



## REPORT LISTENING TO LOCAL WOMEN – DIOCESE OF MAITLAND/NEWCASTLE CACW CONTACT GROUP 2014 SURVEY

### SITUATION

In June/July 2014 the Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle Contact Group of the Council for Australian Catholic Women conducted a survey to ascertain the views of local women (and men) on matters relating to the participation of local women in decision-making, leadership and ministry in the life of the Catholic Church.

### BACKGROUND

On the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2014 the Council for Australian Catholic Women (CACW) met in the Diocese of Maitland Newcastle. The CACW provides advice to the Australian Bishops' Commission for Church Ministry about women and their participation in the Catholic Church in Australia. It exists 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". (*ACBC Social Justice Statement 2000*)

The Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle CACW Contact Group is a 'grass roots' body. It liaises with the Bishop of Maitland/Newcastle concerning issues related to the CACW, and provides feedback and advice to the CACW on matters relating to the participation of local women in decision-making, leadership and ministry in the life of the Catholic Church.

Prior to the 25<sup>th</sup> July meeting the CACW held a consultation with members of the Diocesan CACW Contact Group and other interested women to seek their thoughts on the participation of local women in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in the Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle and the Church more broadly. In preparation for that consultation the Diocesan CACW Contact Group sponsored a survey – *Listening to Local Women* – to ascertain the views of local women (and men). The survey was available on the Diocese Maitland/Newcastle CACW Contact Group webpage and in paper format. Parish Priests were approached for their assistance in the dissemination of the survey in their parishes.

The survey comprised six open ended questions:

1. Does your parish promote the participation of women in **decision-making, leadership and ministry**? What evidence supports your answer?
2. Are there individuals (women or men) who deserve recognition for promoting the participation of women in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in your parish? Please explain what they do that is worthy of recognition.
3. Is there anything your parish could do better to promote women's participation in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in your parish? What suggestions can you offer?
4. What tools, resources or education would assist your parish to better promote women's participation in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in your parish? Please explain why these would be useful in your parish.
5. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns about women's participation in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in your parish, the Diocese or the Church in general?

6. Would you like your name to be added to the Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle CACW's mailing list or receive further information about the CACW and/or the Diocesan Contact Group? If so please provide your name and email or postal address.

46 responses were received – most were individual responses but at least two parishes submitted a survey following a meeting to discuss the questions.

## FINDINGS

1. Does your parish promote the participation of women in **decision-making, leadership and ministry**? What evidence supports your answer?

21 of the respondents answered yes to this question citing women's membership of Parish Councils and their involvement in ministry as evidence of that participation. Two of the surveys provided evidence of significant participation in all facets of life in their parish.

*Yes, most definitely! St John Vianney Morisset works with the Moderator Model of Leadership. That means we have a Moderator Priest who does not live in our geographical boundaries, who celebrates Mass and Sacraments with us when he can and who is kept informed of decisions made in our parish by the Parish Leadership Team (PLT) and Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). Our Parish Co-ordinator is a woman. The Parish Leadership Team has 7 members who are parishioners - 2 men and 5 women. We share the day to day running of the parish with each of the 5 Foundations being led by members of the PLT. Foundation 1 - Identity and Community - led a young mum who is also a teacher P/T Foundation 2 - Worship and Prayer - led by 2 women who have completed Formation Ministry Foundation 3 - Formation and Education - led a young mum who is also a teacher P/T Foundation 4 - Mission and Outreach - led by a young married woman who is working full time Foundation 5 - Leadership and Structure - led by 2 men - one full time working and one semi-retired Each team member has one full day in the office each week and deals with the issues that arise. Two women from the PLT attended the NAPPA conference 2014. Three of our women and 2 men from the PLT are also members of the Diocesan Association of Lay Pastoral Ministries. Two of PLT women are members of the Macquarie Regional Pastoral Council. Almost all our our Proclaimers of the Word, Special Ministers and Lay liturgical Leaders are women. Half of our Funeral ministers are women. All our Liturgy team and all but 2 of our Music ministry as well as approx. 80% of the Baptismal and Sacramental Team are women. All of the RCIA team are women.*

10 respondents answered no and another 9 respondents were ambivalent about the participation of women in their parish. Whilst some cited membership of their Parish Council as evidence to participation they qualified this with statements such as

*'I don't see any evidence of them being given leadership roles other than to organise the rosters, catering etc.*

*In my parish, there are plenty of opportunities for, and examples of, women taking roles of leadership and ministry, and of making decisions as to what they will do and initiate, and how they will do this. However it might be stretching it too far to say that 'the parish' PROMOTES this participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry.*

*Most of the leadership roles are held by men and the women seem to hold the supporting roles.*

In some cases these statements concluded with an assessment that women fulfilled the majority of ministry functions and an assessment that they do a better job. Others noted that men too were not fully supported as participants in the life of their parish.

## Recommendation

- a) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group in collaboration with the Diocesan Pastoral Council Diocese Maitland/Newcastle

- identify and map women's participation in decision making, leadership and ministry in the councils/teams established under the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, and in the Diocesan Chancery, agencies and advisory bodies.
  - develop strategies that proactively promote the participation of women up to and including women's leadership in liturgy and governance with the aim of ensuring balanced representation at all levels of decision making and leadership.
2. Are there individuals (women or men) who deserve recognition for promoting the participation of women in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in your parish? Please explain what they do that is worthy of recognition.

Whilst some respondents chose not to nominate anyone others identified over sixty women, including women who are no longer alive, six men and seven priests including Bishops Michael Malone and Bill Wright, who deserved recognition for their support of women. In addition they identified many others – Pastoral Associates, Parish Secretaries, sacramental team leaders, those involved in ministry, hospitality – who participated in the life of their parishes but whose name they chose not to mention. Several respondents, however, tempered their responses with qualifying statements that questioned how much these women were appreciated in their parishes.

*We have women in our parish very capable of running things if they were given the chance.*

*We have several women who show strong leadership but are not given the trust and support to do so.*

*There are women who continue to contribute and to educate and form themselves despite a lack of appreciation and acknowledgement of their gifts and generosity. When parishioners' gifts exceed the leaders in certain areas, they are not encouraged to shine!*

### **Recommendation**

- b) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group consider
- the establishment of an annual award to recognise local women who demonstrate leadership in the life of the Church;
  - naming the award after a local woman who has supported the participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry within the Diocese;
  - presentation of the award at the annual Diocesan International Women's Day Mass in March.
3. Is there anything your parish could do better to promote women's participation in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in your parish? What suggestions can you offer?

Not all respondents addressed this question, however, several made suggestions as to what parishes could do to promote women's participation in decision-making, leadership and ministry including:-

- Clearer reports of church activities
- Trust women and give them space to carry out responsibilities
- *greater contact with, promotion of, and overt support of the various parish groups and their group leaders by the priests of the parish. However, we do recognise the stresses and demands being placed on the currently limited clerical resources of our parish and sympathise with the fear of being overwhelmed by 'the need to go to meetings'. Consequently, it may be more realistic to encourage and promote participation at diocesan level. In particular, for Bishops and other diocesan spokespersons to promote, acknowledge and encourage women to participate in parish decision-making, leadership and ministry. There is a role for publicly reinforcing that it is acceptable in 'Church' circles for women to take the initiative and, where they see a need or a gap, to have the courage and the confidence to make their own decisions to step in, exercise leadership, and so inform the parish.*
- recognition of women's efforts
- inviting women to occasionally preach at Mass

- *guest speakers to inform the Congregation about their involvement on the Parish Council and decision making and engage women from the different Parish groups to speak to the Congregation at Mass about their involvement for e.g. in the Catholic Women's League, and the Legion of Mary*
- naming women for their role in ministry
- talk about women's participation
- ordain women
- need for discernment
- link the parish with school to provide opportunities for younger women to be involved in the life of their Church
- *Treat women as educated caring people who do have the ability to make important decisions and carry them out.*
- *provide women with opportunities to be upskilled; by providing/promoting their attendance at training, educational opportunities, conferences etc.*
- establish a leadership group for women which could be drawn from across Parishes
- build a supportive culture within the parish - *I think the most effective way to promote women's participation in the parish in these roles is to individually build relationships with those in your parish community, and then invite them to become involved in decision-making, leadership and ministry based on their gifts.*

Eleven respondents voiced concern about the clerical nature of the Church and the ability of parish priests 'to empower others in leadership', and the voicelessness of women which then worked against the participation of women. For one respondent this was expressed as

*one must presume that the Parish priest is open to and able for inclusive dialogue and contribution by a whole range of people. It is difficult for priests who have shouldered responsibility almost alone, to work leadership differently from the pyramid model.*

Another respondent noted that programmes were available but time commitments militated against women taking these opportunities up. It was suggested that working with schools or the Diocesan Federation of Parents and Friends might be a possible avenue to explore alternate ways of reaching young women.

Five respondents were happy with the participation of women in their parishes.

### **Recommendations**

- c) That the CACW consider the development of a training/education programme that can be used in Dioceses and parishes to support the participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry.
  - d) That the Diocesan Pastoral Council Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle considers implementation of a training/education programme developed by the CACW or another relevant programme.
  - e) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group in collaboration with the Diocesan Pastoral Council Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle and the Diocesan Federation of Catholic School Parents consider establishment of a mentoring programme to support local women who are leaders in their parish or in the Diocese.
4. What tools, resources or education would assist your parish to better promote women's participation in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in your parish? Please explain why these would be useful in your parish.

Six respondents commented that tools, resources and education are available including Tennison Woods Education Centre courses and the Parish Formation programme. Eight respondents, including most of those who commented that things were already in place, argued that parish priests thwarted or gave lip service to the participation of women.

*I believe there are already women in our parish with tool, resources and education that could enrich our parish in the roles of leadership etc., but unfortunately many of the P.P. are threaten by such women and frightened of losing control. As I see it, it is not a lack of tools, resources, education in our women, rather a lack of good leadership in the P.P. This is not to say, that our P.P. is not a good pastoral man, but he lack the kind of leadership that allows others to bring their gifts to the parish.*

*Perhaps the single most useful thing which could be done would be to improve the skills and educations of priests (both current and future) so that they can more readily act in appropriate ways to move from: - making tokenistic gestures and - maintaining a facade of consultations to - encourage genuine joint decision-making - have the confidence not to look simply for 'rubber-stamping' of their own opinions - genuine power sharing - have higher levels of social skills and - empower people.*

Three respondents spoke of the desire to 'hear the female perspective on the Gospels in homilies'.

Respondents did not limit their comments to the role of parish priests. One noted that Parish Councils could better advertise both their role and their decisions.

*If women saw that we had a council which communicated well and was an effective instrument in the parish, they might be motivated to offer their services.*

Another suggested her parish should have a Finance Team noting many people have the skills required to undertake the work of such a team.

The lack of opportunity to use their skills has in the opinion of one respondent led to women's frustration and disillusionment.

Four noted that time to attend formation courses, especially for young women, was a problem and three suggested better engagement with schools.

*if the parish could gear a course specifically to their needs it may be well received. Perhaps we could tap into the 3 schools and encourage mums to share their talents in parish leadership and decision making and then debunk any myths or fears they may possess.*

Other suggestions included holding more reflection days for women, education in public speaking, encouragement and support of women's participation in formation courses, adapting the way we do things to the needs of the congregation, and making women (and men) feel welcome and appreciated, which is best summarised in this response

*I think a better understanding of what the parish is and the potential it has to be an important centre in a person's life would be beneficial. I think we need to start at the basic building block of showing why volunteering and working in the parish is worthwhile and important. I think once the general parish community understands that there is a real reason for people to get involved in the life of the parish, then both women and men will step forward to be more involved in decision-making, leadership and ministry. At this stage in the life of the Church, I think our problem is bigger than a lack of participation of women in the parish, it is a vast lack of participation of the laity in the running of the parish in general. Once the laity finds a reason to become invested in the parish, they will naturally step forward to help out, and then with some formation, they can become powerful agents of change.*

## **Recommendations**

- f) That the CACW consider revisiting the proposal to include education on the participation of women in the seminary curriculum to be delivered by women.
- g) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group considers an approach to the Bishop, Council of Priests and Diocesan Pastoral Council to identify and implement strategies that

support priests in how they might better support women's participation in decision-making, leadership and ministry.

- h) That the Diocesan CACW in collaboration with CWL considers the organisation of reflection days/retreats that support the participation of women in decision making, leadership and ministry.

5. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns about women's participation in **decision-making, leadership and ministry** in your parish, the Diocese or the Church in general?

Of the thirty six responses to this question three respondents highlighted the positive moves undertaken in the Diocese including the appointment of women to the role of Chancellor and Vice Chancellor. Twenty two responses (including those that highlighted the positives) however expressed concerns about the structure of the Church and Church agencies such as the Catholic Schools Office. Their responses included calls for the ordination of women as deacons and priests but extended beyond this solution, best summarised by a Morisset parishioner.

*My comments refer to ...Decision-Making at THE HIGHEST LEVEL i.e. Conferences /Synods Gatherings – presently the sole domain of male clerics.*

*May I begin with an observation ... At every level of society, I see a growing recognition that, BALANCE at the highest level of decision-making is needed to ensure wise, inclusive and valued outcomes.*

*I do recognise and welcome some wonderful initiatives*

- *in our lay leadership model unfolding within Morisset parish*
- *in women and men currently holding valued and key advisory positions in the MN Diocese*
- *in surveys such as this, gathering and seriously listening to local women*

*But where I believe inroads could and need to be made, is stepping up current balanced representation at the advisory level to the round table itself!*

- *I appreciate the concerns around discernment/ democracy.*
- *I know that 'Canon Law' is always brought out as that age old brick wall to change.*
- *I realise there may be a journey in faith formation.*
- *I accept that there is much I may not understand!*

*But just maybe, with the fresh winds of change evident from the Vatican, with an open and refreshing outlook from Bishop Bill, surely avenues can be identified that will draw inclusive representation 'at that Highest Level' into existence.*

*May I close with some hopes ...*

- *that goals can be set to bring about balanced representation 'at the highest level' of decision-making*
- *that there begin now, a process to bring this much needed BALANCE about, within some suitable timeframe*
- *for outcomes to be effective and valued.*

## **Recommendations**

- i) That this report be submitted to the Bishop, Vice-Chancellor Pastoral Ministries and the Diocesan Pastoral Council for consideration and action.
- j) That this report be submitted to the Council of Australian Catholic Women for the purpose of assisting it in its work to encourage and support the participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry.
- k) That this report be uploaded to the Diocesan CACW Contact Group webpage and distributed to parishes for information and discussion.

6. Would you like your name to be added to the Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle CACW's mailing list or receive further information about the CACW and/or the Diocesan Contact Group? If so please provide your name and email or postal address.

Not all respondents answered this question but some noted they were already on the contact list and nine asked for their names to be added to the list.

### **Recommendation**

- l) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group updates its database in accordance with the wishes of women who have asked to be kept informed.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The responses received highlight the thoughtful and respectful engagement of a group of women interested in the life of their Church. As well as the many positive comments made in relation to the participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry in their parishes, our Diocese and the wider Church they highlighted several areas of concern. These include

- the very real and often unrecognised contribution of women to the life of parishes and the Church
- the need for the women's perspective to be recognised and heard including in the proclamation of the Gospel and in homilies/reflections
- the existence of many capable and educated women whose participation is not welcome or is limited
- the clerical and patriarchal nature of the Church
- the need to examine the structure of the Church and Church agencies to overcome barriers and promote the real participation of women in the Church
- the need to begin the conversation about ordained ministry within the Church
- the need for formation of parish priests to include the role of women
- the need for support and education for parish council/team members
- lack of balance in decision making, leadership and ministry
- lack of support for women who are leaders
- importance of education/formation that is targeted and held at times and in places that facilitate women's involvement
- the absence of young women

Five respondents noted that the laity more broadly experienced problems with participation in decision-making, leadership and ministry.

Some wondered about the possible impact of Pope Francis but ultimately change rests upon a different way of doing things.

*Leadership in the church is mostly in the hands of ordained men and the challenge remains for us to explore another model of shared leadership with those who have the gifts to lead faith communities.*

The findings of this survey detail the experience of local women. It should be noted, however, their views echo those expressed across Australia in the course of the 1996 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's investigation into the *Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia*. This report confirms the findings documented in *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus (1999)* the subsequent report of that investigation. In many ways it report highlights the fact that not a lot has changed however many women still hold hope for the future. The *Report Listening to Local Women: Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle CACW Contact Group* is thus presented as a small step to a achieving a new model of shared decision-making, leadership and ministry.

## SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group in collaboration with the Diocesan Pastoral Council Diocese Maitland/Newcastle
  - identify and map women's participation in decision making, leadership and ministry in the councils/teams established under the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, and in the Diocesan Chancery, agencies and advisory bodies.
  - develop strategies that proactively promote the participation of women up to and including women's leadership in liturgy and governance with the aim of ensuring balanced representation at all levels of decision making and leadership.
- b) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group consider
  - the establishment of an annual award to recognise local women who demonstrate leadership in the life of the Church;
  - naming the award after a local woman who has supported the participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry within the Diocese;
  - presenting the award at the annual Diocesan International Year of the Woman Mass.
- c) That the CACW consider the development of a training/education programme that can be used in Dioceses and parishes to support the participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry.
- d) That the Diocesan Pastoral Council Diocese of Maitland/Newcastle in collaboration with Diocesan CACW consider implementation of training/education programme developed by the national CACW or another relevant programme.
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- g) That the CACW consider revisiting the proposal to include education on the participation of women in the seminary curriculum to be delivered by women.
- h) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group in collaboration with Catholic Women's League considers the organisation of reflection days/retreats that support the participation of women in decision making, leadership and ministry.
- i) That this report be submitted to the Bishop, Vice-Chancellor Pastoral Ministries and the Diocesan Pastoral Council for consideration and action.
- j) That this report be submitted to the Council of Australian Catholic Women for the purpose of assisting it in its work to encourage and support the participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry.
- k) That this report be uploaded to the Diocesan CACW webpage and distributed to parishes for information and discussion.
- l) That the Diocesan CACW Contact Group updates its database in accordance with the wishes of women who have asked to be kept informed.

## REFERENCES

ACBC 1999 *Woman and Man – One in Christ Jesus Report of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Research Project on the participation of women in the Catholic Church of Australia* East Melbourne : Harper Collins Religious

ACSJC 2000 *Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 Woman and Man: The Bishops respond*  
<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/social-justice-statements#SJS2000>