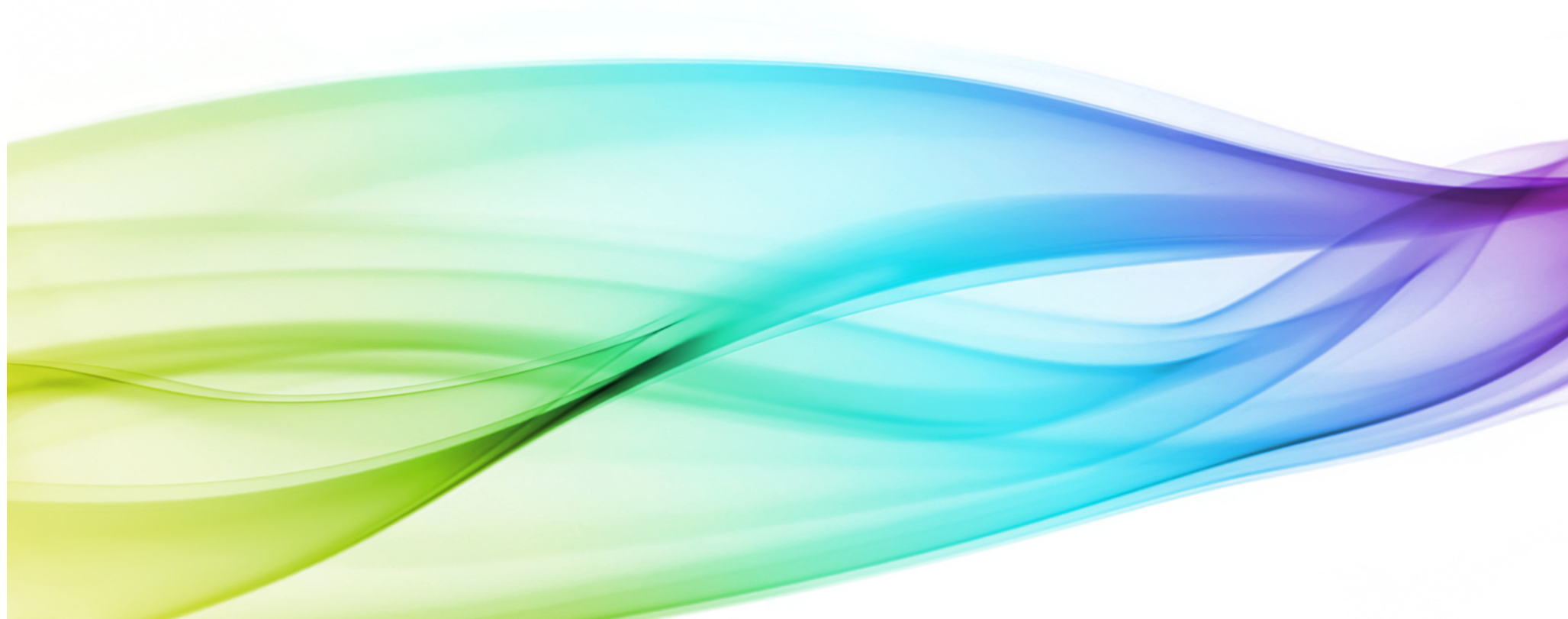


Still Listening to the Spirit: Woman and Man Twenty Years Later

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Introduction

The anthology of essays *Still Listening to the Spirit: Woman and Man Twenty Years Later* was developed in partnership by two offices of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference; the Office for Social Justice and the Office for the Participation of Women. It celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the publication of findings of ground-breaking research on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia. It was also intended to provide food for thought and prayer in the discernment phase of preparation for the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia.

This discussion guide accompanies the anthology, providing starting points for engagement with each of the essays. It can be used for personal reflection, or in a parish, school or community group context. Several discussion starters are provided for each essay. You might choose to focus on one or two of the essays or to work through the whole anthology reflecting on each of them. Likewise, you may choose to focus on one or two of the questions in relation to any given essay, or to work your way through all of them.

An important, overarching question is: 'What does all of this mean for the Plenary Council?' You may care to craft your response in relation to one of the themes identified by the Plenary Council Team for deeper consideration during the discernment phase. They are:

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is...

1. *Missionary and evangelizing*
2. *Inclusive, participatory and synodal*
3. *Prayerful and eucharistic*
4. *Humble, healing and merciful*
5. *A joyful, hope-filled and servant community*
6. *Open to conversion, renewal and reform?*

Submissions on the six themes for discernment are still being accepted by the Plenary Council Team during the first months of 2020. International Women's Day on 8 March might be a good time to convene a group for prayer and reflection and the preparation of a submission. Submissions of up to 1,000 characters can be made via an online form here: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/listening-and-discernment/>

If you are meeting with a group to pray and reflect, you may wish to use this discussion guide in conjunction with the resources provided by the Plenary Council Team for listening and discernment sessions. They are available here: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/listening-and-discernment/> The guides for the themes 'inclusive, participatory and synodal' and 'open to conversion, renewal and reform' are especially relevant for the concerns expressed in these essays.

I am grateful for the assistance of Elizabeth Delaney SGS, Dr Patricia Madigan OP, Liz Mackinlay, Louise McKeogh FMA, Susan Grout, and Debra Zanella in the development of this discussion guide. I hope that it helps you to reflect and pray over the seventeen essays in *Still Listening to the Spirit*, and to contribute the fruits of your reflection to the Plenary Council preparation process.

Dr Sandie Cornish
Publications and Research Officer
Office for Social Justice
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Sydney, January 2020

Woman and Man, One in Christ Jesus: An Aboriginal Woman's Perspective

Kelly Humphrey

The first essay in the anthology comes from First Nations' woman Kelly Humphrey. While declaring impatience for a spiritual revolution, she takes a long view of the makings of such revolutions, and finds reasons for hope. Twenty years after eight groups of Aboriginal women courageously took part in the research on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia, a greater sense of urgency on the part of all members of the Church is needed so that the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to the Church may be joyfully received.

Read Kelly's essay at pages 3 to 9 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. What is the revolution for which you are impatient?
2. Where do you see signs of hope that a spiritual revolution may be beginning to bear fruit?
3. How can the Church in Australia be more inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, welcoming their contributions joyfully?
4. What recommendations or decisions could the Plenary Council make to increase the cultural competence of Church personnel, especially leaders at all levels?
5. In what ways could the Plenary Council promote greater participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the Church?

Looking Back, Looking Forward – Love or Fear?

Geraldine Hawkes

Geraldine Hawkes places before us a choice between dispositions of love and fear. Geraldine was the inaugural Chair of the Commission (later a Council) for Australian Catholic Women, which was established in response to the research on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia. She contrasts the fear and gatekeeping that has thwarted progress in deepening women's participation in the Church with the disposition of love and receptivity that is consistently encouraged by the Gospel. She sees hope in the example of Archbishop Faulkner's shared leadership and governance of the Archdiocese of Adelaide and views the Plenary Council as an opportunity to receive what the Spirit is saying to and through all of us.

Read Geraldine's essay at pages 10 to 17 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. How can we increase the space of love and reduce the influence of fear within the Church?
2. What practices and processes have helped you to listen to and learn from others? How might they be used to enhance the life of the Church?
3. How can the Church in Australia better listen to and learn from women?
4. What models of governance would you recommend that the Plenary Council endorse?
5. Since the publication of *Still Listening to the Spirit*, both the Office for the Participation of Women and the Council for Australian Catholic Women have been dissolved. In a context of financial constraint, what institutional arrangements might the Plenary Council recommend to ensure an effective focus on promoting the equality of women and men in the Church?

The Experience of Women Religious

Clare Condon SGS

Religious women have been standard-bearers and trailblazers in women's participation in leadership and decision-making within the Church in Australia, as elsewhere. Clare recalls the journey of religious women in Australia as they discerned and responded to the call of Vatican II. She also shares how they continue to innovate in their models of leadership and governance in attentiveness to the Spirit. The courage, graciousness and inclusivity of religious women as they not only open but hand over leadership and governance of the works which they established to lay people is, in itself, an important act of leadership within the Church.

Read Clare's essay at pages 21 to 29 in *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. What are the key lessons about leadership that the Church in Australia can learn from the experience of women religious?
2. Why were women religious able to respond so fully and creatively to the call of Vatican II?
3. What role might a return to a baptismal theology of the People of God play in the development of new expressions of the Catholic tradition?
4. Where in the Church do you think the leadership of women is most needed today?
5. Where are the 'edges' towards which you see the Gospel guiding us in Australian society today?
6. Have you experienced a collaborative team approach to local Church leadership? What were the elements that facilitated and gave life to this approach?
7. How can the Plenary Council draw on the innovations in governance, leadership and decision-making by women religious to increase the transparency, inclusivity and accountability of the Church?

Women's Leadership in the Church: A Question of Imagination

Maeve Louise Heaney VDMF

Theologian Maeve Louise Heaney takes up the question of reimagining ways of sharing decision-making, power and leadership within the Church. She presents the reflections on gender justice of the International Network for Societies of Catholic Theology, and notes their convergence with some of the key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Maeve proposes three ways forward. First, an inclusive conversation that gathers and listens to diversity; second, dismissing fear as an adviser, and; third, greater formation in the history of women's involvement in the Church, in the historicity of our grasp of truth and the development of doctrine, and in an ecclesiology of structured communion founded on baptism.

Read Maeve's essay at pages 30 to 38 in *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. In what ways does the 'sin of fear' hold us back from implementing changes to the Church's structures and culture?
2. Who or what might lose personal, institutional or cultural power if women are more equally included in decision-making and ministry in the Church?
3. Issues concerning the equality of women and men in the Church are well-known. What prevents change? How can we address these blockages?
4. How might the Church in Australia increase the opportunities for local communities to regularly hear the theological reflection of qualified women?
5. A key issue is how we imagine things; Maeve says 'imagination is our doorway to the eschatological.' What are the implications of this assertion?
6. How can we reimagine power, decision-making and accountability within the Church?
7. One of the aims of the Plenary Council is to listen to what the Spirit is saying. What have you heard in your experience of the Council thus far? What do you believe are the essential things the Spirit is saying?
8. In what ways do you hope that the Plenary Council might 'open up new pathways of inclusive involvement of women in the renewal of our Church'?

A Leadership Framework for Service and Being: Mission, Mercy and Pope Francis

Debra Zanella

Debra Zanella reflects on her experience of leading a Catholic social service organization. She finds inspiration for her development of a leadership framework for service and being in the teachings concerning mission and mercy of Pope Francis and of former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Debra's vision and practice of mission and leadership invites us to go outwards towards others, to where they live and work, and where they struggle.

Read Debra's essay at pages 39 to 52 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. In the desire to be of service to others we can at times lose sight of the 'other' as 'us' and forget our mutual interdependence. Who are the 'other' and 'us' in our contemporary world? What would it mean for our Church if we truly recognized the 'other' as 'us'?
2. If the Christian vision is that leadership is 'an essential means of building community', what does this mean for people in leadership roles in the Church?
3. Pope Francis says that the only future worth building is US. Why do you believe building a future of 'US' (connections, partnerships and networks) is essential?
4. In places where there are limited opportunities for leadership roles in the Church, how can we reach out and improve our availability to others?
5. How can we educate and inform our shrinking and older demographic of regular Church attenders about the need to change gender inequality and gender bias for the good of all? How would you describe your own framework for leadership and being?
6. How can women's experiences of leadership inform the development of a more synodal Church?
7. In your view, what would our Church look like if women were able to exercise their gifts of leadership?
8. Since structural gender inequality has been shown to be one of the key drivers in violence against women, how do the structures and systems within the institutional Church counter or facilitate this driver? How might this issue be addressed at the Plenary Council?

The Discipline with the Bad Reputation: Woman and Canon Law

Elizabeth Delaney SGS

Elizabeth Delaney's essay on canon law sets out a significant element of the context for the other essays. She expertly provides interpretive keys to the law of the Church and its development. Elizabeth identifies practical situations in which canon law allows women to have a voice. These include determining the readiness of children for the sacraments, participation in diocesan and parish structures and, perhaps surprisingly, the selection of bishops.

Read Elizabeth's essay at pages 55 to 63 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. Canon law allows for the operation of diocesan commissions. Does your diocese make use of such structures to include lay women and men in decision-making processes?
2. How might greater space be created for lay people to cooperate in the governance of parishes and dioceses?
3. What opportunities could we imagine in our local church that would give voice to the baptized? Are there structures or practices within the local church that cause members of the baptized to be excluded?
4. What are the values that underlie changes for which we would hope? Can we imagine situations where these values flourish?
5. How might we broaden our sense of church, the People of God? How might we recognize and honour God's gifts in the various churches, communities and groups? How might we eliminate any sense of 'us' and 'them'?
6. In our various interactions, whether social or business, what thoughts have stirred us? What have we learned that might be wisdom for our church?
3. What structures or processes might the Plenary Council establish to facilitate the participation of the laity, especially women, in the process of selecting bishops?
4. The Plenary Council cannot change canon law, but it could recommend changes to canon law. What, if any, changes to canon law do you think the Plenary Council should recommend?

Women's Modes of Liturgical Participation

Clare V Johnson

Liturgy professor Clare Johnson elucidates the current opportunities for and limitations on women's participation in the liturgy. She laments that, despite increased permissions for women to participate in the public liturgical celebration of the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church since Vatican II, it is in liturgy that the ecclesial inequality between women and men is most publicly on display. Clare concludes that much remains to be done to enact Jesus' radical vision of equality when it comes to the liturgy of the Church.

Read Clare' essay at pages 64 to 71 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. What is hindering women's full participation in liturgy?
2. Which limitations to women's participation in liturgy trouble you the most?
3. How important is the full inclusion of women in liturgical language?
4. How might more space be given to women's leadership of prayer and worship in the life of the Church in Australia?
5. Women with higher degrees in theological disciplines are often more qualified to offer theological reflection than their parish priest. How might local communities be enabled to benefit from the involvement of these women in preaching?
6. What action could be taken at the Plenary Council to realize in the Church's liturgy Christ's radical vision of equality between men and women who are created equal in the image and likeness of God, and baptized as members of Christ's Body?
7. What changes would you like the Plenary Council to recommend in relation to the limits on the participation of women in the liturgy of the Church?

Women Deacons: Status and Function

John N Collins

John N Collins, an international authority on the diaconate, takes up the question of the status and function of women deacons in the early Church and their implications for the diaconate today. He notes that while agitation for women deacons was widespread at the time of the research into the participation of women in the Catholic Church, it does not figure significantly in the findings. It is a question that is currently receiving serious attention in the Holy See. John stresses that contrary to the common misinterpretation of *diakonia* as loving service, it actually refers to responding to a mandate. He concludes that before accepting an invitation to be ordained deacons, women should ensure that Church leaders understand that such ordination will establish in the local Church pastoral officers with responsibilities under the bishop in a commission to minister to the People of God in liturgy, the Word and charity.

Read John's essay at pages 72 to 81 in *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. How might a theology of service have different implications for women and for men?
2. How do you see the difference between the diaconate and lay pastoral ministry?
3. Should the diaconate be open to lay men who are not preparing for priestly ordination if it is not also open to lay women?
4. John demonstrates that considering *diakonia* as lowly, loving-service is a linguistic misunderstanding. What difference does it make to understand diaconate as receiving a mandate, rather than as lowly, loving-service?
5. How would you like the Plenary Council to respond to calls for women to be admitted to the diaconate?

Women in Pastoral Ministry

Anne Dowling

Anne Dowling's reflection on her experience as a lay pastoral minister reveals a complex reality in which strategies to ensure the sacramental life of local communities are in tension with the development of lay pastoral ministry and the inculturation of the Gospel in Australia. The confluence of canon law restrictions on women's participation in leadership and governance in the Church, and in the public liturgy of the Church, together with patriarchal attitudes on the part of some ordained ministers, leaves women lay pastoral ministers exposed to the possibility of arbitrary behaviors by parish priests. Further research could help to probe the perception that women's participation in this area has actually gone backwards in the last twenty years.

Read Anne's essay at pages 82 to 88 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. What changes are needed to provide fairer and more secure employment relationships for women in lay pastoral ministry?
2. In what ways are strategies to ensure the sacramental life of local communities in tension with the development of lay pastoral ministry?
3. How can lay pastoral ministry contribute to the effective inculturation of the Gospel in Australia?
4. Should a national accreditation and training framework for lay pastoral ministry be adopted?
5. What recommendations could the Plenary Council make to curtail arbitrary behavior by parish priests towards women in lay pastoral ministry and to provide transparent mechanisms of accountability?
6. How might the Plenary Council further develop and respond to the recommendations of *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace* (available here <https://www.catholic.org.au/fsgg>)?

To Rise Above a Whisper: Catholic Women in Interfaith Networks in Australia

Cheryl Camp RSM

Cheryl Camp's essay on women in interreligious dialogue shows quiet progress in an area that did not receive significant attention in the research into the participation of women in the Catholic Church twenty years ago. While holding up the contributions of women in an increasingly important expression of Church, Cheryl contrasts the volume of men's voices in interreligious dialogue with those of women, which are yet to 'rise above a whisper'.

Read Cheryl's essay at pages 89 to 98 in *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. Why do you think men's voices have been louder than those of women in interfaith dialogue and action?
2. How can the voices of Catholic women in interfaith dialogue be given a higher public profile and greater visibility?
3. Should the Church give greater emphasis to the 'dialogue of life' in interreligious dialogue compared with formal statements and teaching?
4. In what ways can the Plenary Council acknowledge and hold up the importance of interfaith dialogue in the mission of the Church in Australia?
5. What interfaith actions or initiatives should the Plenary Council recommend? How can an incisive role for women be ensured in such actions or initiatives?

An Option for Poor Women: Women and the Economy

Gemma Tulud Cruz

Theologian Gemma Tulud Cruz highlights the female face of poverty and advocates for a more woman-friendly economy. She argues that the global market overlays 'female' roles – defined in terms of sexuality, reproduction and domesticity – with a market ethos of commodification, moral relativism and dominance by those who already possess resources. Gemma suggests that the gender blindness of the response of the Catholic social tradition has failed to serve poor women in Australia. She concludes that our option for the poor must become an option for poor women.

Read Gemma's essay at pages 101 to 110 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. What is preventing the Church from speaking out more effectively about the female face of poverty?
2. Could the Catholic Church better support women who chose to be wives and mothers and in paid work?
3. From your own experience, what would a 'woman-friendly economy' look like in contemporary Australia, including in the Church?
4. Are there ways in which we can embrace the many women in our own area whose lives are economically, spiritually or physically challenged?
5. Can economically marginalized women find help within your parish or diocesan community? If not, why? Can we change this?
6. What structures and processes could ensure that the experiences and perspectives of women are included in the development of local and international teachings of the Church on social, economic and ecological justice?
7. How can the Plenary Council equitably represent the diverse perspectives and needs of all women in the Church?

Perceptions of Motherhood

Pauline Marriott

Pauline Marriott explores perceptions of motherhood and the challenges that they pose for women's exercise of leadership both in the Church and in society. She stresses the importance of listening to the voices of female theologians, particularly in their reflection on actual experiences of motherhood in contrast to the banal stereotypes that are at times presented in Church teaching.

Read Pauline's essay at pages 111 to 119 in *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. How do you think perceptions of motherhood help or hinder women's leadership within the Church?
2. How might Church teaching concerning family life be better grounded in the actual experience of parenting and avoid the idealization of motherhood and the marginalization of fatherhood?
3. Do you experience the Church's approach to women as excessively focused on biological functions and reflective of an essentialized conception of 'the woman'? Does it acknowledge meaningfully and respect the experience of women who do not have children?
4. What leadership skills do women develop through the role of motherhood and how might these be better recognized and respected in Church appointments?
5. How can the Plenary Council help the Church to move beyond banal stereotypes of motherhood and to engage with diverse lived experiences of motherhood? How might it help the Church to affirm and value fatherhood and to encourage men to understand their parenting as a vocation?

Motherhood, Unconditional Love, Disability and Uncertainty

**Moira Byrne
Garton**

Moira Byrne Garton reflects with great generosity from the perspective of the mother of a daughter with a disability. She relates the varying, and at times painful, attitudes and responses of others, including members of the Church community. Moira concludes that managing uncertainty and being prepared to love unconditionally are what is required for us to be able to navigate an evolving Church, and to bear witness to our God.

**Read Moira's essay at pages 120 to 124 of
Still Listening to the Spirit.**

Discussion Starters

1. Why do you think it might be "easier to love an amorphous, anonymous 'other' neighbor, than a 'different' person sitting next to us on a church pew"?
2. How does your parish welcome, support and include people living with disability, their families and carers?
3. In what ways can our local Church communities develop their theology and pastoral practices to become more inclusive of those who live with disability or are in some way not typical?
4. How are managing uncertainty and being prepared to love unconditionally needed in order to be able to navigate an evolving Church and to witness to our God?
5. Has the Plenary Council got a role to play in making our Church more inclusive of people with disabilities, their families and carers?
6. How will the Plenary Council itself need to manage uncertainty and express the willingness to love unconditionally?

Domestic Violence: Moving from Silence to Inclusion and Dialogue in the Australian Catholic Church

Liz Mackinlay

Liz Mackinlay observes that while Catholic organizations provide front-line services for women and their children experiencing domestic violence, the Catholic Church in Australia is yet to address family and domestic violence in a systematic way. Furthermore, the nature of decision-making and the structure of leadership in the Church, including the status accorded to priests, actually reinforces the cultural assumption that underpins domestic violence – that men may control women. Liz concludes that until this is addressed, women and children experiencing domestic violence will not find in the Church a place of rest and support.

Read Liz's essay at page 125 to 131 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. What mechanisms and conditions need to exist for the voices of women, especially vulnerable women, to be heard in our Church?
2. To be an inclusive Church where this is possible, we will need creative ideas beyond 'discussing the issue with the parish priest'. What are some ideas?
3. How could the Catholic Church in Australia in the 21st century provide multiple and permanent opportunities for women to participate in all aspects of Church life including management and governance, ministry, theology and pastoral care?
4. How can recommendation 16.7 from the Australian Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse be implemented in the Australian Catholic Church? Can examples from the management and governance of Catholic health, community services and education agencies help?
5. What recommendations would you make to the Plenary Council on the drivers and enablers of violence against women and children that exist in the culture of the Church?
6. What decisions could the Plenary Council make that would ensure that the Church addresses family and domestic violence in a systematic way?

Women and the Sexual Abuse Crisis

Maree Marsh CSB

Maree Marsh addresses the sexual abuse crisis in the Church. She demonstrates that, in order to move forward, the abuse of power must end and clericalism must be challenged by the active involvement of lay colleagues. Maree points to the importance of including more women in diocesan and parish governance to create balance.

Read Maree's essay at pages 132 to 142 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Discussion Starters

1. What do you think are some reasons why the Church has done so little to protect women from sexual violation and other forms of violence?
2. Is there a danger that safeguarding organizations, roles and procedures may give the impression that the causes of the sexual abuse crisis have been dealt with? Is a focus on these things detracting from questions of cultural change in your local church?
3. What changes are needed to address the culture that has enabled sexual abuse within the Church and failed to hold perpetrators, and leaders who have failed to address the situation, accountable?
4. How can we go about fostering cultural change at the local and regional levels?
5. What changes should the Plenary Council recommend in the organization of power, decision-making, transparency and accountability within the Church?

Letter to My Daughter

Kym Keady

Discussion Starters

1. What would you write to a young woman who is about to embark on the next chapter of her life?
2. Kym's letter presumes that her daughter's future will centre on family and raising children. How do we support and guide young women who make other choices, or whose desire for children is not realized?
3. What hopes do you have for the next generation of women in the Church?
4. How might the wisdom of the women Doctors of the Church guide us in this time? Imagine what they might say if they were *periti* (theological advisors) to the Plenary Council?
5. Who are the wise women of our Church today to whom the Plenary Council could turn for guidance?

Kym Keady's imaginative piece is framed as a letter to her daughter on the occasion of her wedding. It presents in a poignant way the hopes of so many women for the next generation of women and girls, and those still to come. Kym entrusts her daughter to the companionship of the four women Doctors of the Church, whose wisdom permeates the letter.

Read Kym's essay at pages 145 to 155 of *Still Listening to the Spirit*.

Looking Forward: Women and the Plenary Council

Patricia Madigan OP

The last word in the anthology goes to Patricia Madigan, scholar and the last Chair of the Council for Australian Catholic Women, which has now been dissolved. She points to the unfinished business of the Second Vatican Council. Patricia observes that the Council did not describe roles for the faithful on the basis of gender but rather as participants in the mystery of Christ through baptism. Fifty years later, for many Catholic women, not enough has changed to give expression to this teaching in practice. The Plenary Council may be the last opportunity in the foreseeable future for the Church in Australia to implement the theological and structural changes needed to fulfil the promise of the Council.

**Read Patricia's essay at pages 156 to 163 of
Still Listening to the Spirit.**

Discussion Starters

1. How can the Catholic Church promote a 'full vocational flourishing' for each of its baptized members?
2. Pope Francis' preferred language is 'reciprocity' and 'mutuality' compared with Pope John Paul II's preferred language of 'complementarity'. What difference does this make?
3. What theological and/or structural changes in the Catholic Church do you see are needed to fulfil the promise of the Second Vatican Council and to equip the Catholic Church for its mission into the future?
4. Do you think that the Plenary Council is the 'last opportunity for the foreseeable future' for us to implement the changes needed to 'fulfill the promise' of Vatican II? What would be the consequences of missing this opportunity?
5. What are some concrete and measurable outcomes you would like to see implemented as a result of the Plenary Council?



Order your copy of *Still Listening to the Spirit* at the [ACBC Online Shop](#) (allow eight days for print on demand) or get an electronic version on Apple Books or Kindle.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OFFICE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

24-32 O'Riordan St, Alexandria NSW 2015 Australia

PO Box 7246 Alexandria NSW 2015 Australia

P (02) 8306 3499 F (02) 8306 3498 E admin.socialjustice@catholic.org.au

Web www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

ABN 60 597 896 756