

# Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000

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## Introduction

In 1996 the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference launched a major research initiative focusing on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia. Our aim in doing so was to gather information about the participation of women in the Church in order to help Church bodies to reflect on and promote the Gospel vision of the equal dignity of women and men, to discuss the issues in a constructive way, and to plan for the future.

As Cardinal Clancy said in launching the research project:

*"We know that the Church as a whole has much to learn from and about women, who constitute more than half of its membership ... We know that their contribution over the centuries and today has been (and is) enormous, even if not fully recognized and valued.*

*We are also aware, as Pope John Paul II has acknowledged, that the Church's history has often been characterized by mistaken attitudes and actions in this as in other areas; and that the brief period between now (i.e. 1995) and the Church's Year of Jubilee (AD 2000) is an appropriate time for us to acknowledge, repent for and begin to remedy the mistakes of the past."*

It is particularly appropriate then for the Social Justice Sunday Statement for the Year of Jubilee to address issues concerning women in the Church, and to announce the actions that the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference has decided to undertake in response to the research report "*Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*".

Before moving on to the actions that we will undertake in response to the research, let us recall briefly how the research came about and how it was undertaken.

## History of the Project

Individuals and groups had raised issues concerning the role and status of women in the Church and in Australian society with the Bishops over a period of years and we knew that this important issue of justice in our Church and in our society needed to be addressed. We received a variety of suggestions on how best to address these issues and in the end concluded that a study on women's actual participation in the life of the Church and ways of improving this participation was needed. We felt that we needed a sound information base for theological reflection, pastoral planning and further dialogue with women and women's groups on particular issues. This became the objective of the research.

The research itself was professionally conducted for us by the Secretariat of the Bishop's Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, the Australian Catholic University and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, and we thank the members of the Research Management Group for their diligent and competent work. The members of the Research Management Group were: Dr Marie Macdonald, Professor Peter Carpenter, Ms Sandie Cornish, Dr Michael Costigan, Mr Robert Dixon, Sr Margaret Malone sgs, Bishop Kevin Manning, and Sr Sonia Wagner sgs.

The researchers chose to use a variety of different means, both qualitative and quantitative, to collect information about this large and complex topic. Each method had its strengths and weaknesses, but together they provided a very comprehensive picture. Through contextual papers, written submissions, public hearings, a large scale sampling of Church attenders as part of the Church Life Survey, a survey of Catholic organizations, and targeted groups, responses were gathered from many thousands of women and men. The people who made responses were from a variety of age groups and backgrounds. Some were actively involved in the life of the Church while others were not.

The research was structured around four key questions:

1. What are the ways in which women participate in the Catholic Church in Australia?
2. What assistance and support are currently offered to women to participate in the Church?
3. What are barriers to women's participation in the Church?
4. What are some ways in which women's participation in the Church can be increased?

These questions bound each of the different ways of gathering information together, giving them a common structure. They were also intended to be as open as possible to a variety of responses grounded in different experiences and views. For example, it was just as possible for respondents to express the view that there are no barriers to women's participation in the Church as to submit a long list of barriers in response to the third key question.

A report setting out the findings from each of the methods of gathering information in relation to each of the key questions, and a synthesis of the overall results, was produced and presented to the Bishops in April 1999. The first decision that we made in response to the research was to have the report published as quickly as possible in order to make the findings available to the whole community, and especially those who had taken part in the research. We are grateful to Harper Collins Religious for their cooperation in making "*Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*" available so quickly, and relatively inexpensively for such a large book.

The Bishops' Conference then sought advice and assistance in discerning how we would respond to the research. An Ad Hoc Committee prepared a set of recommendations for the Conference and these recommendations were then referred to another committee for further development. The latter group included Bishops from the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, the Bishops' Committee for the Laity and the Bishops' Committee for Doctrine and Morals, and five lay consultants. We are very grateful to the following people for their work as part of either of these two groups which helped to shape the responses which we are now ready to announce:

Bishop William Brennan, Professor Peter Carpenter, Ms Sandie Cornish, Dr Michael Costigan, Bishop David Cremin, Mr Robert Dixon, Mrs Liz Hanney, Mrs Katherine Harris, Mrs Elsie Heiss, Bishop Peter Ingham, Mrs Therese Lynch, Dr Marie Macdonald, Bishop Kevin Manning, Bishop William Morris, Professor Gabrielle McMullen, Bishop Michael Putney, Sr Sonia Wagner, Bishop David Walker.

### **“Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus”**

The Australian Catholic bishops are grateful to the very many women and men who participated in the research which led to the publication of the report, *“Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus”*. We especially wanted to hear the voices of women themselves about their experience of and hopes for participation in the life and mission of the Church. While we acknowledge that not all women believe their views are adequately represented in the report, we nonetheless would wish to respond as well as we can to those women whose views are reported.

From the research we have learned that there are many women who feel frustrated because of their experience and hope for greater opportunities for participation. There are other women who have expressed concerns because of the changes which have occurred in the church and their fears of further changes. We have also learned that there are many Catholic women who are largely content with the level of their participation in the life and mission of the Church and who are quite open to further developments. The bishops would want to respond whole heartedly to each of the women who participated no matter what their perspective might be.

Bishops cannot and would not wish to change the teaching of the Church on any matter despite the difficulty some respondents have had with some elements of the Church’s teaching. Likewise they cannot reverse the changes in the Church asked of us by the Second Vatican Council or turn away from its path, to satisfy the concerns of others. In both cases they are willing to dialogue with women about these matters for the sake of mutual understanding and in a spirit of Christian love.

We would wish to work with all women in the Church and to increase the level of their participation where it is insufficient, because the Church needs their gifts in all its life and mission. Our understanding of the Church is that it is a communion bound together in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Through Baptism men and women enter into the new world of that communion. Baptismal consecration of all into the universal priesthood of Christ’s faithful is the fundamental reality. Jesus uses the image of the vine and branches and Paul speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ. These images express the intimacy between Christ and the faithful and among the faithful themselves. It is at this level that each of the faithful makes their greatest contribution to the life of the Church. This is the place of vocation or the call of Christ to each person to the special way in which they contribute to the life of the church and serve their sisters and brothers. Along with those who are ordained, women and men in marriage, single life, and consecrated life offer their diverse gifts to the building up of the church.

The Church is built up by the very diverse gifts of all members. We wish to draw attention to the significant role that mothers play in the life and mission of the Church and society, lest their participation be taken for granted or considered of less value than

other forms of participation. After all it was through Mary's role as mother that the world received its Saviour. All members of the Church have an equal dignity and a unique gift to contribute. Diversity of gifts should not lead to different degrees of personal participation in the life and mission of the church. If it has led to this, steps must be taken to remedy such a situation. We would also wish to acknowledge the efforts already being made in parishes and agencies around the country to move forward in this regard.

We have decided to take some steps at the national level to ensure that the dignity of women is honoured and their gifts are given space to flourish for the sake of the Church's life and mission. Our practices and policies are not always the same as those of civil society because they arise from our faith in the Church as a communion of life in God with a divinely ordained structure, though they must express the equality of all within that communion.

## **PRACTICAL STEPS**

As Cardinal Clancy stated at the launch "*Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*" at the National Press Club on 18 August 1999, the challenge that faces the Bishops is to find ways within the integral Catholic Tradition to engage the wisdom, the talents and the experience of women for the enrichment of the Church and society, and for the fulfilment of their own lives.

From the outset of the research project, it was intended that the information obtained would provide a solid basis for theological reflection, pastoral planning and dialogue with women and women's groups on particular issues. These issues focus on women's involvement and participation in the different areas of Church life and ministry.

The report pointed to women being as involved as possible in the processes of decision making at the different levels of Church life. It also suggested that the nature of ministry within the Church, and in particular the role of women in ecclesial ministries, be addressed; and that programs be developed to promote the equality and dignity of women, enabling a better balance of women and men, clergy, religious and laity on Church bodies.

It encouraged the training of indigenous women and men for leadership and ministry to their own people and expressed the desire that cultural expressions of the Catholic faith be recognised, welcomed and integrated into liturgy where they are appropriate.

Further, the report asks all in the Church to focus on the ever relevant message and attitude of Jesus Christ and his relationship with women. "Transcending the established norms of his own culture, Jesus treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness" (Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women n.3).

In addition to the following decisions, other proposals which have arisen at various stages are included for possible action by diocesan bishops and eparchs.

## **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.
  - 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 a "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 NGO's.

The Executive Officer will seek authorisation for action from the Executive of the Commission eg in those circumstances when it does not seem appropriate for issues to await the next meeting of the Commission.

## **PROPOSALS**

Proposals which have emerged from the report "*Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*", which bishops might wish to consider for possible action in their dioceses:

- A better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity be included on existing councils, organisations and advisory bodies.
- A better balance of men and women be appointed to leadership roles in the Catholic Church.
- 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.
- A data-base 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.
- Clergy, religious and lay people be encouraged and trained to exercise their ministries in a more collaborative way.
- 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.
- If and where it does not occur, funding be provided for the employment and training, including in ethics, of those involved in hospital ministries.
- The role of parish Pastoral Associate be actively developed and promoted by the Bishops where appropriate.
- Women's participation in parish life be increased through the employment of more lay women in the role of Pastoral Associate.
- 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.
- Dioceses, parishes and all Catholic organisations recognise and promote equality and inclusivity for Australia's indigenous peoples.
- Clergy and others in leadership positions in the Church be given the opportunity for continuing education in keeping with other professions.

- Where it does not occur, qualified women be employed as educators, counsellors and formation personnel in seminaries and/or theological institutions.
- That Australian indigenous women be included as part of decision-making, especially in judgments and decisions which affect them.
- 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.
- The appropriate authorities in the Church investigate more employment opportunities for Australian indigenous women in a range of roles and tasks in the Church.
- 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.
- That qualified women be encouraged to act as Church spokespersons and as guest speakers at Church conferences, ceremonies and functions.
- That women's needs in relation to participation in the Church be made a financial priority for the Church.
- Bishops when pointing to the signs of the times acknowledge positive developments in the role and status of women.
- Where it does not occur, parish Pastoral Associates receive fair contracts.
- Lay women as well as lay men act as marriage celebrants in accordance with canon 1112.
- Where it does not occur, qualified and experienced women be involved in pre-marriage programs.
- 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.
- More women be appointed to marriage tribunals and, where necessary, be funded to undertake specialist training.
- Support for solo mothers be given through greater inclusion of solo parents in Church life.
- The employing authority give just remuneration and employment conditions for women in the Church as a priority.
- 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.
- The Bishops promote contemporary Catholic female role models, especially for young women.
- A range of faith education opportunities, including formation in liturgy, be provided for women in rural communities

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