

Concerned Catholics
Canberra Goulburn Webinar,
*The Light from the Southern
Cross*

Presenter: Adj Prof Susan Pascoe AM
22 October, 5.00 – 6.30pm

Overview

- Brief overview of *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia* Report
- If a diocese were considering a governance review, how could it utilise the LSC Report? What mechanisms could be used within the diocese?
- What issues should be taken up?
- What will be new and challenging?
- What time-table? Should the Plenary Council processes be built into a diocesan discernment of LSC?

Report of Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRSCA)



Recommendation 16.7

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference should conduct a national review of the governance and management structures of dioceses and parishes, including in relation to issues of transparency, accountability, consultation and the participation of lay men and women. This review should draw from the approaches to governance of Catholic health, community services and education agencies.

(RCIRSCA Final Report: Volume 16, Religious institutions Book 2, p 682)

THE LIGHT FROM THE SOUTHERN CROSS

KEY FINDINGS

- Significant improvements in safeguarding practice and adoption of professional standards during, and following RCIRCSA (eg CPSL & NCSS)
- Impressive changes such as CSNSW, Diocesan Assemblies (Bunbury and Newcastle-Maitland), supportive Metropolitans (eg WA), Sandhurst Education, Brisbane lay participants in consultors, ACBC processes.
- BUT, leadership formation limited and styles vary across dioceses and parishes due to authority vested in the person of the priest or bishop
- Only 10 of 30 dioceses in Australia have diocesan Pastoral Councils as one indication of limited take up of co-responsible approaches with laity
- Church processes such as appointment of Bishops are opaque, and areas such as full financial reporting limited

LSC ecclesial & civil governance principles

Ecclesial

- Synodality
- Subsidiarity
- Discernment
- Integrity
- Dialogue
- Accountability
- Morality

Civil

- Engagement
- Responsibility and liability
- Right decision-making
- Integrity
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Ethics

Issue: Relationship of Canonical and Civil responsibilities

- Canonical and Civil responsibilities both require adherence; preferably not perfunctory compliance, but understanding of ethical foundations, inherent good, benefits of adhering to the principles -> willing implementation.
- The ACNC and Corporations (Cth) Acts as well as S/T legislation provide the legal foundations for charities and NFPs. The regulators have legislated authority (ACNC and ASIC as well as S/T regulators) and the courts will deal with matters as well.
- Both codes have laws, courts and judges with differing consequences for breaches or non-compliance. (NB current case in Vatican Court re sexual abuse of minor, and pursuit of former cardinal re allegations of financial malfeasance)
- Both codes have ethical foundations, and conceptions of the human person as an individual with identified rights.
- Recent inquiries such as the 2018 APRA inquiry into the CBA, and 2019 Financial Services RC pay greater attention to values and ethical foundations. In addition the 2020 identification of 'community standards' via the AMP sexual misconduct case and the Rio Tinto destruction of the Juukan Gorge Caves

Other ecclesial and civil governance principles

- Fidelity to mission, Discernment' Stewardship, and Right relationship and authentic engagement/communication
- Catholic Social Teaching principles: human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity and the pursuit of the common good
- Leadership; culture; communication; and right relationships
- In addition Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* released in May 2015 which emphasizes an integrated approach to tackling poverty and environmental sustainability. And since the release of LSC, the promulgation in October 2020 of the companion encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, in which Francis advocates principles of equality and freedom based on our common humanity.

Letter of Pope Francis To the People of God: 28/08/18

- “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26)
- ‘Today we are challenged as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit. If, in the past, the response was one of omission, today we want solidarity, in the deepest and most challenging sense, to become our way of forging present and future history... Together with those efforts, every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does.
- It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God’s People. Indeed, whenever we have tried to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the People of God to small elites, we end up creating communities, projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives.[2] This is clearly seen in a peculiar way of understanding the Church’s authority, one common in many communities where sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience have occurred. Such is the case with clericalism, an approach that “not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people”.[3]

Some ideas how a diocese could utilise the LSC Report if it were considering a governance review

- Senior lay and diocesan leaders including Bishop, encourage laity to read the report. It would be helpful if a summary were provided.
- Decision required if it is to be an independent review as in Parramatta Diocese, or a lay-led process as in Maitland – Newcastle Diocese. (Both have DPCs)
- Whatever approach is taken, necessary to have parameters of review delineated prior to start to manage expectations. Could be written as TOR, charter, or auspicing document.
- Need to think in advance of governance oversight of review process – preferably with mix of clerical and lay people
- Beneficial to existing bodies such as Diocesan Pastoral Council, and Parish Pastoral Councils involved
- NB: All of this presupposes the blessing of the Bishop

What issues should be considered in diocesan governance review? What will be new and challenging?

- Clue to core issue is in LSC sub-title – *promoting co-responsible governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*
- Co-responsibility which underpins democracies (and has been dramatically in evidence during COVID lockdowns) is underdeveloped in the Catholic Church (RCIRCSA) despite the efforts of Pope Francis to authorise the People of God through his 2018 call to action.
- Vatican resolve to transparently tackle sexual and financial misconduct is promising, as is unheeded call from ACBC to Vatican to allow more lay people at PC2020.
- However, canon law vesting authority and decision-making power in priests and bishop; enduring ecclesial-clerical cultures; timid, preoccupied or jaded lay people; and the loud clash of the culture wars are barriers.
- The deepest issues are cultural, however, better to begin with the feasible and doable
- The new and challenging element will be lay people feeling they have the agency to get involved. Issues are likely to vary from diocese to diocese but will likely include seeking diversity on decision-making bodies, financial and pastoral transparency, and open avenues for involvement.

Should the Plenary Council processes be built into a diocesan discernment of LSC?

- Due to delay of PC2020 due to pandemic, and no guarantee that Australia will have vaccine coverage to enable large gatherings by October 2021, no sense in delaying consideration of *LSC*.
- Most dioceses will have undertaken initial consultation on PC2020, however *LSC* lends itself to being interwoven into pastoral planning processes.
- However, *Sensus fidelium*, documents offer further opportunity for reflection as they are released and could be considered alongside *LSC* key findings as part of governance review.
- Timelines could accommodate the PC2020 processes. However, individual dioceses need not be constrained from making changes prior to the release of the plenary laws agreed for Australia which may not be released until 2023, given COVID and Vatican processes.

Comments & Questions