

## A Strong Voice for Justice and Equality

As soon as I heard that the newly-elected Pope had chosen the name Leo, the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On New Things) jumped into my head. Why did that happen? Although *Rerum Novarum* was written in 1891, as a seminarian in the 60's, I was inspired by what is now considered to be one of the greatest encyclicals ever written.

In responding to the industrial revolution, Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) condemned excessive social and economic inequality, demanding justice in the distribution of resources and protection for the rights of the poor. He maintained that the free market cannot solve all social problems and that unbridled economic liberalism means that the State must intervene in order to build a just society.

Reading this as a young person in the political climate at the time created some confusion in my mind. Why did we not see much evidence that the encyclical had some impact? Robert Menzies, who was the Liberal Prime Minister during the Second World War, was brought back to lead a government for a second period, his strong stance against the perceived threats of Communism being one of the main factors keeping him and the conservatives in power. In this climate, the Church in Australia also showed fear of communism and *Rerum Novarum* may have been seen as going too far.

Although the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) took up the issue of economic and social inequality specifically in Chapter III of *The Church in the Modern World*, it took Pope Francis to effectively bring the required emphasis to the need to deal with increasing poverty and injustice with his overriding mantra of mercy. What a time for our new Pope to indicate that he is not only in tune with Francis but also identifies with the prophetic insights of the man whose name he has chosen! Welcome Pope Leo XIV.

The so-called 'experts' who predicted the possible successors to Francis were all completely wrong. The fact that it took only four voting sessions to elect



Cardinal Robert Prevost shows that there may have been a lot of consensus in the discussion among groups of cardinals before the voting started about the right man for now. Given that many in the Conclave had been made cardinals by Pope Francis, they may have seen an opportunity to quell the fierce opposition that had been shown to Francis by many of the American cardinals, in addition to some

### IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial: .. 1-2

Letters .. 2

Michael Sibert: *Unleash the creativity of the Body of Christ* .. 3-4

Noelene Uren: *What is Synodality?* .. 4-5

John Buggy: *Some Necessary Conditions for Synodality* .. 5

Eugene Stockton: *Reflections on Parish Reform* .. 6-8

Kevin Liston: *Features of a Desired Future Church* .. 9-10

Johnson Kotaram: *The Pope in a Poncho* .. 11

Fiona Cochrane: *Grander Vision* .. 12-13

New book by Phillipa Martyr: *WITNESS* .. 14

*Pope Francis reflecting from hospital* .. 15

Have your say – Secretariat – Subscriptions .. 16

of those in the Curia. A smart move . . . have someone from the country of the dissidents who is not of their ilk, especially when he has so many capabilities.

Pope Leo XIV is a person of high intelligence, has vast pastoral experience along with degrees in mathematics, theology and Canon Law, speaks five languages, and has the quiet political diplomacy to move through the regional and ideological differences across the Church. He is reported as being a listener

and, in doing this, he appears to have the capacity to interpret the need of the times. We so much want to trust him on this.

The reform that we in ARC seek in relation to doctrine might not be on the top of Leo's agenda. But maybe the gap between traditional teaching and what people believe will open up if genuine Synodality progresses. Injustice and inequality can have many forms.

*John Buggy*

## Letters to the Editor

**H**ave just finished reading the latest, very fine edition of *ARCVoice*. I think it is a terrific read - and inspirational! I think it could/should be sent 'free' to more of the Catholic diaspora with an encouragement for them, to subscribe.

It's really that good and it would resonate with many people who may not yet know about ARC. I know of at least 10 people I could send it to, and encourage them to subscribe!

*Michael Hawton*

**A** brief note to say well done again to you and all the team on the latest edition of *ARCVoice*.

*Paul Casey*

**I** did not want to go without giving a congrats for the latest *ARC Voice*. There were some interesting and challenging articles, especially Patrick's on '**Catholics not attending Mass - Major decline in attendance**' and Alan's '**A Just War**'. It was most interesting for me to understand the true situation of Taiwan!! and it's terrible connection with AUKUS.

Michael's outstanding article, '**Reasons**' also in relation to *Catholics not attending Mass*, was fantastic. This could or should become the official rationale for major reformation within the Australian Catholic Church.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to *ARCVoice*.

*Maureen Ryan*

### Please Help if You Can

We have not changed the fee for ARC Membership subscriptions since our commencement in the year 2000, despite the large increase in costs since then. Additional donations from members have enabled us to do this.

**Without changing the current membership fee** of \$30 and \$20 for pensioners, we are asking you to consider paying \$50, only if you can afford it. This is optional, but it will help us to continue with what you tell us to keep on doing.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of *ARCVoice* which comes with your membership. An extra copy is provided this time for you to hand on to someone who may be interested.

*John Buggy, on behalf of the ARC Secretariat*

# Unleash the creativity of the Body of Christ

Michael Sibert

One of my fondest memories, and greatest privileges as a teacher, was carrying out the role of Year 12 Retreat Facilitator for 20 or so years. After each retreat we asked students to complete evaluation scores on all aspects of the retreat. For many years the ratings on the final liturgy were consistently poor. The liturgy, as it was then, followed a tightly scripted and mostly passive communion service structure. However, it did include a narrated Gospel mime segment on the Passion of Christ or the Prodigal Son for which I needed a dozen volunteers to give up some of their free time to learn the routine and perform it in front of their peers. Eventually I realised that students in this volunteer group gave somewhat higher ratings to the final liturgy than the others, which led me to ponder how I could extend the active involvement to all the students in the hope it would improve their liturgical experience and make it more meaningful. After researching and becoming inspired by the work of Matthew Fox in creative liturgy, I decided to pass the responsibility for most of the final liturgy back to the students. Students were encouraged to work in their retreat small groups to select one of the retreat themes covered in the large group input and be creative in presenting their groups reflections, insights and learning within the final liturgy. They could choose from an array of presentation options including a rap song, a poem, a dance routine, a mime, a drama skit, a large mural artwork etc. The three retreats completed in this fashion were marked by an enthusiastic buzz in preparation and anticipation of the final liturgy and significantly improved student evaluation scores. The unlocking and empowering of creativity worked a treat!

While our Catholic schools thrive, our parishes atrophy. The non-attending Catholic community send their children to Catholic schools, at significant financial cost, but sadly do not bring them to celebrate the Eucharist. The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2021 produced by The National Centre for Pastoral Research for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference revealed that the number of people at Mass on a typical weekend in May 2021 was 8.2% of Catholics and 11.8% in 2016.

Now while this data is not news to most of us, it surely makes a statement about the health and vitality of the Catholic Church in Australia and must be of some concern to the leaders of the flock. Like the Year

12 Retreat Liturgy evaluation scores, the decision to not attend the central religious practice of Catholicism implies a very poor evaluation of the experience.

Phillippa Martyr's article 'Why Catholics don't come to Mass' in the September 2024 issue of *ARCVoice*, identified the previously documented reasons for Catholics not attending Mass as: the view that it's not a sin to miss Mass on Sundays and not agreeing with Church teachings on key issues like ordination and sexuality. Martyr also referenced the Catholics in Australia 2022 survey which recorded a shared anger among 'irregulars and non-attenders' around clergy sexual abuse and the role of women.

Furthermore, and most interestingly, Martyr makes the very salient point that we cannot assume that the issues people have with the church, equate with the reasons why they don't come to Mass. She points out that fixing issues such as clergy sexual abuse and the role of women will not necessarily lead to an improvement in regular attendance at Mass. In Martyr's view the reasons for not attending are mostly personal and as such will require a greater level of listening, patience and engagement for each personal context to be appreciated and effectively addressed.

The implication of this point means that strategies aimed at improving Mass attendance must not only address issues of church teachings and practices (i.e. deal with the negatives), but also at the same time, must provide positive reasons, positive experiences, for people to come to Mass regularly. Our contemporary culture places a high value on our personal freedom to choose, especially when it comes to how we spend our free time. Time-poor families choose to spend their available free-time pursuing health and recreation activities rather than on formal religious participation. These activities also provide the added benefit of social connection and community. Non-attending Catholics are prioritising positive health and recreation experiences and will only return to Mass if it becomes a positive experience.

As the formal leaders of local diocesan churches, Bishops hold the keys of possibility when it comes to creating positive liturgical experiences. They can unlock the latent potential of the whole church, all the baptised lay members, and facilitate some experimental creativity and engagement in preparing and presenting Eucharistic liturgies. Catholic liturgies will become positive, valued experiences if they are allowed to arise from and speak to the life contexts of 21<sup>st</sup> century Australian lives, while also honouring the tradition.

In the accompanying note to his approval and signing of the Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis speaks of the need to effectively implement what is already provided for in existing law and ‘to the creative activation of new forms of ministeriality and missionary action, experimenting and testing these experiences’, and further that for the ad limina visit, ‘each Bishop will take care to report what choices have been made in the local Church entrusted to him’. Francis’ sentiments include a challenge and an accountability for Bishops to exercise their existing authority to recognise their non-attending flock and to encourage some liturgical flexibility and experimentation to open the possibilities of far greater lay involvement, beyond the existing roles of Lector and Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist.

Moving forward in the spirit of synodality, the Pope is open to local churches responding to the

demands of their local contexts. Improving Mass attendance in Australian churches will require all of us interested in change to accept his invitation by:

- i. respectfully insisting on our baptismal right to be an active contributor to the way our churches express themselves liturgically;
- ii. pressing our bishops and priests to re-consider perceived restrictions and allow a greater degree of experimentation in the ‘who and how’ of liturgy, and as Dr. Sandie Cornish highlights:, ‘Notice who is not present – seek their voices, (and) invite their participation.’\*

The process may be messy but within the mess lie the seeds of a flourishing future.

MICHAEL SIBERT is a member of the ARC Secretariat and a regular contributor.

\* Dr. Sandie Cornish: Presentation on *The Synod and the Australian Church – where to now?* Sense of the Faithful

## What is Synodality?

Noelene Uren

Synodality has become part of the legacy of Pope Francis. He convened a Synod on Synodality, an assembly of Bishops focusing on a Synodal Church with the theme, ‘Communion, Participation and Mission’. There was a lot of discussion, a lot of words, but nothing really appeared to change. For many people, including me, the question was, ‘What does Synodality really mean?’ I read a lot of definitions, but the one I liked best was: ‘Synodality means everyone working together towards a common goal’.

Is this what Pope Francis wanted? He started with the bishops coming together, but if the key word in that sentence is, ‘everyone’, shouldn’t it be at the parish level that Synodality begins? What is our common goal? Surely it is to live a good, Christian life. This then would mean clergy and people all working together to follow and practise the teachings of Christ, listening to each other, helping and supporting each other as equals before God, being a community.

My former Parish Priest, Fr Peter McGrath, instinctively recognised this. I recently watched a recording of an interview made with Peter by Ray Martin. When Ray asked him how it was that in his parish the church was full to overflowing where other congregations were shrinking, Peter didn’t need any fancy words to explain it. He simply said, ‘I ask the people what they want’.

He understood that in today’s world families are different, no longer part of a village where everyone knows everyone else. There are nuclear families with no relatives around and no support, blended families, single parents, people living on their own, all with financial, emotional and spiritual needs. He wanted his parish to be like the early Church where the Church itself was the extended family.

To this end he initiated the Family Groups to which at one stage 80% of the parish belonged. This provided friendship for both parents and children and gave children a wide experience of socialisation in a Christian setting. But there was much more.

There was a Parish Council with never any shortage of people wanting to stand for election. This was the spirit of community in action, with the committee even being organised into a weekend away to better come together to plan for the good of the parish. There was also a finance committee and groups to cater for all: social groups, youth groups, support groups, house and grounds, cleaning, a liturgy group, a group to organise the Christmas hampers, a roster to hold the coffee/wine mornings after Mass. The newsletter, *The Terrey-Graph*, kept every-one informed of what was going on in the parish and all were welcome: married, single, separated, divorced, gay and, if you weren’t a Catholic but wanted to come to Mass or serve on a committee, no problem. Welcome!

Peter realised that in every parish there is a variety of talents and experiences available and these qualities and distinct gifts needed to be recognised, welcomed and expressed in action. Under his leadership

parishioners came together to support and care for each other, to work together, play together, cherish their children together with the basic teaching of Jesus central to their lives: 'Love one another as I

have loved you.' Because, as Peter said, 'If you love one another, you love God.' That was Synodality.

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## Some Necessary Conditions for Synodality

John Buggy

**I**t is very encouraging to know that the newly-elected Pope Leo XIV will follow in the spirit of Pope Francis in relation to the need for Synodality. It is now up to bishops to implement it in the form of diocesan councils and for priests to do so in their parish councils.

Given that there has been little enthusiasm to do this in Australia, it will probably not happen in some places. Where it does, it is also likely that many priests will maintain that they have already introduced Synodality because they have a parish council. Without an understanding of the spirit of Synodality, there is the distinct possibility that such councils merely reflect a situation where the bishop or priest largely uses a structure in which he tells those involved what he already intends to do.

Without very clear guidelines and rules that govern it, no structure of consultation can meet the spirit of what Pope Francis meant by Synodality. At its very least, listening in an atmosphere of humility and openness before decision-making is essential. Here are some elements that a council should have:

**Representation:** Not everyone in a diocese or parish can be directly involved but Synodality implies inclusion. Therefore, those involved in meetings need to represent those who will be affected by the process. Although it is agreed that the Church is not a democracy, it does not mean that the principles of equality that we accept in our society should not be respected and applied. Those who represent others should be elected. Otherwise, it is too easy for the bishop or priest to appoint those who will agree with him without the need to do any effective listening. Candidates should be required to present statements outlining their approach to those they may be representing, including background and any credentials that would make them an appropriate council

member. An appropriate voting procedure should be established for this purpose. People in paid positions, if included, should not be seen as representatives (*possibly contrary to the view of Eugene Stockton in his article in this issue*).

**Opportunity:** Once a person has earned the right to be a council member, that right cannot be exercised unless there is a defined opportunity to do so. This means that the minimum number of meetings in a defined period should be stipulated, meeting times and minimum length determined, and agendas outlined at a set time before each meeting. In other words, members must be able to prepare in order to participate effectively.

**Transparency:** Any accompanying documentation related to the agenda must be available for a sufficient period before the meeting, especially if it is expected that decisions will need to be made at that meeting. Otherwise, members can be pressured into agreeing or otherwise when they may not have had time to consider an issue. This is particularly important if there is need to consult with others whom they represent.

**Accountability:** Unlike the democratic political process, the bishop in a diocesan council and the parish priest in a parish council has the final say in the decision-making process. However, in the spirit of Synodality, attempts should be made to achieve consensus in decisions taken. This should not mean that the bishop or priest can't be held accountable for decisions he takes. There should be a mechanism of appeal if a bishop or priest decides against the majority of council members in a large proportion of significant decisions over time. This appeal should be able to be made to the diocesan bishop (in the case of a priest) or to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (in the case of a bishop).

There are other elements that may need to be considered in order for councils to be effective in the spirit of Synodality, ethnic mix of people being just one example. The above points are submitted for consideration if you are assessing the establishment of a pastoral council or happen to become involved.

Perhaps you should write to your bishop or ask your parish priest what rules or procedures they will set up in responding to the need for Synodality. □

# Reflections on Parish Reform

Eugene Stockton

The following three articles are from the first chapters of a booklet which came about as the result of discussions by priests in the Blue Mountains, later shared with their Bishop. The remaining six articles will be included in future issues of *ARCVoice*. Meanwhile an email version of the whole booklet can be had from Allan Walsh: [contact@bmert.com.au](mailto:contact@bmert.com.au)

## (1) Times are a-Changing

**T**hese reflections come out of a cyber conversation conducted by Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, Lawson, in collaboration with Catholica ([www.catholica.com.au](http://www.catholica.com.au)) and are presented here to stimulate further discussion on what the future of the parish may hold.

Culture shock is being experienced by many Catholics resulting from recent events such as the Royal Commission of Sexual Abuse of Children, the papacy of Pope Francis, his advocacy of synodality and collegiality, and the successive synods in Rome on the family. Christendom used to be the dominant culture in Europe and the Christian world in general. But beginning with the Enlightenment, and progressively with the advance of science, the Industrial Revolution, republican revolutions (America, France and this flow on in Europe), two World Wars and now the Information Technology, an increasingly secular culture has emerged. Christendom as a church-based culture still persisted alongside, but increasingly separate and hostile to the culture of modern society. Now I believe the 'signs of the time' are calling us to let go of the culture which used to support our faith and practice. This does not mean repudiating that which we once loved, but to cease clinging on to it for its own sake, and as childhood merges into adulthood, to embrace the maturing of the Church in a new age.

Its mission can be seen to be the heart and soul of culture in the modern society, affirming its positive values (eg. democracy, equality, freedom, inclusiveness, respect for law and the rights of all, civic responsibility) and supplying for its inadequacy (with the love and compassion of God, the option for the poor, care of the environment, etc.). We are to show forth a Father 'who so loved the world that he gave his own Son'. In this context it is timely to reconsider the role of the parish in the pastoral care of the faithful, in Gospel outreach to others and in the care of the poor and of the environment.

## Critique of Present Parish

It must be one of the last vestiges of Christendom culture, along with quaint titles and attire. The parish displays a feudal structure reminiscent of the Middle Ages: a defined part of the diocesan territory, ruled monarchically by a parish priest ('lord of the manor') mandated by the bishop ('sovereign'), to whom he is accountable rather than to the 'peasants'. This naturally encourages the scourge of clericalism. Increasingly he is seen as a functionary burdened by matters which are not purely religious. Parishioners are asked to volunteer services to the parish, without taking responsibility for their outcome, thus being denied the means of personal development by learning from their mistakes. Often priest and people display an impoverished view of the parish community, whether it be a service station mentality ('you drive up, fill up, pay up, then you drive home') or one of an administrative unit (branch office of the cathedral). Such an understanding of the parish sees clustering of parishes the obvious solution to the crisis of fewer, ageing priests. The larger the parish becomes the more its members are rendered anonymous clients, strangers to each other and to the pastor.

## Some Principles of Reform

- ◆ Democracy and inclusiveness in the governance of the parish
- ◆ Full participation and collaboration of parishioners in running the parish
- ◆ Lay (and female) involvement in non-sacramental ministry
- ◆ Full use of the diverse talents and skills of parishioners
- ◆ The priest as missionary to the People of God, rather than leader
- ◆ Fostering the sense of the unique identity of each community
- ◆ Discernment and consultation of all, through the Pastoral Council, for parish functions
- ◆ Readiness to connect with other faiths and civic entities of the neighbourhood
- ◆ Alternative terminology: Catholic Community of X, (local) Church of Y

While the Pope and his associates in Rome are concerned with the reform of the Church at the top, the parish has the opportunity of working for reform from the bottom up.

## (2) Models of Pastoral Care other than the Parish

We are so accustomed to the parish in the structure of the Church that we take for granted that it is the only way that the ministry of the Church can reach out to the bulk of the faithful. Now we are hearing all too frequently the word ‘crisis’ as fewer, aging priests and the lack of vocations threaten the closure of parishes or their amalgamation into larger impersonal entities.

This is not a crisis for the Church. It is a crisis for a certain model of Church leadership and ministry. The only model most of us are familiar with – the bishop in his diocese, the priest in his parish – developed as an ecclesiastical reflection of the civil authority structures of its time, beginning with the reorganisation of imperial administration under Justinian and consolidated in the feudal system of medieval Europe. There the parish priest in his parish was the Church’s mirror of the Lord of the manor. The ecclesiastical structure has long outlasted its secular model. The numbers problem, i.e. of too few priests to ‘man’ all positions in the structure, is surely one of those signs of the times which alert us to the prodding of Divine Providence. Perhaps the model needs re-examining.

The history of the Church shows that models of leadership have varied greatly through the centuries, and none appears sacrosanct. The earliest model, attested to in the N.T. and *Didache*, had local churches enjoying both resident leadership (*episcopoi*, deacons) and itinerant teachers (apostles, prophets). An obvious danger in this arrangement was that of heterodox wanderers claiming to be prophets, but the Church had early established safeguards (*Didache* 11-13; cf Stockton 1982, 32-3).

From 5th Century Palestine comes a delightful account of how church ministry was remodelled, without complications, around the lifestyle of a newly converted people (Chitty 1966, 83-8). A tribe of pagan Arabs had fled from Persian Suzerainty and settled in the Judean Desert. The sheikh, Peter Aspebet, brought his sick son to the monk Euthymius: the son was healed, the tribe was converted and Peter Aspebet was consecrated their bishop. The Bishop of the Arab Encampments (Parembolarum), together with his Bedouin clergy, wandered with the nomadic tribe in its seasonal movements. Bishop Peter played an important part in the Council of Ephesus, appointed to a committee to negotiate with Nestorius.

As noted above, church organisation in general tended to copy the pyramid structure of the Roman Empire. At the same time, monasticism was also tending to pose a distinction between spiritual leadership (charismatic) and hierarchical authority (institutional). Congar notes instances in the East and in the West (1962, 129-30).

In the East from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, even surviving in the *staretz* up to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Russia, was the situation where a revered monk, rarely a priest, exercised a ministry of spiritual direction and confession, autonomously of the ordinary hierarchical structure. Similarly holiness, rather than hierarchical status, was the basis of authority in the Celtic Church up to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.

‘There was no diocesan pattern, that is, there were no specific territories under the authority of bishops, but a whole complex of spheres of spiritual influence. A ‘saint’ had his own sphere of influence in which he was in a sense the permanent spiritual lord of a given place. A territory was affiliated to a holy man and, eventually, there was a grouping with a monastery at its centre and the jurisdiction belonged to the abbot who was often, but not necessarily, in bishop’s orders. Sometimes even, as at Kildare, jurisdiction was in the hands of an abbeys. Authority was attributed to the man of God, and not to a particular grade in the priestly hierarchy.

(It is said that the local bishop may have been an ordinary monk, himself subject to an abbot or abbeys).

The crisis of the English Reformation, where the hierarchy as a whole failed the faithful, called forth a new mode of mission. One hardly supposes, in the circumstances, that searching questions were asked about jurisdiction and faculties. Danger of detection kept the priests ever on the move and limited their furtive ministry to Catholic households. Yet the Church survived and gradually returned to normalcy. This pattern was repeated in other countries during times of persecution, and also in the early stages of mission endeavour in North America and Asia.

St. Francis Xavier and his companions brought the faith to Japan in 1549 and there Christianity flourished till persecution broke out and priests were executed or expelled. Two hundred years later missionaries returned to find 50,000 Christians still true to the faith, which had been handed down from generation to generation under the leadership of ‘baptisers’.

The Church in Australia was, from the first, one of laity (except for the brief ministry of the convict

priest, Fr. Dixon, in 1803), until the arrival of Frs. Therry and Conolly in 1821. In the meantime, Catholics were united around the Blessed Sacrament left reserved by Fr. Dixon in the Davis home.

Village communities in some Orthodox Churches offer a model which respects the principle of local leadership and recognises the occasional need of theological expertise. When the old *papas* dies, the village people elect their new pastor and send him to a seminary for a few months training (mainly in liturgy). He returns with the enormous advantage of close links with his people and with sufficient formation to perform the liturgy and to look after the ordinary pastoral needs of the villagers. At the approach of big feasts, the more highly trained

‘theologian priests’ circulate through the countryside to hear confessions and to attend to the more demanding pastoral needs.

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## (3) Re-imagining the Parish for the 21st Century

The following is proposed as an example of how a parish might be reformed. Currently, the parish is seen to be a territorial entity headed by a Parish Priest, commissioned by the Bishop of the Diocese. It is an ancient feudal arrangement which lends itself to clericalism.

**Proposal:** To view the parish as a Eucharistic community; that is:

- A community of the faithful who congregate for the Eucharist in a specified church – no boundaries, church viewed as the centre for the congregation.<sup>1</sup>
- A cluster of such communities form a mission operated by one or more priest-missioners who cycle the parish communities on a regular basis. While resident at a particular place he celebrates the Eucharist, is available for Reconciliation, counselling, ministry to the sick, guidance of Pastoral Council and Team, discernment and fostering of charisms. He enters as part of the circle of the faithful.
- The parish as a whole is pastor of souls, run by a Pastoral Council (which recognises and develops the charisms of parishioners) and a Pastoral Team.

The Pastoral Team consists of:

- ♦ Parish Secretary – the point of contact with the priest and bishop
- ♦ Parish manager – care of finances and material needs
- ♦ Liturgist (deacon?) – plans and prepares liturgies
- ♦ Catechist – care of education and formation
- ♦ Representatives of the St Vincent de Paul, Prayer Groups, Discussion Groups, etc.

Endnote:

<sup>1</sup> From Vatican II, 1970. ‘The Celebration of the Mass ... is the centre of the whole Christian Life for the universal Church, the local Church and everyone of the faithful.’

- ♦ Mass, the core Eucharistic experience, is not necessary every Sunday (traditional routine); it is the highlight of the visit of the missionary priest. Mass is celebrated as a ‘peak event’ in the life of the parish at various intervals.
- ♦ Sunday communion services, (the Eucharist event conducted by parish leaders), look back to the previous Mass and visit by the ordained minister (consecrated hosts), and look forward to the next Mass.
- ♦ As a Eucharistic community, parishioners are encouraged to partake in related devotions (e.g. Benediction, visits to Blessed Sacrament). For them the celebration of the Eucharist is not confined to the action of the Mass, but extends over a larger span of their daily lives leading up to and beyond the actual Mass.
- ♦ Endnote 1 From Vatican II, 1970: ‘The celebration of the Mass ... is the centre of the whole Christian life for the universal Church, the local Church and for each and everyone of the faithful’.

The following chapters will be included in future editions of *ARCVoice*:

4. The Parish as a charismatic Community
5. The Parish as a Prophetic Community
6. The Parish as a Mission Field
7. The Parish as a Celebrative Community
8. The Parish as Priest
9. A Voice against Parish Clustering

EUGENE STOCKTON was a priest for more than 60 years. He was also a teacher, Biblical scholar, theologian, Aboriginal Chaplain, archaeologist and hermit. He is Member of ARC.

# Features of a Desired Future Church

Kevin Liston

## AIMS

Set out the features of a church:

That relates practically to the socio-cultural context of the 2020s;

Is committed to dealing with the life-issues experienced by Catholics and offers effective solutions;

Responds to the cries of Catholics for ongoing reform and renewal, offering:

- practical solutions to the issues that continue to cause pain and grief, spiritual and mental suffering, relationship distortion and disruption, loss of faith and depression; and
- Inspiration and guidance for personal and community intentional, spiritual living.

We dream of a courageous, forward-looking, open and welcoming church that truly and unambiguously articulates and actualises the vision of Jesus.

## FOUNDATIONS

**Jesus Christ:** The foundation of Christian life is in a relationship with Jesus and the Spirit at the heart of every human. Personal authority and responsibility derive from that relationship.

**Legacy of Jesus:** The vision and message of Jesus are gifts to be shared by all, with all, for all. They have the potential to assist people, whatever their background or faith tradition, to live fully and be all they can be. Access will never be denied.

**Spiritual experience:** Spiritual experience is the common ground for all Catholics whether they engage with Church liturgies or live by their personal spiritual experience. Pope Francis' *Motu Proprio, Ad Promovendam Theologiam*, (October 2023) was an unmistakeable promotion of the sense of faith which emerges from personal experience.

**Sense of faith of the faithful:** The personal sense of faith places believers at the centre of church life and ecclesial practices. It has a long tradition, specifically referred to by Jesus ('Your faith has saved you', 'Have faith'), Augustine, Aquinas, John Henry Newman, Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan among many others. It carried Catholicism through the Roman persecutions, Irish penal times and now sustains it in Amazonia. Personal spiritual accompaniment will be the crucial pastoral role of the church (Pastor, priest) in the future.

**Motivation:** Why do people join a group, e.g. Vinnies? Because of what they see people in the group doing or becoming.

## FEATURES

**Equality:** All will be equal regardless of gender, sex, race, socio-economic or political status, creed or colour. Everyone will be welcome with full participation in our celebrations, our sacraments of unity.

**Eucharist:** The Eucharist, an open, welcoming celebration of life and the goodness of God' will be offered generously, openly and equally to all who seek it. Everyone will be welcome, baptised or not. We are all people of God, whatever our faith tradition or none. The church community has an open door with a welcome for everyone.

**Women:** Women will have equal status, access and participation in all church functions. No discrimination on grounds of sex, gender or sexual orientation.

**LGBTIQ+:** All LGBTIQ+ people will be fully welcome and included.

**Divorced and re-partnered Catholics:** The reality of relationship breakdown and re-formation with another is recognised and supported. Positions adopted in times of poorer understanding of theology and human sciences are updated in the spirit of *aggiornamento*.

**Unity with diversity.** The basis of unity is a shared love of Christ and commitment to his vision and values. Love of God and care for others are the core values that bring people together. Power emerges from mutual concern and cooperation.

**Priesthood:** Priesthood will be open to everyone. The ‘power’ of priesthood will be given by the people, not through a ceremony of ‘handing on’ a notional power from Jesus but as a community delegating authority and responsibility for leading. Priesthood options will include part-time and temporary.

**Governance:** In a world where power is given and received through free and legitimate cooperation, democratic processes (which do not mean party-political style divisions) will be the norm and will enhance the mission, effectiveness and credibility of church agencies and spokespersons. ‘Walking together’ will be more fruitful as all issues will be on the table, responsibility will be shared and everyone will feel, and actually be, included as they are.

**Synodality:** Synodality means consultations, conversations in the Spirit and participation in taking decisions, responsibility and sharing authority/power.

**Pastoral and Diocesan Councils:** These and similar councils have real decision-taking authority and responsibility.

**Leadership:** Opportunities for the promotion of Catholicism, whether arising from Catholic traditional practices or modern culture will be acted on. The church will be at the forefront in providing the strong, credible moral leadership that contemporary society is crying out for. It offers a vision and a future for our communities, our country and our world.

**Subsidiarity:** Decisions are made at the level where people are directly affected by the issues to be decided. Believers have a role in discerning the action of the Spirit in their lives and communities and have agency in relation to finding and implementing solutions.

**Freedom/liberation:** The personal liberation I have experienced in my life.

## STRUCTURE

The Catholic Christian community will be an open network of groups and individuals sharing resources for both the common good and personal authenticity (holiness).

## CONCLUSION

The Catholic community (church) we envisage hears the pleas and responds effectively to the expressed needs, concerns, anxieties and hopes of ordinary people. It generates the impetus and energy required to restore integrity to Catholicism and reinstates the vision and values of Jesus as a credible lifestyle in the modern world.

KEVIN LISTON is a member of ARC

## Have Your Say!

We have now introduced a **new page on the ARC website** where you can share your views to the benefit of other ARC members.

We will post articles and statements on this page inviting comment and feedback. This will enable members to read what other members think and inform the ARC Secretariat about what is of particular interest to members. You will also be able to respond to what others write.

Each item with responses will appear for a limited time. Please go to [www.australianreformingcatholics.au](http://www.australianreformingcatholics.au), click on ‘**ARC Member Comments**’ and check out the latest entry.

# A Pope in a Poncho:

## The Gospel of Fragility

Johnson Kotaram

**I**t was not the papal cassock, the golden cross, or the solemn gaze from a palace balcony that marked April 10, 2025. Instead, it was a fragile old man in a striped poncho, worn black trousers, and oxygen tubing – rolling quietly through the grandeur of St. Peter's Basilica. No proclamation, no camera crews, no ceremonial fanfare. Just a tired pilgrim in the skin of a pope, moving slowly toward the restored chair of Peter and the tomb of Saint Pius X.

To some, it was a scandal. To others, a shock. And to a few – perhaps not many – it was a moment of deep, unscripted holiness.

Because it was not the Vicar of Christ clothed in tradition but something far rarer: a leader without costume, a priest without performance, a man who dared to embody the Gospel in raw, human skin. In an institution where clothing is language – the cassock, the skullcap, the ring – all. In doing so, he reminded the Church – perhaps unintentionally – that the robes, the collar, the rituals, the relics: they are only bridges. They are not the water beneath.

When we strip away the grandeur, what remains is a question the Church must confront more often: what happens when the sacred no longer looks impressive? When authority arrives in a wheelchair, with sunken eyes and no cross on its chest?

Francis, whether deliberately or by accident, exposed the quiet truth: the real scandal is not the poncho, but how much we've come to rely on appearances to sustain our reverence.

We want our popes upright, glowing and draped in theology. We don't want them too human. Too frail. Too much like us. But isn't that precisely the paradox at the heart of Christianity?

When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a colt, his official representative on earth is wheelchaired into the most ornate church on earth dressed in an Argentinian poncho, it reminded us that fragility is not the opposite of faith – it may be its most honest form. That perhaps, in a moment like this, the Church caught a glimpse of what Jesus meant when he knelt to wash feet instead of issuing commands.

This was not the Pope as prince or priest. This was the Pope as a person. As pilgrim. As a reminder that grace may arrive not dressed in white, but in weakness.

And maybe, just maybe, that is the Church we need to become.

# Grander Vision

Fiona Cochrane

At ten years old, I discovered something that changed  
the trajectory of my life

**M**y first experience with **The Global Leadership Summit** was as a volunteer. I was just a kid at the time, maybe 10 years old. My siblings, friends and I would spend most of our time out in the lobby. Then the doors would open, and all these leaders would come out, and I was there handing out snacks and coffee. I started to look at their name tags and where they were from. I asked them questions and they took time to invest in me and showed me so much kindness. It was a beautiful picture: a global group of leaders gathering in one place to learn together about how to impact their communities in a positive way. In those moments as a kid, I started to realise something: *Leadership matters*. Even at my young age, I felt a part of something important.

When I turned 13, I said: *I want to be in the room! I want to be like all the leaders I've been meeting the past few years*. At 13, I started attending the Summit.

Looking back, I don't actually remember a time when leadership content wasn't a part of my life. So, now as a young leader, there are things that come as second nature to me because they've been ingrained in me. When you learn leadership content when you're older, sometimes you have to unlearn a lot of negative things, but because I started so young, it will save me from a lot of undoing. My parents were also very intentional to foster learning in our home. We were always going to the Summit, listening to messages together or reading books that were written beyond our age level. At the Summit, hearing the message that everyone has influence as a 13-year-old really shaped who I was. I remember growing up thinking, *maybe I can lead*.

It's easy to go to a leadership conference and write yourself off saying: *I don't fit in because I'm not leading an organisation, or I'm only 13*. But because I heard that message over and over – *everyone has influence* – I saw my life in a different way. I realised my life isn't just about me. If everyone really has influence, leadership development matters, even as a 13-year-old. Most people start working on leadership development after they realise they are a leader, but what I loved about me growing up in that leadership environment is that I started learning leadership development before becoming a leader. If more young people could be at the Summit, catch that vision and see that the content is for them, no matter where they are, it would not only shape them for the future, it would shape the future of our world.

When I was 16, I had a lot of people saying: *You have leadership potential*. Even my pastor sat down with me and

said, *I see that you are a leader and a world changer*. Those 'I see in you' conversations are transforming.

I grew up listening to the Grander Vision stories at the Summit and hearing about people who had this moment when something shifted and then they took action. And at 16, I wanted that story to be true in my life.

Because of the way I was raised and because I was exposed to leadership conferences from an early age, I developed a different perspective on what could be for my generation. I had this vision for what life could look like, even as a student in high school. But as I was looking around at my peers, I felt like I wasn't seeing this vision represented anywhere. I would go to youth group and think to myself, *Why is there so much mediocrity? Why is there so much apathy? Why is it that all we care about are things that are temporary? And why are we wasting some of the most passionate years of our lives?* There was a discontent brewing in me and all these messages telling me, *You can do more right now!* But who was telling my peers? *You can follow your dreams now! You don't have to wait until you're older*. I was hungry for this message for myself too.

In this same season, I had read a book about all the major injustices in the world in hopes of helping young people understand what they're passionate about. I thought, *Great! I'll figure out what my passion is and get going!* But I got to the end of the book feeling way more confused than I was when I started. I cared about all these issues, but I wanted to know what *my* passion was. I told God, *I'm ready! I'll do it! I'll say yes! Just reveal what it is you want me to do!*

Then I felt God impress on me, *Hannah, you're not called to solve all the injustices in the world. I want to use you to empower a generation to solve injustice in the world, and in so doing, you'll have even greater impact*.

I ran up to my bedroom, and I started writing out all these dreams, plans and ideas, thinking about what I could do to help my peers, and other young people, discover their passion, and not get stuck not knowing what to do with it. I wanted to help my peers pick a strategy around their passion and go out and do it. At age 16, that was my plan. But I put it on the back shelf, and said, *I'll do that when I'm older*.

God said, *Why not now?*

That discontent stayed with me as I went to work for a church. I started thinking it would be more comfortable to stay in church work than step out on my own. So, I thought I would be in ministry for the rest of my life. But some key people in my life challenged me, primarily my mom. She said, *What about your dream, Hannah?*

And I said, *Yeah...but in the future. I'm only 20! I have no business degree, and I haven't been in the workplace very long. I have very little that qualifies me for starting my own organisation*. And she said, *If God is saying he will qualify you*.

And God said, *Why wait? Why not now, Hannah?*

At 20 years old, I took a leap into Leadership and

started an organisation. I decided I wasn't going to wait for someone else to solve my discontent for me. I wanted to build what my generation was hungry for. I made a deal with God: *I'll do this, but you have to provide the people who will train me and equip me to make this happen.*

It became even more confirming when I would run into people who wanted to mentor me, consult me and advise me in areas they were experts in, and for free! Thus began Generation Distinct.

Our legacy vision for Generation Distinct is to equip a generation that is radically committed to Jesus. Why? Because what we've found is that, so often, young people are walking away from Jesus because they have passion, vision, desire for justice in this world, and they're going to the Church with it, but they're being shut down. They're not finding an avenue in the Church or their Christian community that fans their flame, telling them: *Your dream and your pursuit of Jesus are unified, and can go together.*

What we're seeing is that young people are still passionate, still fighting for justice and still using their voice, but they're avoiding the Church and going in other directions because they're finding it's more acceptable.

What if we could re-introduce our world to who Jesus really is. Our mission statement is: Equip young leaders to discover the wrong they were born to make right, leading them to experience who Jesus really is. If we can help young people figure out their passion, what they're created to do, how they can change the world and then show them that ultimately leads to the One who gave them those passions, then they're not going to be following Jesus out of obligation. They're going to be following Him because there is no greater adventure and no greater opportunity to change the world than by following this radical change-maker named Jesus.

What if we could re-introduce our world to who Jesus really is? If we can do that, we will see more injustices eradicated, truth released, love spread and unity established. Young people will understand that Jesus is not just a religious figure, a distant God, but He's a rebel who started a movement and is inviting us to change the world.

I feel like God is using my leadership to be an example to other young women, showing them that they, too, can lead. There was a young woman who messaged me after I spoke at a university chapel, and she said: *I want you to know I've recently felt a call to be a leader and I feel like everywhere I look, I don't see anybody who looks like me doing it. So when I saw you on that stage, I realised I can do it too. Thanks for stepping out. It showed me that I have permission to step out too.*

If I keep stepping out, I'm paving a way for others. I want to see a world where I'm no longer the exception. I want to see a world where it's normal for a 24-year-old woman to be leading and speaking.

While leading this new organisation, I've had to learn how to embrace failure, not just as a concept, but in

reality. As a young organisation, there were many moments when we made mistakes. But I feel like every time I go to the Summit, I realise I'm not the only one who struggles.

For example, I grew up listening to these world-class leaders say there were times they wanted to quit. So, when I start to feel those things as a leader, I don't say, *I don't know what this means.* I say, *This is a part of leadership.*

I did a lot of front learning through the Summit that helped prepare me for where I am today, even without a business degree. And to sit there with all these other leaders, listening to a speaker say something that resonates with me, and then to look to my side and see hundreds of others nodding their heads – it's unifying. It's realising we're better together and admitting that we're all in the mess of leadership together. It's messy and not perfect and these moments make me feel like I'm not alone. In those moments when I do feel alone, I can remember back to the Summit. And I think of the army of leaders who are a part of this GLN movement, all walking in this together, choosing to be leaders. It's empowering.

Our world has never been in more need of great leaders. We need to be investing in our leadership even before we have the platform. I truly believe if more young leaders came to the Summit and made leadership development a part of who they are, they would see greater influence in their life and greater leadership in the future. Our churches, our companies and our countries would look different because those young leaders coming into those roles know what to do.

If we can have a generation that knows what great leadership looks like, and goes into those roles, then great leadership would become normal and quality of life would increase. We would see so much more unity in our world.

Leaders of young leaders need to be encouraging and make this a priority. And young leaders need to say, *I need to be trained in leadership, even before I even think I'm a leader.* Then they'll be ready when God opens up the door of opportunity to lead. For any young person who wants to make an impact on the world, the very best first step they can take is investing in their leadership.

What better way to do that than at the Summit?

FIONA COCHRANE is the company director of f-reel pty ltd. She has produced and/or directed several independent Australian feature films as well as numerous documentaries, short films and music videos.

She is the Director of *Women are the Answer*.

This article is included as it gives hope that, with young women like her, the future of Christianity will be in good hands.

Editor

# WITNESS

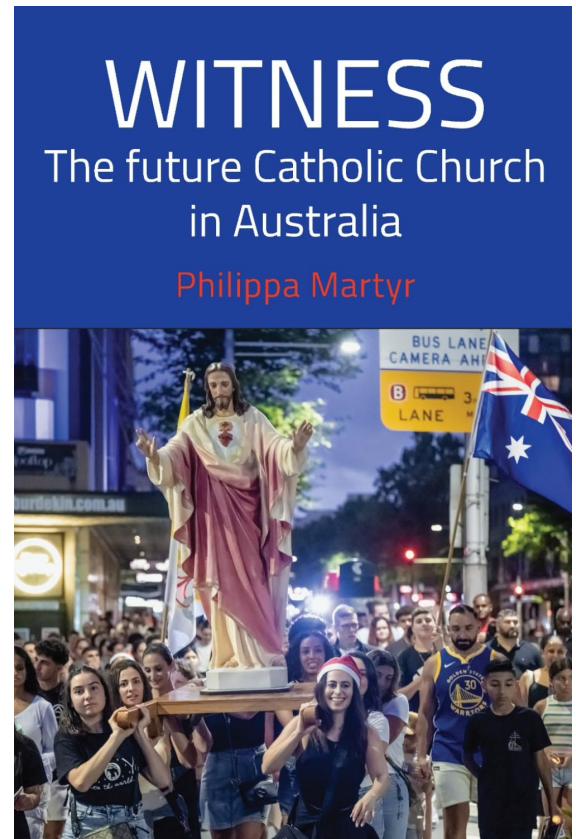
## New book by Phillipa Martyr

**D**r Phillipa Martyr was born in Perth, Western Australia, where she also currently lives and works. She spends most of her week at the University of Western Australia where she teaches women's health and the history of pharmacology. On her off-days she does research and writing for the University of Notre Dame Australia.

Phillippa's main off-day research interest is the state of the Catholic Church in Australia. She has been a weekly columnist for Sydney's *The Catholic Weekly* (TCW) newspaper since 2019, which is impressive, given that most people said she'd last about three weeks. You will find a lot of these articles online on the TCW website. You'll also find her popular academic work online in places like *The Conversation* (Australia).

Phillippa likes plain speaking because it saves a huge amount of time, but she is also keen to temper that with courtesy and mutual listening. She basically talks for a living, so she's very happy to come and speak at events.

An eternal student right down to the Birkenstocks, Phillipa has a PhD in the history and sociology of medicine (UWA), a Graduate Diploma and Graduate Diploma Advanced in Psychology (Monash University), and a Graduate Certificate in Counselling Skills (Edith Cowan University).



## Review

**D**orothy Day famously remarked that 'although the Church may sometimes play the harlot, she will always be my mother'. Similarly, Phillipa Martyr has painted an unvarnished 'warts and all' picture of the Church in Australia as it is in our time, and her projections for the year 2050. Like the observations of Dorothy Day, the work is written from the perspective of a faithful Catholic who loves the Body of Christ but knows that she (the Church is always feminine) can do better. Her judgments are backed up by empirical evidence and her insights are both acute and relatable.

**Professor Tracey Rowland**  
*University of Notre Dame (Australia)*

In *Witness*, Phillipa Martyr asks – and answers – a lot of painful questions about the Catholic Church's future in Australia;

- ◇ The Church in Australia is a mighty spiritual force that flows like a river, transforming lives and saving souls. But it's also in real crisis;
- ◇ Barely 400,000 people in Australia now go to Sunday Mass – less than the population of Tasmania. At the same time, billions of dollars pour annually through Catholic schools, hospitals and charities;
- ◇ Many young Australian Catholics now feel like unwanted strangers in their own Church. And yet, soon, they will inherit what's left of it;
- ◇ Enriched by data sets, interviews and commentary from across the Church, *Witness* is both a sharp analysis of the real problems and a blueprint for younger Catholics to rebuild a future Church in Australia.

# Pope Francis reflecting from hospital

April 24 2025

**T**he walls of hospitals have heard more honest prayers than churches...  
They have witnessed far more sincere kisses than those in airports...  
It is in hospitals that you see:

A homophobe being saved by a gay doctor;  
A privileged doctor saving the life of a beggar;  
In intensive care, you see a Jew taking care of a racist...;  
A police officer and a prisoner in the same room receiving the same care...  
A wealthy patient waiting for a liver transplant, ready to receive the organ from a poor donor...

It is in these moments, when the hospital touches the wounds of people, that different worlds intersect according to a divine design. And in this communion of destinies, we realise that alone, we are nothing.

The absolute truth of people, most of the time, only reveals itself in moments of pain or in the real threat of an irreversible loss.

A hospital is a place where human beings remove their masks and show themselves as they truly are, in their purest essence.

This life will pass quickly, so do not waste it fighting with people. Do not criticize your body too much.

Do not complain excessively.

Do not lose sleep over bills.

Make sure to hug your loved ones.

Do not worry too much about keeping the house spotless. Material goods must be earned by each person – do not dedicate yourself to accumulating an inheritance...

You are waiting for too much: Christmas, Friday, next year, when you have money, when love arrives, when everything is perfect...

Listen, perfection does not exist. A human being cannot attain it because we are simply not made to be fulfilled here.

Here, we are given an opportunity to learn.

So, make the most of this trial of life – and do it now.

Respect yourself, respect others. Walk your own path, and let go of the path others have chosen for you. Respect: Do not comment, do not judge, do not interfere.

Love more, forgive more, embrace more, live more intensely! And leave the rest in the hands of the Creator.

## Have your say

ARCVoice is a report of news, opinions and reflections on the renewal and reform currently experienced in the Catholic Church.

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or of ARC.

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