mission of the Church. However, its vision remains only partially fulfilled. A key insight from this evaluation is that actions framed as discrete tasks—such as producing resources or commissioning research—were unlikely to result in sustained change unless they were accompanied by clear expectations, embedded processes, ongoing monitoring and accountability for follow-through. Similarly, the Proposals were presented as optional, leaving their implementation largely dependent on local priorities. A more effective strategy would have been to frame these actions as steps toward measurable goals, supported by appropriate resources and accountability mechanisms.

This has important implications for shaping future action plans for the Catholic Church in Australia, particularly the design and implementation of national and diocesan initiatives. It points to the need for renewed commitment and structured processes—particularly in areas such as collaborative ministry, inclusive governance and leadership formation.

The evaluation also identified new and emerging forms of participation not envisaged in 2000, including digital platforms, expanded lay leadership pathways and synodal practices that offer new ways for women's participation to be embedded in the life and mission of the Church.

As the Church moves forward, these insights offer a roadmap for implementing the decrees of the Plenary Council and actions of the Synod in response to emerging priorities. Continued dialogue, innovation, and intentional action will be essential to ensure that the equal dignity of women and men is not only affirmed but given concrete expression.

The findings of this evaluation project offer several important benefits for the Church in Australia. By providing evidence-based insights rather than relying on anecdotal assumptions, this study delivers a clearer understanding of the current status of women's participation in the Church. These insights will enable dioceses, parishes, agencies and other Catholic organisations to update their awareness of the present-day context, respond to emerging trends and develop targeted pastoral strategies to address underlying barriers.

For the Bishops' Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry and the Conference, these findings highlight the challenges dioceses face in implementing the original proposals and identify some best practices that can be shared nationally. These examples offer practical ideas to build momentum in areas where progress has been limited.

The Australian Catholic bishops will also gain essential information to inform future pastoral policy and practice. This evidence provides a strong foundation for implementing the decrees of the Plenary Council and shaping new initiatives. Where critical gaps or emerging needs for women's participation are identified, these findings enable dioceses, parishes and Church organisations to respond in a focused and intentional manner. By learning from the past 25 years and embracing a more intentional, accountable and synodal approach, the Catholic Church in Australia is better placed to ensure that the equal dignity and co-responsibility of women and men are not only affirmed in principle but realised in practice.

REFLECTIONS

Reflection 1 – Ms Cathy Jenkins

Reflection 2 – Rev Dr David Ranson

Reflection 3 – Ms Kelly Humphrey

Reflection 4 – Ms Maricelle Oringo-Vos

Reflection 5 – Dr Patricia Madigan OP

Reflection 1: Ms Cathy Jenkins

Ms Cathy Jenkins serves on Catholic Education Boards, has held senior roles in Catholic organisations, and is a presenter at Catholic events. Cathy was a member of the HarperCollins editorial team that published 'Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus'.

The ancient city of Corinth was central to both Greek and early Christian history. Situated between two seas, it served as a hub for trade, travel and cultural exchange. About ten kilometres to the east lay the port of Cenchreae, a gateway to the eastern Mediterranean. It was here that Phoebe lived, led and served her community. Readers of St Paul's Letter to the Romans (16:1–2) will recognise Phoebe as a deacon of the church at Cenchreae and a benefactor to many, including Paul himself. Some scholars suggest that she was entrusted with carrying Paul's letter to the Roman community—a significant responsibility, as letter-carriers in the ancient world often interpreted or explained the message on the author's behalf.

A little further afield, near ancient Philippi, we encounter another woman of influence: Lydia (Acts 16:14–16). From her brief appearance in the Acts of the Apostles, we learn that Lydia and her household were baptised by Paul, and that she welcomed Paul and his companions into her home. Today, a baptistry near the River Zygaktis honours the site where Paul is believed to have preached and baptised Lydia and other early followers of Jesus. Together, Phoebe and Lydia remind us of the vital role women played in the leadership, mission and ministry of the early Church.

It is easy to imagine both the challenges and the joys these early Christian women faced - the joy of contributing meaningfully to the Church's mission, and the challenge of navigating questions that may have surrounded their ministries. Similar questions, in different forms, continue to arise today as we pray and reflect on the role of Catholic women in the life and mission of the Church.

The 1999 Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*, was both timely and ambitious. The 31 proposals that followed in the Social Justice Sunday Statement of 2000 were aspirational and wide-ranging. In reviewing progress, the Report identifies a Church on a journey—seeking to understand and implement clear strategies to ensure that women are appropriately involved in ministry and governance. It is encouraging that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has fully implemented several significant commitments outlined in the Report, even as notable gaps remain.

The varied approaches to implementation across dioceses highlight both the richness of diversity within the Australian Church and the challenges that arise when consistency is lacking. This dynamic is familiar within broader conversations about women's participation, as reflected also in the work of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

Since 2000, a significant shift has shaped the Church's self-understanding. Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has invited all the baptised to help build a synodal Church. The meeting point between synodality and the role of women is one of the most dynamic intersections in contemporary Church life. Synodality is not only about structures and processes, but also about imagination, listening and through prayerful reflection identifying the ways the Spirit reshapes the Church from within. This Report demonstrates the central role women already play in Church life and reminds us that women of faith continue to carry the mission forward. The historical memory of the stories of women such as

Phoebe and Lydia echo through this reflection, affirming that women have always been essential to the life of the Church, and that a deepening understanding of our shared baptismal call is reshaping our vision for the future. Synodality invites a renewed approach to women's contributions—one that is marked by shared responsibility, honouring leadership, scholarship, pastoral care, prophecy and courageous witness.

This Report highlights the themes about women's roles in the Church that consistently rise to the surface at both local and international levels. It marks another step in recognising that women, and the experiences they bring, are integral to the Church's mission. Interviewees note how synodality is influencing Church life, describing a shift toward co-responsibility, inclusion and more collaborative ways of working. They identify synodal practices as essential to strengthening lay involvement.

The authors of this Report are to be commended for the care, diligence and prayerful attention they have brought to reviewing the progress since the 2000 Social Justice Sunday Statement. A healthy Church grows when the gifts of women and men are recognised, welcomed and nurtured, and this Report helps us take important steps along that path. May it continue to inspire us to build a community where all the baptised are encouraged to offer their gifts in service of the Gospel.

Reflection 2: Rev Dr David Ranson

Rev Dr David Ranson is the Vicar General, Moderator of the Curia and Parish Priest of the Chatswood Parish in the Diocese of Broken Bay. He has served as a priest for over thirty years in academic, governance and pastoral roles. Fr David's service includes being the Secretary of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia and an Australian representative at the 2024 International meeting of Parish Priests that formed part of the Synod on Synodality.

When *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* was published in 1999, along with the ACBC Social Justice Statement response in 2000, there was a marked sense of optimism running through Australian society. The Sydney Olympics, "the most successful Olympics ever", had been staged. An Australian woman, Cathy Freeman, had captured the nation's and the world's imagination. Yet what was to unfold in the years following was unimagined: the beginning of the 'war on terror' occasioned by the 11 September attacks in New York in 2001 with their defining geopolitical rupture and accentuated by the Bali bombings in 2002; the global financial crisis of 2008; the 2008 National Apology to the Stolen Generations acknowledging past injustice; the COVID19 pandemic over 2020-2023, the rise of artificial intelligence in the 2020s with its transformation of education and research, and its ethical debates about truth, creativity and human identity. Since the year 2000, the world has, in fact, passed through a sequence of moments that have reshaped politics, economics, technology, culture, and the global imagination. Some were sudden shocks; others were slow transformations whose significance has only become clear over time. Yet, further, over these decades the very understanding, itself, of woman and man has come under intense scrutiny in such a way that the conclusions of twenty-five years ago require a certain revisiting, a certain revisioning. In other words, there emerges a need to re-read them in light of all that has occurred over the last two and a half decades, all of which have been too monumental not to attend. Subsequently, the conclusions of twenty five years cannot simply be reviewed with measurements of participation in ecclesial life. Something far more radical and penetrating is now necessitated.

In particular, the arrival of the smartphone age—symbolised by the launch of the iPhone in 2010—did more than transform technology. It transformed whose voices could be heard. Social media enabled women across the world to tell their stories publicly, organise social movements, and challenge structures that had previously silenced them. Movements like the *MeToo Movement* emerged from this new digital space, exposing patterns of harassment and abuse that had long been endured privately. In Australia the digital era also amplified debates around domestic violence, workplace equity, consent, and political representation. What had once been whispered experiences became public moral questions. At the same time, movements for Indigenous justice—seen in moments such as the National Apology to the Stolen Generations and the later 2023 debate in the Indigenous Voice referendum—have highlighted the leadership and witness of many Aboriginal women who have carried cultural memory and community resilience.

Yet, weaving its way through all this has been a reassessment of identity, sexuality, and gender. This shift grew out of several earlier movements—feminism, LGBTQ+ activism, and academic developments in Gender Studies—but it accelerated rapidly in the digital age. The same technological revolution that gave us the iPhone and the social media ecosystem meant that debates about identity

could now spread globally within days. Questions that had once belonged largely to universities began to enter schools, workplaces, churches, and families. Social media did not simply provide a platform for communication; it reshaped the way identity itself was expressed. Online spaces encouraged individuals to articulate who they were through labels, communities, and narratives of self-definition. Movements advocating gender diversity grew rapidly in this environment. Concepts such as gender fluidity, non-binary identity, and transition became part of public conversation in ways unimaginable twenty years earlier.

Of course, these developments have been highly controversial. Advocates saw them as a necessary expansion of human freedom and dignity; as a community of Catholic Faith, we have argued that forms of gender ideology risk detaching identity from biological embodiment. Notwithstanding, many of the most intense discussions around gender ideology have involved women themselves. Nonetheless, debates about gender are not isolated controversies. They are symptoms of a deeper cultural moment. Modern societies are asking: Is identity primarily self-defined, or received? How do body, biology, and personal experience relate to one another? What does it mean to be male and female in a world where social roles are changing? These are not merely political questions. Rather, they are deeply spiritual questions about the meaning of the human person. It could be claimed, consequently, that the early twenty-first century has become a time when humanity is rediscovering the importance of anthropology—the question of who we are. In our Christian thought, the human person is not a solitary self-inventing identity from nothing. Rather, identity is discovered in a relationship between gift and freedom: the gift of the body; the gift of being created male or female; the freedom to live those gifts in love and responsibility. Seen in that light, the debates about gender ideology are part of a wider cultural struggle to reconcile freedom, identity, embodiment, and dignity.

Of course, the story of women over the past twenty-five years has not only reshaped women's lives; it has also quietly unsettled and reshaped men's sense of identity. The cultural shifts affecting women have forced men, themselves, to reconsider what it means to be male in the modern world. For much of the twentieth century, men in many societies lived within relatively stable expectations: provider, protector, authority figure. These roles were never universal, but they offered a recognisable framework for male identity. As women entered public leadership, professions, and higher education in greater numbers, those frameworks began to shift. By the early twenty-first century—particularly in Western societies—many young men found themselves in a world where the old scripts no longer quite fit, yet no universally accepted new script had replaced them.

Movements such as the *MeToo Movement*, and even the more recent controversy related to Jeffrey Epstein, have intensified this disruption. These have exposed patterns of behaviour that had long been normalised or ignored. For many men it has been a moment of moral awakening; for others it has produced confusion or defensiveness. But in either case it has compelled men to reflect on power, respect, consent, and responsibility in ways previous generations had rarely been asked to do. The past two decades have therefore become a period in which many men have been invited—sometimes abruptly—to examine themselves. Questions that were once rarely asked of men are now part of public conversation: How do men exercise power responsibly? What does strength look like when it is not domination? How should masculinity relate to vulnerability and care? The experience of women

speaking publicly about violence, exclusion, and inequality forced these questions into the open. In that sense, women's testimony has acted almost like a mirror held up to male culture. This environment has created both opportunities and confusion. Many men are searching for constructive ways to understand masculinity, while others, especially young males, feel displaced or uncertain about their place.

From a spiritual perspective, one might say that the encounter between women's experience and men's identity has become part of a larger cultural conversion. The modern world began the millennium fascinated with autonomy and power. Yet the voices emerging from women's experience particularly through the re-defining occasions of the first quarter of the new century—especially around care, vulnerability, and relational life—have the possibility of reminding society that human flourishing depends upon mutuality. In the Christian imagination this echoes something deeply biblical: that the human person is not fulfilled in isolation but in communion, where male and female recognise one another as partners in the work of sustaining life. The great social debates of our time are not simply about competing rights or ideologies. At their deepest level, they are part of humanity learning again what the Book of Genesis already suggested—that men and women come to understand themselves most truthfully in relationship with one another, not in rivalry but in reciprocity. This affirmation emerges with even more urgency in 2026 than in 2000.

Reflection 3: Ms Kelly Humphrey

Ms Kelly Humphrey is the inaugural Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) at Australian Catholic University. Kelly is a Gomeroi woman, a graduate of the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship, and has significant experience in the education sector. Her PhD is focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school leadership.

2026 marks forty years since Pope John Paul II stood on our Country in Alice Springs and spoke words that continue to echo across generations of our people: "You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you… the Church will not be fully the Church Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution…and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others." These words were both a blessing and a challenge. They reminded the Church that our voices, cultures, languages and spiritualities are not optional, they are essential. And yet, they also require the Church to receive our contributions joyfully, not reluctantly, conditionally, or selectively.

While the report offers insights and acknowledges important progress, my reflection is written through the lens of an Aboriginal woman, a mother, a daughter, a wife, a member of many communities and a Catholic educational leader, grounded in lived experience, cultural memory, and community resilience. I hold a deep hope that the Church in this country will one day become what Pope John Paul II envisioned: a place where our contributions are celebrated, valued, and embedded in its identity, not treated as symbolic gestures or occasional exceptions.

The report identifies the "complexity of engagement" as a barrier to progressing Decisions 4b, 7a and 7c. Yet national structures already exist to support culturally grounded consultation. NATSICC, established in 1992, should be consistently utilised to ensure culturally informed dialogue. Although the report suggests that Decision 4b has been fully implemented, the lived reality is uneven. The Mass of the Land of the Holy Spirit in the Diocese of Broome is a rightful and powerful expression of culture within Catholic worship. However, cultural symbols remain unwelcome in some dioceses, revealing an ongoing reluctance to embrace Indigenous spirituality as intrinsic to Catholic liturgy.

Theme 4 lays out an ambitious vision for deepening the relationship between the Church in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As I reflect on Proposals 23–28, I see some signs of progress efforts toward cultural awareness, moves toward genuine inclusion, attempts to support healing, and recognition of the spiritual gifts of Indigenous women. But I also see structural gaps, inconsistent diocesan engagement, and a continued hesitation to treat Indigenous culture as fundamental rather than optional.

I was initially hopeful, in being offered the opportunity to reflect on this report expecting to see systemic implementation across the country supported through uniform diocesan policy, implemented across the dioceses, and monitored for consistency. This would demonstrate that a coordinated national commitment was activated rather than pockets of goodwill within dioceses. However, the report described Proposals 23 and 24 as adopted by several diocese (30-59%) with moderate to strong implementation and 27 as "adopted by some dioceses and weak to strong implementation. The picture that emerges is uneven: some dioceses show meaningful engagement, while others show minimal, inconsistent uptake or have been unable to provide evidence. The absence of a national framework means these proposals have not moved beyond isolated efforts into

sustained, structural practice.

Proposal 23 calls for clergy to develop deeper understanding of Indigenous spirituality, cultures, and histories. Across dioceses there are immersion experiences, formation days and Aboriginal-led workshops. Some have gone further and implemented mandatory formation. These are encouraging signs. Yet much of this work still depends on the goodwill or vision of individual Bishops rather than being embedded as national expectation. The comment that some clergy were "too busy to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality" reflects a deeper problem: cultural awareness is still seen as optional. Twenty-five years ago, cultural awareness was considered a high expectation; today it is merely the first, foundational step toward deeper understanding expressed through one's cultural responsiveness practice and ongoing learning. Yet, despite several dioceses embracing this work, its inconsistent uptake reveals that cultural awareness remains optional, exposing how little value has been placed on the accountability of this proposal for what is nowadays, a non-negotiable expectation in many organisations. For our communities, this inconsistency directly affects cultural safety and trust.

Proposal 24 seeks recognition and promotion of equality and inclusivity. While developments listed in the report are important, symbolic inclusion does not equal structural inclusion. Many dioceses embrace Indigenous culture for significant events such as NAIDOC Week or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday yet hesitate to weave these expressions into ordinary liturgical life. Cultural symbols and language are still viewed as "add ons" rather than authentic expressions of Catholic faith.

Proposal 25 highlights the need to include Indigenous women in decision making. The increasing presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in leadership spaces is heartening, especially in one remote diocese where genuine shared leadership is emerging. Yet representation remains fragile. Without consistent structures, our voices can disappear when leadership changes or temporary funding ends. True participation requires reshaping the table, not simply inviting us to it.

Proposal 26 concerns Stolen Generations healing. Some dioceses have offered documentation for redress, hosted truth-telling forums and supported healing programs. These are meaningful steps. Yet the lack of a coordinated national review over the last 25 years, originally envisioned, feels like a missed opportunity. Healing remains uneven across the country, resulting in postcode-based disparities in pastoral care.

Proposal 27 calls for increased employment opportunities for Indigenous women. Some dioceses demonstrate leadership through partnerships, training pathways and ministry roles. However, employment remains limited, ad hoc and often confined to cultural positions. Sustainable, long term career development is essential if the Church is serious about reconciliation.

Proposal 28 speaks most deeply to my heart. Indigenous women contribute profoundly to Catholic spirituality through artwork, hymns, liturgies, truth telling and curriculum development. Our stories are often welcomed, but only within specific contexts. Many Aboriginal Catholic Ministries remain not funded, underfunded or absent. Formation pathways are still rare and a major contradiction persists: how can our stories nourish Catholic spirituality when our cultural symbols, languages and traditions are not consistently welcomed in everyday worship? Until Indigenous expressions are embraced not only in special liturgies but in the ordinary life of parishes, the invitation to "share our charisms" risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

Twenty-five years on, I can recognise meaningful gains: stronger visibility, louder voices, moments of real partnership. But the work ahead remains significant. True equality, reciprocity and shared spiritual life require national coordination, structural commitment and deep cultural humility.

We are a patient people; we know how to wait but let's not wait another 25 years. The work before us is not optional, it is essential to the future of the Church in Australia. Only when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are genuinely honoured, supported, and empowered to lead, teach and shape the Church's spiritual life will the vision of 1986 be realised. When that day comes, the Church will not merely have "included" us, it will have been transformed.

Reflection 4: Ms Maricelle Oringo-Vos

Ms Maricelle Oringo-Vos, Marci, is an educator and coach specialising in Physical Education and Religious Education. She has held various roles in education and leadership positions in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Marci was a member of the 2024-25 Young Catholic Women's Fellowship.

Christian life is a vocation of service, to love God and to serve with the whole of who we are. Yet, this vocation cannot be merely a personal calling; it is ecclesial, because our Church's strength depends upon whether the gifts of the baptised are genuinely welcomed and lived out. For this reason, the commitments to increase women's participation, made by the original report (*SJSS2000*), matter. Twenty-five years after the original study, this new evaluation demonstrates areas of both real progress and unfinished business. In Australia, our Church has also been learning to "walk together", a lesson reinforced through the Fifth Plenary Council (2018–2022) and the emerging practice of diocesan and parish assemblies. This synodal shift has given many lay people renewed hope for men and women to be recognised as equal in our Church. However, many others still ask whether this synodal approach will bear any fruit at all. The Report provides a response that is both an encouragement and a demand for urgent action. While progress has been made towards genuine male and female equity, it is uneven, and our Church must consider its next step carefully. The implementation of the 31 decisions has been concerning, given they primarily impact at a national level of leadership and governance, yet could be better integrated across diocesan levels.

The Report's central finding shows that women's leadership has become more visible since 2000, including in senior diocesan and national roles. Women are increasingly appointed in professional leadership, and women-led initiatives now offer spaces for younger generations to discuss, reform, and lead within their local contexts through programs such as the Australian Young Catholic Women's Fellowship. This matters. Not just for representation's sake, but also because it normalises nurturing and recognising women's charisms, i.e. what they bring to our Church. Yet, frankly, that progress has been "patchy". Women still provide the bulk of active ministry at the local levels; in 2016, they held around 65% of parish leadership and ministry roles. At the same time, a key pathway for lay women in parishes—the pastoral associate role—has declined, often due to financial constraints and changing staffing patterns. Where these roles held by women disappear, formation pathways narrow, and parishes lose visible leadership roles for women.

The implementation of the *SJSS2000* decisions has varied widely. Many commitments have been written in broad language, such as seeking "a better balance", without measurable criteria or clear accountability. In such circumstances, implementation can be reduced to one-off tasks such as publishing a guideline or convening a group—rather than sustained change embedded in governance and decision-making. National restructures of the ACBC have also weakened continuity, reducing institutional knowledge and the visibility of women-focused advisory work.

However, beneath these structural issues sits a deeper cultural challenge— clerical habits and unconscious bias that default leadership to the ordained and treat lay women as supplementary rather than co-responsible. Changing this pervasive issue is not limited to policy. It must target formation, culture, and systemic structures at a grassroots level. Strengthening formation for mission and ministry can be facilitated through training, supervision, and scholarships for theological and pastoral study, which builds competence and shapes habits of dialogue and collaboration. Structural change

requires transparent organisational governance, whilst cultural conversion must start through changing the way we speak about women's service in our Church. The call for "attitudinal change" is therefore a spiritual task as much as an administrative one.

A Catholic lens begins with baptismal dignity and ecclesial communion. Our Church is the Body of Christ, ordered in communion, where each gift is given for the good of all. From this perspective, women's participation cannot be reduced to "helping" or filling gaps. It should include real collaboration in discernment and governance where appropriate, grounded in a sound theology of ministry. The principle *lex orandi, lex credendi* or the Church's liturgy (how it worships) shapes and defines its faith (what it believes). When Pope Francis expanded the Holy Thursday washing of the feet to include women, it was a liturgical change that more clearly expressed Christ's service to His whole Church. In the same spirit, women should be encouraged into the full breadth of ministries their gifts support, not merely into the roles left vacant by shortages.

A synodal culture is not satisfied with symbolism; it forms communities where voices—especially those long marginalised—are listened to and acted upon. This evaluation report, therefore, calls our Church to move from vague aspiration to structured accountability, and from national level decisions to measurable standards in diocesan and parish contexts.

My own commitment is to build a culture of discernment in my local contexts—Archdiocese, parish, and ministry—by encouraging charisms, mentoring emerging leaders, and actively advocating for women's roles so they can have the opportunity to contribute to our Church in new and innovative ways. If we truly believe baptism confers gifts for the good of the whole Body, then we must intentionally entrust women with real authority and leadership, so that synodality becomes visible fruit rather than an unfulfilled promise.

Reflection 5: Dr Patricia Madigan OP

Dr Patricia Madigan OP is a historical theologian, an educator, a leader in interfaith relations and a strong advocate for women. Her PhD covered all of these areas. Patricia was a member of the Australian Catholic Women's Council from 2015 to 2019 and its Chair from 2018 to 2019.

While vague phrases such as "a better balance" of women and men make it difficult to accurately assess progress resulting from the Woman and Man project, the Evaluation Report indicates that over 25 years, despite the response being patchy, there has been some progress in implementation of many of the 31 Commitments, although of the 9 Decisions only 3 were fully realized. Significant progress was noted in initiatives such as the Young Catholic Women's Fellowship, in which 78 young Catholic women have now graduated, and in initiatives led by women themselves such as the Australian Women Preach podcast. A general shift towards synodal practices in the Church was noted and appreciated. However, it is also evident that there is still much to be done. There has been little progress in the use of inclusive language in liturgy and Vatican pastoral documents, and there are still systemic limitations and cultural barriers for women including those inscribed in Canon Law.

A major issue in the Report concerns the establishment of the Commission for Australian Catholic Women (Decisions 8 and 9 are described as "fully implemented"!). This was the result of many years of preparation, involving a movement which began as early as 1977 among concerned laity in Australia, years of discussion which included bishops, and a large national research project 1994-1997. The Commission for Australian Catholic Women was formally established in 2001. However, as the Report notes, a mere five years later as part of a restructure of the ACBC, it was reduced to an advisory Council (CACW2006) and in 2019 ceased operating altogether when an all-male BCELM assumed responsibility for the "active participation of all the baptised in the life of the Church".

How can this be allowed to happen in a Church which says it values the participation of women?

An enigma in the Church's teachings concerning women today is that the Church in its anthropological understanding of women remains strongly influenced by medieval thought which portrayed women as both passive and inferior in mind and body. Thomas Aquinas, for example, following on from Augustine and the pre-Christian philosopher Aristotle, describes the female as an imperfect human being since she is conceived because of an "accident" to the male sperm (*Summa Theologia*, 1. q. 92, a. 1, reply 1) which even today, whether consciously or unconsciously, is used to justify the exclusion of women from decision-making and leadership positions in the Church. Church teachings, which continue to hold that only men are called to Church leadership, that women cannot image Christ, etc., can be traced back to such medieval constructs of the female as a passive nurturer of the new life which is created by males of the species. That belief became untenable with the scientific discovery of the ovum in 1827.

A second related issue for the Church today, which affects women in particular, is the lack of cohesion in aspects of Church teaching between the traditional medieval approach and the Vatican II approach. In general, the social documents of the Church employ a more historically conscious approach whereas the sexual and personal papal teachings employ a classicist approach. The classicist approach tends to stress the eternal and unchanging and adopts a more deductive methodology, whereas the historically

conscious approach gives more importance to change, development and historical differences, while employing a more inductive approach. These different approaches in methodologies continue to raise problems of consistency and coherence for papal teaching affecting women. There is an urgent need for a more historically conscious approach on issues affecting women, beginning with their concrete realities and not with abstract definitions from another time and place**.**

Changing Church culture will require leadership at appropriate levels from each one of us as baptised Christians. As well as developing strategies for moving forward, it will require each member of the Church to be agents of the change we wish to see. Bringing to life the Christian value of the equal dignity of all the baptised will require action as well as words.

Religious Orders which have generally operated from structures of inclusive leadership, have much to offer. In one Congregation, aware that many would not find the changes of Vatican II easy, a voluntary experimental community was given permission to live a different lifestyle which gave sisters the opportunity for more individual control of their dress, finances, experience of new forms of ministry, styles of prayer etc., while maintaining core values of prayer, community, study and service. As other sisters observed these changes taking place, they welcomed them and gradually these communal changes became the norm. A few sisters who found it difficult to adapt were also given the freedom to maintain ways of prayer, dress etc. that they valued.

Perhaps this offers a practical model for change in parishes/dioceses today.

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Appendix 1 – Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000: Decisions

1. That the ACBC commit itself to work to establish, where necessary, and within the divinely ordained structure and communion of the Church:
    a. a better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity on existing councils, organizations and advisory bodies, at the national level.
    b. a better balance of men and women in leadership roles at the national the level.
    c. a better balance of men and women in professional roles within the Church at national level.
2. That the ACBC request the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations to develop policies to assist Church bodies to develop programs to promote the equality and dignity of women.
3. The ACBC commits itself, through its various committees, to foster research in the following areas:
    a. contemporary ecclesiologies and their theological, catechetical and pastoral implications, especially for the participation of women in the Church.
    b. ministry in the Church and in particular the role of lay faithful and especially women in ecclesial ministries, from the scriptural, historical, theological, liturgical, sociological and canonical perspectives.
    c. b) the theology of the human person, sexuality, marriage and family life, especially as it refers to the contemporary life of Catholic women.
4. The ACBC commits itself through the Bishops Committee for the Liturgy to study the following areas:
    a. the possibility of providing at the national level guidelines and education, as well as appropriate resources, to provide rituals to be used in the absence of a priest in the prison and hospital apostolates.
    b. in collaboration with the Bishops Committee for Aborigines, the provision of guidelines, materials and resources directed to integrating elements of Indigenous culture into the celebration of the liturgy.
    c. the drawing up of guidelines concerning the use of inclusive language in the liturgy, prayer, pastoral and social life of the Church.
    d. the establishment of guidelines to assist with the understanding and implementation of Canons 766 and 767 concerning lay preaching.
5. That the ACBC commits itself through its committees to draw up policies of care to respond to the pain of people and groups of people within the Church who are struggling with the implications of Church teaching:
    a. by providing pastoral and spiritual support for those suffering the pain of failed marriage or divorce and those who have entered into another marriage.
    b. by the provision of guidelines to assist in the pastoral care of those who are finding difficulty in understanding and accepting the Church's teaching on the restriction of ordination to males.
    c. by the provision of appropriate pastoral statements concerning Catholic teaching on such areas as sexuality, marriage and family planning.
6. That the ACBC commits itself to foster at a national level, educational possibilities to assist in the implementation of the recommendations of this report:

a. by fostering programs of professional preparation and supervision for women and men involved in ministry.
b. by the promotion and publication of models of best pastoral practice concerning the involvement of women in the life of the Church.
c. by fostering continued study of the theology and practice of collaborative ministry as a contribution to the training of people involved at all levels in Church leadership.

7. That concerning Indigenous Catholics in Australia, the ACBC asks:
a. that the Bishops Committee for Aborigines enters into dialogue with Australian Indigenous peoples about suggested actions arising from the Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia.
b. that in responding to the findings of the Report, priorities be determined by Australian Indigenous people in relation to the findings, advice be sought from Australian Indigenous peoples about the processes and protocols in relation to proposed action, and regional differences be addressed.
c. that the Bishops Committee for Aborigines and the Bishops Committee for Doctrine and Morals make research available to the bishops in response to requests received from Indigenous Australians and others for married clergy and women deacons.

8. That the ACBC establish a Commission for Australian Catholic Women.

9. That the Commission for Australian Catholic Women be established according to the following outline.

COMMISSION FOR AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC WOMEN

The Commission for Australian Catholic Women will be a commission of women and men, clergy, religious and laity, designed to promote the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia. It will have an office which will support its activity. The Commission will facilitate the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the ACBC in response to the Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia, *Woman and Man*: *One in Christ Jesus*, and will be the focus and catalyst for ongoing dialogue. The Commission will be accountable to the ACBC through the Bishops Committee for the Laity.

The purpose of the Commission is twofold. It has a mandate to:

1. act as a focal point for ongoing dialogue and integration of ideas pertaining to women and their participation in the Catholic Church in Australia, and
2. assist in the implementation of the decisions and recommendations arising from the Plenary Meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in May 2000 concerning the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia,

The Commission

The Commission will:

- have an ability to communicate with, and listen to, many diverse groups within the community;
- seek to understand the depth and complexity of women's issues within the Church and in the broader society; and

- be chaired by a suitably qualified person, who reports directly to the ACBC, and submits an annual report.

The Commission has responsibility for assisting in the implementation of the recommendations arising in response to the Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia by the ACBC involving:

- monitoring the development of strategic planning concerning recommendations from the ACBC in response to the Report;
- ongoing dialogue about the participation of women in the Church;
- selection and dissemination of examples of best practice related to the promotion of the participation of women;
- evaluation of the outcomes of the ACBC recommendations; and
- the development of specialised publications which acknowledge Catholic teaching, use other sources, and draw on Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus and the response of the ACBC, for parishes, schools and organisations.

Composition of the Commission

The Commission shall be appointed by the ACBC, according to its procedures, and shall consist of a Chair and eight members, from around Australia and indicative of the multi-cultural nature of Australia. The Commission shall elect a Deputy Chair who, with the Chair and the Executive Officer, will make up the Executive of the Commission.

There is benefit in the Commission maintaining a mix of members with experience and knowledge of the foundational Research Project on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia and new members who bring specialised experience related to the implementation stage of the Bishops decisions and recommendations and a freshness of approach to considerations of the Commission.

Upon appointment, members of the Commission should desirably be able to serve for at least three years before retiring from the Commission. No member may serve for more than two consecutive terms.

The Office

Administration of the Commission requires support from an Office to be effective and of assistance to the ACBC, as well as to converse with the many diverse groups within the Church.

The purpose of the Office is to assist the Commission to achieve its two-fold purpose of assisting in the implementation of the recommendations and promoting ongoing dialogue concerning the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia.

Appointment of an Executive Officer

ACBC appoints the Executive Officer on a full-time basis for a term of three years.

Role of the Executive Officer

The Executive Officer's role is to assist the Commission's work by:

- developing strategic planning related to the recommendations arising from the Plenary Meeting of the ACBC in May 2000 and subsequent recommendations of the ACBC concerning the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia;
- identifying, recording and disseminating examples of best practice;
- assisting in all of the outcomes of the recommendations of the ACBC;
- providing and coordinating opportunities for ongoing dialogue concerning the participation to women in the Church;
- liaising with publishers and writers in the development of specialised publications;
- liaising with the Catholic Commission for Employment Relations in the design of "best practice" policies to assist Church bodies to develop programs to promote the equality and dignity of women;
- preparing reports for the ACBC.

To achieve this purpose, the Executive Officer will:

- report on all important matters affecting the Office to the Commission;
- liaise with other ACBC agencies;
- liaise with diocesan coordinators of Catholic women;
- liaise, as appropriate, with other Catholic Church women's groups, committees, organisations and agencies;
- liaise, as appropriate, with ecumenical women's groups;
- establish a working liaison with appropriate government agencies for women's affairs and other pertinent NGOs.

The Executive Officer will seek authorisation for action from the Executive of the Commission e.g. in those circumstances when it does not seem appropriate for issues to await the next meeting of the Commission.

Appendix 2 – Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000: Proposals

Proposals which have emerged from of the report *"Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*", which bishops might wish to consider for possible action in their dioceses:

1. A better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity be included on existing councils, organisations and advisory bodies.
2. A better balance of men and women be appointed to leadership roles in the Catholic Church.
3. In dioceses where pastoral councils are not established and where the Bishop judges their formation to be appropriate, they be formed, and include a balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity so that women's participation in decision-making and leadership may be increased.
4. A data-base (sic) of Catholic women and their qualifications and skills be developed to help promote the participation of women in the Catholic Church, especially their involvement in decision-making processes and leadership roles.
5. Clergy, religious and lay people be encouraged and trained to exercise their ministries in a more collaborative way.
6. Bishops request each theological institute or faculty and adult education centre in Australia to explore the theological and pastoral implications of the Report, for example through public lectures, faculty seminars and published papers.
7. If and where it does not occur, funding be provided for the employment and training, including in ethics, of those involved in hospital ministries.
8. The role of parish Pastoral Associate be actively developed and promoted by the Bishops where appropriate.
9. Women's participation in parish life be increased through the employment of more lay women in the role of Pastoral Associate.
10. Priests in their training develop further understanding, both through studies and experience, of Australian Indigenous spirituality, culture and history, especially of the region where they will minister.
11. Dioceses, parishes and all Catholic organisations recognise and promote equality and inclusivity for Australia's Indigenous peoples.
12. Clergy and others in leadership positions in the Church be given the opportunity for continuing education in keeping with other professions.
13. Where it does not occur, qualified women be employed as educators, counsellors and formation personnel in seminaries and/or theological institutions.
14. That Australian Indigenous women be included as part of decision-making, especially in judgments and decisions which affect them.
15. The reunion and rebuilding of Australian Indigenous families, fragmented as a result of "the stolen generation" phenomenon, be fostered; and that the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and ACLRI consult with NATSICC and other appropriate organisations to determine how effective current processes are and what further action would be welcomed.

16. The appropriate authorities in the Church investigate more employment opportunities for Australian Indigenous women in a range of roles and tasks in the Church.

17. National and diocesan liturgical commissions, in consultation with NATSICC and other appropriate organisations, encourage the involvement of Australian Indigenous women in sharing their stories and charisms to build up Catholic spirituality.

18. That qualified women be encouraged to act as Church spokespersons and as guest speakers at Church conferences, ceremonies and functions.

19. That women's needs in relation to participation in the Church be made a financial priority for the Church.

20. Bishops when pointing to the signs of the times acknowledge positive developments in the role and status of women.

21. Where it does not occur, parish Pastoral Associates receive fair contracts.

22. Lay women as well as lay men act as marriage celebrants in accordance with canon 1112.

23. Where it does not occur, qualified and experienced women be involved in pre-marriage programs.

24. The range of pastoral and professional services provided by the Catholic Church and the wider society for women, especially support during pregnancy, miscarriage, postnatal depression, marital breakdown and separation, be more widely made known and, where necessary, expanded.

25. More women be appointed to marriage tribunals and, where necessary, be funded to undertake specialist training.

26. Support for solo mothers be given through greater inclusion of solo parents in Church life.

27. The employing authority give just remuneration and employment conditions for women in the Church as a priority.

28. Greater attention be given to the education of clergy, religious and laity towards attitudinal change in recognising equal value, equal rights of women and men within the lay faithful of the Church.

29. The Bishops promote contemporary Catholic female role models, especially for young women.

30. A range of faith education opportunities, including formation in liturgy, be provided for women in rural communities.

31. At every opportunity, the spokespersons for appropriate Catholic bodies oppose the unjust treatment of women in social and economic life.

Appendix 3 – Ethics Approval: Stage 1



Human Research Ethics Committee

NHMRC Registration No. EC00354

90 Albion Street, Box Hill, VIC 3128

Email: secretary_HREC@cra.org.au

Notification of Ethics Approval

HREC Application number: 181

Date of Approval: 16/5/2024

Project Name: Evaluating the implementation of Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond (Social Justice Statement 2000) Stage 1

Principal Researcher(s): Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid.

Organisation: National Centre for Pastoral Research



Rev Emeritus Professor Philip Hughes
Executive Officer,
Christian Research Association
Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 4 – Ethics Approval: Stage 2



Human Research Ethics Committee

NHMRC Registration No. EC00354

90 Albion Street, Box Hill, VIC 3128

Email: secretary_HREC@cra.org.au

Notification of Ethics Approval

HREC Application number: 204

Date of Approval: 28/10/2024

Project Name: Evaluating the implementation of Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond (Social Justice Statement 2000) Stage 2

Principal Researcher(s): Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid, Katherine Jelavic

Organisation: National Centre for Pastoral Research



Rev Emeritus Professor Philip Hughes
Executive Officer,
Christian Research Association
Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 5 – Sample Invitation to Stage 1 Participants

VIA EMAIL

Subject Line: Woman and Man Research Request for Information

Evaluating the Implementation of *Woman and Man:*

The Bishops Respond. Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000

Dear [Name],

The Woman and Man research project is commissioned by the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry. The National Centre for Evangelisation has invited the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) to undertake the research. Stage 1 of the project is an evaluation of how the ACBC implemented the nine Decisions that the bishops committed to undertake in the Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 (SJSS2000).

To enable this evaluation, you are invited to provide information to NCPR about how the following Commissions implemented the decisions that were allocated to them:

[Name of Commission and applicable Decision numbers]

Please refer to the attached document for the full text of the decisions.

Information is to be submitted using a portal that will be open between 20 May 2024 and 30 August 2024. It is available on the following link: SJSS2000 Survey

When making submissions, please keep the following points in mind:

- The portal is designed to collect information for multiple Decisions for one Commission/Council in each session. At the end of each submission, you will be given the option to return to Page 1 to enter additional information for either the same Commission/Council or another one.
- One text entry and/or up to 3 documents can be uploaded in each session. Documents must be closed on your computer before uploading otherwise you will receive the following error message: Something went wrong. Please try again.
- A zipped file containing multiple documents relating to one Decision for one Commission is treated as one document by the portal. This is the most effective way to submit multiple documents for one Decision.
- For all uploaded documents, please include the Decision number and a brief description of the relevant information in each document in the text box that opens below the document upload. For example, “Decision 3. This document is the Minutes of the Council X meeting where action Y was implemented”. If possible, please include the Decision number in the name of the file.
- You may make multiple submissions to the portal until it closes on 30 August 2024.
- You are encouraged to submit progressively as you find information relevant to each decision.

All responses received will contribute to a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Decisions by the ACBC and provide concrete evidence about the actions undertaken. Names of individuals who submit information will not appear in the final report.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact:

Katherine Jelavic - katherine.jelavic@catholic.org.au
Stephen Reid - stephen.reid@catholic.org.au
or me - trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au

Many thanks in anticipation of your support for this project.

Kind regards,

Katherine Jelavic on behalf of Dr Trudy Dantis

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Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday

Appendix 6 – Invitation Letter to Australian Bishops

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry

Att: Australian Bishops

Wednesday, 22 January 2025

Evaluating the implementation of Woman and Man:
The Bishops respond. Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000

Stage Two Survey

Brothers in Christ

'Evaluating the implementation of Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond is a research project commissioned by the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry (BCELM) that is currently being undertaken by the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR). The project seeks to evaluate how the practical steps identified in the Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 (SJSS2000) were implemented across the Catholic Church in Australia and what can be learned from the process.

It is anticipated that this study will offer several benefits for the Australian Catholic community including quantifiable evidence to provide a clearer understanding of the status of women's participation in the Church, identifying challenges faced by dioceses, and uncovering best practices for implementing actions. The research findings are expected to be published in late 2025.

While this research focuses on the SJSS2000, the findings are expected to be relevant for implementing actions arising from Diocesan synods, the Plenary Council and the Synod on Synodality.

In early 2()25, we will seek information about the Proposals included in SJSS2000 for possible action by diocesan bishops and eparchs. The complete listing of Proposals, grouped into topics, is appended for your review. The NCPR will set up and host an online survey for all dioceses and eparchies and selected MPJPs and religious congregations between Monday, 3 March, and Friday, 30 May 2025, to collect information about Proposals chosen for implementation, including details about how they were chosen, enacted, sustained and concluded, and whether any obstacles were encountered.

At the end of the survey questionnaire, respondents will be invited to include their contact details and indicate their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. The interviews are scheduled for July 2025 and will be undertaken to fill in gaps in the research findings.

On behalf of the BCELM, I would like to invite all dioceses and eparchies to participate in this project to help us understand how developments have been made to foster greater participation of women in the Catholic Church since the publication of SJSS2000.

SECRETARIAT FOR EVANGELISATION, LAITY & MINISTRY

GPO Box 368 CANBERRA ACT 2601
T: (02) 6201 9886

www.catholic.org.au
clara.geoghegan@catholic.org.au

Participating in the survey may involve a significant time commitment due to the need to search through historical records. It is therefore suggested that each diocese identifies a contact person who can dedicate sufficient time to gathering information and responding appropriately on behalf of the diocese.

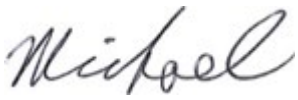
In preparation for the distribution of further information and survey links in February 2025, I would greatly appreciate if you could please provide the name, phone number and email address of your contact person to the Chief Researcher, Dr Trudy Dantis, via email at Trudy.Dantis@catholic.org.au by Monday 10 February 2025.

All responses received will contribute to a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Proposals across the Catholic Church in Australia and provide concrete evidence about the actions undertaken. The names of individuals who submit information will not appear in the final report.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact Dr Trudy Dantis at Trudy.Dantis@catholic.org.au at any time.

I thank you in anticipation of your support for this valuable research.

Yours in Christ.



Bishop Michael Morrissey
Bishops Delegate for Women
Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry.
Bishop of Geraldton

Appendix 7 – Invitation to Stage 2 Survey Participants

VIA EMAIL

Subject Line: Woman and Man Research Request for Information – Stage 2

Evaluating the Implementation of *Woman and Man:*

The Bishops Respond. Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000

Stage Two Survey – Proposals

Dear Participant,

You have been nominated as the contact person for the Stage 2 Survey of the research project: Evaluating the implementation of the *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond Social Justice Statement 2000 (SJSS2000).* Thank you for being part of this research.

Please find information about the project in the attached *Participant Information Sheet*. The full text of the *SJSS2000* together with a separate listing of the 31 Proposals, that have been abbreviated and grouped into five Categories, are also attached for your information.

After reading the *Participant Information Sheet*, you are invited to respond to the Stage 2 Survey that is open for submissions between **Wednesday 5 March 2025 and Friday 30 May 2025**. The survey portal is available by using the following link: SJSS2000 Survey

The NCPR will host a workshop for you and other nominated contacts on **Wednesday 12 March from 2.00pm to 3.00pm AEDT** to demonstrate the portal, provide guidance about the information to be submitted and address any questions you may have. The session will be recorded and made available to all nominated contacts.

The Teams invitation to this event is as follows:

Microsoft Teams
Join the meeting now
Meeting ID: 4XX 1XX 4XX 5XX
Passcode: s-——-U

Some points to keep in mind when making submissions are:

- The portal is designed to collect information about one Category or up to five individual Proposals. A general response may also be included. At the end of your submission, you will be given the option to make further submissions by returning to the start of the portal.
- One text entry and up to five documents can be uploaded in each session. When documents are uploaded, please provide a brief description in the text box about the items that are being submitted and identify the specific Proposal number or Category in the name of the file.
- A zipped file containing multiple documents is treated as one document by the portal. This is the most effective way to submit multiple documents for a Proposal or Category.
- Documents must be closed on your computer before uploading, otherwise, you will receive the following error message: “Something went wrong. Please try again.”
- Due to the requirement to locate historical and current data for this project, you are encouraged to allow sufficient time and resources to locate and submit the information.
- You are invited to submit progressively as you find relevant information. Multiple submissions may

be made to the portal until it closes on **Friday, 30 May 2025.**

At the end of the survey is an option for your diocese, eparchy or organisation to nominate a suitable person to participate in an interview to provide greater details about your submission and the implementation of *SJSS2000.* If a person is available, please provide their name and contact details.

The research findings will be published in a report upon completion.

Please remember that the survey is confidential. Your name and contact details are requested to allow the NCPR to make contact about the submission when follow up is necessary. These details will not be used in the research report.

For further information about the project, please contact:

Katherine Jelavic - katherine.jelavic@catholic.org.au
Stephen Reid - stephen.reid@catholic.org.au
or me - trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au

Many thanks in anticipation of your support for this project.

Kind Regards,

DR TRUDY DANTIS

National Coordinator, Synod of Bishops 2021-2024
Director, National Centre for Pastoral Research |
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601
P: (02) 6201 9812 |
E: trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au |
W: ncpr.catholic.org.au

Appendix 8 – Stage 2 Survey Participant Information Sheet

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Evaluating the Implementation of *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond*
(Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – Stage 2 Survey

Title of project:	Evaluating the Implementation of Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond (Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000)
Names of investigators:	Dr Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator) Dr Stephen Reid

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in this research project which aims to evaluate the implementation of Practical Actions identified in the Australian Catholic Bishops' *Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 (SJSS2000)*, which was their response to the research published in *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* (1999).

Stage 2 of the research project includes a survey where all dioceses and eparchies together with purposefully selected MPJPs and religious congregations are invited to submit information to a portal detailing past and current responses to the *SJSS2000*. The survey requests detailed responses about the Proposals that were included in the *SJSS2000* for bishops and eparchs to choose from for implementation.

The research findings will be published in a report upon completion. They are expected to offer several benefits that can be shared across the Catholic Church in Australia including:

- the use of quantifiable evidence to provide a clearer understanding about women's participation in the Church,
- the identification of challenges faced by dioceses, and
- uncovering best practices in proposal implementation.

To maintain confidentiality, survey submissions will be aggregated in the final report. Details that identify survey respondents will be kept confidential at all times and will not be disclosed. Examples of projects and activities undertaken by dioceses and eparchies will be included in the final report. These examples will not disclose personal names or contact details. Project data will be securely stored for a minimum of seven years before being destroyed in accordance with ACBC data security protocols.

Participation in the survey is voluntary. Should you accept the invitation to participate, you have the right to:

- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.
- Choose which survey questions are responded to.
- Choose to withdraw from the survey or study at any time without giving a reason.
- Preserve your confidentiality with regards to participation in this project.

A list of Support Services is attached for your use if the survey makes you feel uncomfortable or if you wish to discuss any of the topics raised during the survey.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may contact the Chair of the Ethics Committee, Dr Neville Carr, via email at: secretary_hrec@cra.org.au. Any complaint or concern will be treated

in confidence and fully investigated, and the participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in the survey, please respond to the survey using the link provided in the cover email.

For more information on the project, please contact either of the following:

- Dr Trudy Dantis, Director, National Centre for Pastoral Research: trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au
- Dr Stephen Reid, Senior Researcher, National Centre for Pastoral Research: stephen.reid@catholic.org.au



…….
Dr Trudy Dantis, Director

Appendix 9 – Proposals by Category (Abbreviated)

SJSS2000 Proposals by Category

A. Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men

1. A better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity on existing councils, organisations and advisory bodies.
2. A better balance of women and men appointed to leadership roles.
3. Formation of diocesan pastoral councils with a balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity.
4. Develop a database to help promote participation, particularly in decision-making and leadership.
5. Engage qualified women to act as Church spokespersons and guest speakers at Church events.
6. Women's needs in relation to participation to be a financial priority.
7. Developments in role and status of women be acknowledged among the 'signs of the times'.
8. Appoint more women to marriage tribunals and, where necessary, fund their specialist training.
9. Church employers provide just remuneration and employment conditions for women as a priority.

B. Parish Pastoral Associates

10. Actively develop and promote the role of parish Pastoral Associate.
11. More lay women be employed as Pastoral Associates.
12. Parish Pastoral Associates to receive fair contracts.

C. Formation for Leadership in Mission and Ministry

13. Encouragement and training of lay, ordained and religious to exercise ministries collaboratively.
14. Request educational bodies to explore theological and pastoral implications of the Report (Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus, 1999) and to share their findings.
15. Provide funding for training, including in ethics, of those involved in hospital ministries.
16. Continuing education for clergy and others in leadership positions.
17. Qualified women be employed as educators, counsellors and formation personnel in seminaries and/or theological institutions.
18. Lay women and men act as marriage celebrants in accordance with canon 1112.
19. Qualified and experienced women be involved in pre-marriage programs.
20. Greater attention to education towards attitudinal change in recognising the equal value, equal rights of women and men within the lay faithful.
21. Bishops promote contemporary Catholic female role models, especially for young women.
22. Provide a range of faith education opportunities, including formation in liturgy for women in rural communities.

D. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the life of the Catholic Church

23. Priests develop further understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality, culture and history.
24. All Catholic parishes, dioceses and agencies recongise and promote equality and inclusivity for ATSI people.

25. Indigenous women be included in decision-making, especially where they are affected.
26. Fostering the reunion and rebuilding of families who were fragmented by 'the stolen generation'.
27. More employment opportunities for Indigenous women in Church roles and tasks.
28. Encourage Indigenous women's involvement in sharing their stories and charisms to build up Catholic spirituality.

E. Building Relationships of Respect and Compassion

29. Publicise, and expand where necessary, Church and community services that support women especially during pregnancy, miscarriage, postnatal depression, marital breakdown and separation.
30. Greater inclusion of solo parents in church life.
31. Spokespersons to oppose unjust treatment of women in social and economic life at every opportunity.

Appendix 10 – Invitation to Stage 2 Interview Participants

VIA EMAIL

Subject Line: Woman and Man Research Project – Interview invitation

Attachments: Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 and Participant Information Sheet

Dear [Name],

The National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) is undertaking a review of the implementation of actions included in the Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 (*SJSS2000*), the bishops' response to the groundbreaking *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* research (1999). This work is being undertaken at the request of the Bishops' Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry, with the assistance of the National Centre for Evangelisation.

The *SJSS2000* actions took the form of nine Decisions that the bishops committed to undertaking at a national level and 31 Proposals that diocesan bishops and eparchs could choose from to animate in their local areas. They are available from page 4 in the attached copy of the S*JSS2000*.

As part of our research, the NCPR plans to interview up to 25 people from various parts of the Church in Australia who can share their experiences about the animation of the *SJSS2000's* actions.

The Research Reference Group, which has guided the research team through this study, contributed to and approved a list of suitable interview candidates who could provide relevant insights for the project. Your name is included on that list.

I am writing today to invite you to be interviewed to contribute your experiences and thoughts about the implementation of the actions contained in the *SJSS2000*. I have attached a Participant Information Sheet that gives you more details about the project.

The interview will take approximately one hour and will consist of questions designed to examine some of the matters arising from the survey responses already received in prior phases of the research. We plan to conduct interviews between 10 July and 29 August 2025.

If you are able to assist with this work, or if you are not able to participate in the interview, I would be grateful if you can let me know by **Friday 13 June 2025.**

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Katherine Jelavic (Katherine.jelavic@catholic.org.au) or Stephen Reid (stephen.reid@catholic.org.au).

With thanks and kind regards,

DR TRUDY DANTIS

National Coordinator, Synod of Bishops 2021-2024
Director, National Centre for Pastoral Research |
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601
P: (02) 6201 9812 |
E: trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au |
W: ncpr.catholic.org.au

Appendix 11 – Stage 2 Interview Participant Information Sheet

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Evaluating the implementation of *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond*
(Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – Stage 2 Interviews

Title of project: Evaluating the implementation of Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond (Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000)

Names of investigators: Dr Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Dr Stephen Reid

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in this research project which aims to evaluate the implementation of Practical Actions identified in the Australian Catholic Bishops' *Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 (SJSS2000)*, which was their response to the research published in *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* (1999).

Stage 2 of the project involves one-on-one interviews that will take approximately an hour. The interviews, which will be hosted online, take a deeper look at some of the matters arising from survey responses already received as part of the research.

The interview will cover matters such as:

- Local factors that supported or impeded the implementation of Decisions or Proposals.
- Sharing important experiences to fill gaps in the research findings.
- Recent social and cultural changes in Australia affecting the participation of women in the Catholic Church.

Participants have been purposefully chosen for the interviews based on their ability to contribute particular information about the implementation of the practical actions or to share important experiences that fill any gaps in the research findings.

The research findings will be published in a report and are expected to offer several benefits that can be shared across the Catholic Church in Australia including:

- the use of quantifiable evidence to provide a clearer understanding about women's participation in the Church,
- the identification of challenges faced by dioceses and
- uncovering best practices in proposal implementation.

Participation in the interview is voluntary and you are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate in the interview process, you have the right to:

- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.
- Decline to answer any question.
- Choose to withdraw from the interview or study at any time without giving a reason.
- Preserve your confidentiality with regards to participation in this project.

ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research T: (02) 6201 9812 ncpr@catholic.org.au
GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601 www.ncpr.catholic.org.au

In-person interviews will be conducted in a setting that ensures privacy. For online interviews, the interviewers will be in a private space. It is your responsibility to ensure the privacy of the space you are in during the interview.

Interviews will be recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis and can only be accessed by NCPR research staff and other authorised IT personnel.

Details that identify participants will be kept confidential at all times and will not be disclosed without specific consent. In cases where NCPR would like to use a direct quote or attribute comments to you, we will provide you with a copy of what is proposed and obtain your consent before publishing. Data will be stored for a minimum of seven years before being destroyed in accordance with ACBC data security protocols.

A list of Support Services is attached for your use if you feel uncomfortable or wish to discuss any of the topics raised during the interview.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may contact the Chair of the Ethics Committee, Dr Neville Carr, via email at: secretary_hrec@cra.org.au. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated, and the participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, please complete the Consent Form which will be provided prior to the interview.

For more information on the project, please contact either of the following:

- Dr Trudy Dantis, Director, National Centre for Pastoral Research: trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au
- Dr Stephen Reid, Senior Researcher, National Centre for Pastoral Research: stephen.reid@catholic.org.au





…… ……

Dr Trudy Dantis, Director Dr Stephen Reid, Senior Researcher

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ncpr@catholic.org.au

Appendix 12 – Support Services Document

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Evaluating the implementation of
Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond
(Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000)

SUPPORT SERVICES

Participation in this project is completely voluntary and you may decline to take part, refuse to answer a question, or withdraw at any time without providing an explanation or incurring any penalty.

If after the survey you want to talk to someone about what was discussed, if the survey has raised any issues for you that make you feel uncomfortable, or if you wish to talk to a counsellor, please see the range of contact numbers provided on this sheet.

If you, or someone you are caring for, is in imminent danger, please call 000.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 https://www.lifeline.org.au/

Beyond Blue - support for anxiety and depression: 1300 224 636
https://www.beyondblue.org.au/

1800 Respect - domestic, family and sexual violence counselling: 1800 737 732
https://www.1800respect.org.au/

Headspace - support for young people experiencing mental health issues: 1800 650 890
https://headspace.org.au/

Mensline Australia: 1300 789 978
https://mensline.org.au/

13Yarn - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support: 13 92 76
https://13yarn.org.au/

Employee Assistance Program: Available through your work.

Please note: 13 numbers are charged at the cost of a local call when using a land line. Higher charges may be applied when calling from a mobile.

NCPR

ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research
GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601
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ncpr@catholic.org.au
www.ncpr.catholic.org.au

Appendix 13 – Stage 2 Consent Form for Participants

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
National Centre for Pastoral Research

Evaluating the implementation of Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond (Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000)

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS
Interview

❑ Participant copy ❑ Researcher copy
(Two forms to be signed by each participant)

Title of project: Evaluating the implementation of Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond

Names of investigators: Dr. Trudy Dantis (Principal Investigator)
Dr. Stephen Reid
Ms. Katherine Jelavic
Ms. Leith Dudfield

☐ I have read and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked, have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time.

☐ I give my consent for the interview to be digitally recorded.

☐ I agree that the researchers will use their discretion to remove any sensitive data and that I will have the option to review all verbatim remarks made by me before they are used in the study.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....
(Block letters)

SIGNATURE: ..... DATE: .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: .....

DATE: .....

NCPR

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Appendix 14 – Stage 2 Interview Schedule

WOMAN AND MAN: THE BISHOPS RESPOND

Interview Schedule

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.

*I am a researcher with the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR), and we have been commissioned by the National Centre for Evangelisation to evaluate the implementation of practical actions that were outlined in the Bishops' **Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000**. This was their response to research published in the 1999 report, "Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus".*

***We are particularly interested in your honest opinions, insights, and experiences regarding the implementation of the practical actions outlined in the Social Justice Statement, specifically the Decisions or Proposals.** Whatever you say is confidential and will be shared only with the NCPR research team, unless a criminal offence is disclosed or something else is said which I legally have to report.*

*It will be helpful if you have a **copy of the decisions and the proposals** available to refer to during the interview.*

*The NCPR will write **a general report** which will analyse the information provided during the interviews. **No individual will be identified** in any way. If we would like to use a direct quote or attribute comments to you, we will give you the chance to read what will be published and seek your further consent prior to publication.*

*To ensure an accurate record of our discussion, may we have your **permission to record this conversation** and take a few notes?*

*This interview will go for **no longer than 60 minutes**. If there is **anything you don't want to talk about**, that is fine. You don't need to say anything if you don't want to. You are also **free to stop the interview at any time** without providing a reason.*

STAGE 2 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

NOTES FOR INTERVIEWER: ————————————————————————————————

- The focus of the interview is the implementation of the *Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000.* You may need to gently remind participants if they begin sharing too many personal opinions.
- Italicised questions in brackets are prompts.

——

A. The Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000

We are interested in learning more about the implementation of decisions or proposals outlined in the Social Justice Statement.

1. What is your awareness of the Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 and your interaction and/or involvement with it?

B. Specific Questions

One of the reasons we were keen to interview you was because of your involvement in [– YOUR AREA –]

2. Can you tell us about your experience with [– YOUR AREA –]
3. How did it impact women's participation in particular?

C. Implementation of Decisions/Proposals

We'll now move on to discuss the implementation of the Decisions and Proposals. You may need to refer to the copy that has been provided to you.

4. What Decisions/Proposals were <u>implemented</u> (in – YOUR AREA– if applicable)? Which ones do you recognise from the Social Justice Statement?
5. What worked well?
6. What aided or supported the implementation of the proposals? *[Communication to the broader community, education/formation of relevant groups, support, encouragement?]*
7. What sort of resources were used to implement the action? Who participated in implementing the Decisions/Proposals? Was funding required and received? *[Where did the funding come from?]*
8. Let's talk about Decisions or Proposals that were <u>not implemented</u>. Do you recognise any from the Social Justice Statement?
9. Can you share why they were not implemented? What was the reason for this? *[Is there a particular characteristic of the area/organisation that makes the Decisions/Proposals not applicable?]*

10. Did you encounter any challenges? If yes, what were they? How were they managed? *[Was there anything that helped to overcome them, or does this continue to be a challenge?]*
11. Were there any activities undertaken to increase the participation of laity, particularly women, in the Church that were not on the list of Decisions/Proposals? [*Who thought of them? Who supported them? Are they still going? Did they increase lay participation in the Church?]*

D. Current Practices to Aid Participation

We are also keen to learn about current practices that aid participation.

12. What is currently occurring to encourage lay participation, particularly for women *(in YOUR AREA– if applicable*)?
13. What barriers exist that limit lay participation, especially women's participation, in the Church today?
14. Can you identify any actions or decisions required to overcome these barriers?
15. Has the implementation of the Social Justice Statement influenced your participation or experience of the Church? What impact does it currently have?
16. Do you have suggestions for other things that could be done in the future?

E. Final Comments

17. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the matters we have been discussing today?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

You are free to email us additional material if you think of something that might assist this project.

Appendix 15 – The Structure of the ACBC in 2000, 2006, 2021, and 2024

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference – 2000 [235]

Bishops Committee	Advisory Body	Offices	Organisation
• Central Commission			
• Committee for Aborigines			
• Committee for Canon Law			
• Committee for Clergy and Religious	• Australian Catholic Commission for the Continuing Education of Clergy		
• Committee for Doctrine and Morals			
• Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Relations			
• Committee for Education	• National Catholic Education Commission		
• Committee for Employment Relations	• Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations		
• Committee for Evangelization and Missions	• Catholic Enquiry Centre		
• Committee for the Family and for Life			
• Committee for Finance			
• Committee for Health Care			
• Committee for Justice, Development and Peace	• Australian Catholic Social Justice Council		• Caritas Australia
• Committee for Laity			
• Committee for Liturgy	• National Liturgical Commission		
• Committee for the Media			
• Membership Panel			
• Committee for Migrants and Refugees		• Apostleship of the Sea • Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office	
• Committee for Professional Standards			
• Committee for Social Welfare	• Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission		
• Conference Secretariat			
• National Catholic Media		• Research Department • Pastoral Research	
• National Committee for Professional Standards • with the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes			

[235] Bodies are categorised according to the headings in the ACBC, *The Catholic Directory 2001*.

Bishops Committee	Advisory Body	Offices	Organisation
• No Committee identified		• AIDS Resource and Reference Centre • Australian Catholic Film Office • National Tribunal of Second Instance	

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference – 2006 [236]

Bishops Commission	Advisory Body	Offices
• Central Commission		
• Permanent Committee		
• Bishops Commission for Doctrine and Morals		
• Bishops Commission for Liturgy	• National Liturgical Council	
• Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith Formation	• Catholic Church Television Australia Council	• Australian Catholic Film Office • Catholic Church Television Australia • Catholic Enquiry Centre
• Bishops Commission for Catholic Education	• National Catholic Education Commission	
• Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life		• Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office
• Bishops Commission for Relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders		
• Bishops Commission for Justice and Service	• Australian Catholic Social Justice Council	• Australian Catholic Social Justice Council[237] • Catholic Earthcare Australia • Catholic Social Services Australia
• Bishops Commission for Church Ministry	• Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations[238] • Council for Australian Catholic Women • Australian Catholic Council for Clergy Life and Ministry	• Office for Participation of Women
• Bishops Commission for Caritas		• Caritas Australia
• Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations		
• Bishops Commission for Canon Law	• National Tribunal of Second Instance	

[236] ACBC, *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia* 2006-2007 (National Council of Priests Australia Inc., 2006), 22-27.
[237] The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council was listed under "Secretariats and Offices Established by the Bishops Conference" on page 24 of *The Catholic Directory* 2006-2007 and under "Councils established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference" on page 27.
[238] The Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations was included in *The Catholic Directory* 2006-2007 as reporting to both the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry and the Bishops Commission for Administration and Information.

Bishops Commission	Advisory Body	Offices
• Bishops Commission for Administration & Information	• Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations	• Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations[239]
• Membership Panel		
• No Commission identified		• National Catholic Film and Television Library • Pastoral Projects Office, renamed Pastoral Research Office

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference – 2020 [240]

Bishops Commission	Advisory Body	Agency	Organisation
• Permanent Committee	• Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research • Australian Catholic Media Council • CathNews Advisory Board • Compliance, Audit and Risk Control • Finance Council	• National Centre for Pastoral Research • Office for Employment Relations	• Australian Catholic Centre for Professional Standards • Australian Catholic Redress • Catholic Professional Standards Limited
• Bishops Commission for Catholic Education	• National Catholic Education Commission	• National Education Commission Secretariat	
• Bishops Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue	• Australian Catholic Council for Christian Unity and Religious Relations with Jews • Australian Catholic Council for Inter-religious Dialogue		
• Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry		• Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office • Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting • Catholic Enquiry Centre • National Centre for Evangelisation	
• Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement	• Australian Council for Public Engagement • Australian Catholic Life, Marriage and Family Council		
• Bishops Commission for Liturgy	• National Liturgical Architecture and Art Council • National Liturgical Council	• National Office for Liturgy	

[239] The Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations was listed under "Secretariats and Offices Established by the Bishops Conference" on page 24 of *The Catholic Directory* 2006-2007 and under "Councils established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference" on page 27.
[240] ACBC, *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia 2020-2021* (National Council of Priests Australia Inc., 2020), 32-37.

Bishops Commission	Advisory Body	Agency	Organisation
	• National Liturgical Music Council		
• Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council	• Plenary Council Executive Committee		
• Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples			
• Bishops Commission for Social Justice – Mission and Service	• Australian Catholic Social Justice Council • Caritas Australia Board of Directors • Catholic Social Services Australia Board • Employment Relations Reference Group	• Disability Projects Office • Office for Social Justice	• Caritas Australia • Catholic Earthcare Australia • Catholic Social Services Australia
• Episcopal Panel for Canon Law	• Canon Law Reference Group		
• Episcopal Panel for Doctrine and Morals			

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference – 2024 [241]

Bishops Commission	Advisory Body	Agency	Organisation
• Permanent Committee	• Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research • Australian Catholic Media Council • CathNews Advisory Board • Finance Council • Research Reference Group	• National Centre for Pastoral Research • Media and Communications Department • Public Policy Office	
• Bishops Commission for Catholic Education	• National Catholic Education Commission	• National Education Commission Secretariat	
• Bishops Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue	• Australian Catholic Council for Christian Unity and Religious Relations with Jews • Australian Catholic Council for Inter-religious Dialogue		
• Bishops Commission for Evangelization, Laity and Ministry	• Council for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry	• Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office • National Centre for Evangelisation	
• Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement	• Australian Council for Public Engagement • Australian Catholic Life, Marriage and Family Council		
• Bishops Commission for Liturgy	• National Liturgical Architecture and Art Council • National Liturgical Council • National Liturgical Music Council	• National Office for Liturgy	

[241] ACBC, *The Catholic Directory 2024*, 32-37.

Bishops Commission	Advisory Body	Agency	Organisation
• Bishops Commission for Professional Standards and Safeguarding	• Professional Standards and Safeguarding Reference Group		• Australian Catholic Redress • Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL)
• Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples			
• Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service	• Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations • Australian Catholic Social Justice Council	• Disability Projects Office • Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace	
• Episcopal Panel for Canon Law	• Canon Law Reference Group		
• Episcopal Panel for Doctrine and Morals			

Appendix 16 – The Composition of National Advisory Bodies in 2004, 2020, and 2024

The tables below report the composition of women and men, laity, religious and clergy on national advisory bodies in 2004, 2020 and 2024. The total number of advisory bodies each year is reported in Table 16.1.

Table 16.1: Details of all Members (including Chairs)

	Excluding Bishops						Including Bishops			
	2004 [242]		2020 [243]		2024 [244]		2004		2024	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Sex										
Female	65	40	108	47	61	44	65	33	61	40
Male	99	60	123	53	78	56	132	67	92	60
Religious status										
Lay	111	68	178	77	90	65	111	56	90	59
Religious	22	13	15	7	15	11	22	11	15	10
Clergy	31	19	38	16	34	24	64	33	48	31
Total	**164**		**231**		**139**		**197**		**153**	
No. of Advisory Bodies		*18*		*20*		*18*		*18*		*18*

Table 16.2: Details of Chairs of National Advisory Bodies

	Excluding Bishops						Including Bishops			
	2004 [245]		2020 [246]		2024 [247]		2004		2024	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Chairs	10				14		18		16	
Sex										
Female	3	30	-	-	9	64	3	17	9	56
Male	7	70	-	-	5	36	15	83	7	44
Religious status										
Lay	6	60	-	-	12	86	6	33	12	75
Religious	1	10	-	-	1	7	1	5	1	6
Clergy	3	30	-	-	1	7	11	61	3	19
Total	**10**		**-**		**14**		**18**		**16**	

[242] Review of and Recommendations for Composition of Membership of National Church Bodies of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in "CACW Report May 2005" 2005, Bishops Committee for Laity.
[243] ACBC, "Response to 'The Light from the Southern Cross'", 16.
[244] Data supplied by ACBC, July 2024.
[245] "CACW Report May 2005" 2005, Bishops Committee for Laity.
[246] ACBC, "Response to 'The Light from the Southern Cross'", 16.
[247] Data supplied by ACBC, July 2024.

Appendix 17 – BCELM Key Liaison Bodies 2024

Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry

Key National and International Liaison Bodies

Item 6 - Relations of the Commission's mandate states that it "will maintain links, liaise with and host informal forums with key bodies to assist in serving its mandate". In 2024, it liaised with the following bodies in the Holy See and other organisations:[248]

- Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples (including Pontifical Mission Societies) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation
- Congregation for the Clergy
- Congregation for Institutes of the Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life
- Dicastery for Institutes of the Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life
- Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life
- Dicastery for Communications
- Australasian Catholic Press Association
- Australasian Religious Press Association
- Australian Catholic Diocesan Vocations Directors Conference
- Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy
- Australian Catholic Youth Ministry Network
- Catholic Mission
- Catholic Religious Australia
- CHARIS – Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service
- Clergy Care Coordinators
- Diocesan Directors for Clergy Life and Ministry
- National Association of Deacons
- National Council of Priests
- Oceania Mission Planners Network
- Signis – The World Catholic Association for Communication

[248] *Mandate of the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry*, 5-6; Catholic Australia, Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Minstry, "In liaison with", accessed 5 September 2024; differences to the bodies displayed on the website were advised by the BCELM in October 2024.


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