

## ADDRESS TO PJP FORUM AUGUST 2018

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you and to be part of a moment in the emergence of what I believe to be a relatively new and definitely significant movement in the Catholic Church. I have followed the development of what we now commonly refer to as “Ministerial Public Juridic Persons” in the Church for several decades now, which is almost since they were first thought of. I am so pleased that you have moved to come together in an association. You are part of a new face of Church and I believe strongly that you will need the support of each other that can be given through this Association you have founded. It is important for you, so that mutual support can be given, but important for church as well and I hope my reasons for thinking that will become evident this morning. I know some of you already share the conviction that Ministerial PJPs will be significant in the future Church, and I hope I have the chance to learn more about this from you this morning as you share.

As I started to prepare this talk, I found myself thinking of Isaiah 43 where the prophet hears God saying: →

### **Isaiah 43:19 (NRSV)**

*I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
And rivers in the desert.*

This morning’s session will be as much about sharing as it is about any input I will provide. I am proposing to speak for a few minutes to an aspect of Ministerial PJPs in the hope of engaging you in reflection on that aspect. → We will take a few minutes for such reflection and sharing before then moving on to another aspect. In that way I hope the time can be used to engage with our experience of living in this newly-emerged context of being a Church which has these Ministerial PJPs. →

### **Authority→**

You are the stewards, the directors, the guardians, the trustees, the custodians of these Ministerial PJPs, and as such you are named and authorised leaders in the Catholic Church. → At the time of your founding approval process you were given authority by the Church to lead these entities which are mandated to conduct ministries which can claim the title Catholic; which can hang the Catholic shingle on its doors. Until the final few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, all authority in Catholic Ministry traced back to a Bishop or a Leader of a Religious Institute, RI for short. Lay people had held directional and definitive roles in ministries such as health care and education throughout their history, but the authority had been firmly vested in Bishops and RIs.

The move to having a Catholic Church in which lay people could hold genuine authority, end-point authority, Church authority, was an extraordinary shift and one which deserves close consideration. It was indeed “A New Thing”. → In the minds of some it had to happen

because we were running out of Religious and if we wanted the ministries to continue we needed new and different leaders. However, an explanation which sees people like yourself as just plugging holes does no justice at all to what has occurred among us. In particular it ignores completely the teachings of Vatican II about the role of laity in the Church. The Vatican Council emphasised anew that every Baptised person is called to ministry; → every Baptised person has a right and a duty to bring their giftedness to the service of God's People through ministry.

In the creative imagination of some, this spoke to the possibility that lay people could be called not just to delegated authority in the church, but to actual authority. They could be the decision-makers on behalf the church, the decision-makers about Catholic Ministry, about service to the People of God in the name of the church. Ministerial PJPs were invented and you are among those who are called to this authority.

It seems to me very important that you claim this authority to which you are called, that you do not cede it to others deliberately or accidentally, that you reflect often and deeply on this authority. Most of you exercise such authority in an environment where you have delegated a great deal of operational authority to boards. But you have not delegated all authority to boards, and you cannot. Additionally, you need to ensure that your boards are themselves exercising delegated authority in ways which are an authentic reflection of the mission you claim for your organization. In the Gospels it is very clear that Jesus had a vision for how his followers were to exercise authority. → In Matthew 20 we read *“But Jesus called them to him and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Matt 20: 25 – 28)

Let's now take the first of our pauses. You are invited to reflect with the people at your table on the authority of PJPs, perhaps using these questions as starting points. →

*To what degree are you and your PJP conscious of being a Church Authority?  
What challenges have you encountered in exercising this Authority?  
What challenges has your PJP experienced in exercising its Authority?*

## **Responsibility**

The next focus flows naturally from a discussion of Authority. Authority is never separate from Responsibility and I would like to invite reflection now on the responsibility of Ministerial PJPs. First and foremost you are responsible for ensuring the authentic Catholicity → of the ministries you govern. Each of them is meant to be an expression of Christ's mission of Mercy, and you are the people responsible for the maintenance of that mission orientation in each of them. →

The first thing I want to say about this is that you cannot fulfil this responsibility by producing a list of guidelines or rules to be followed and more or less leaving it at that. Such guidelines might be very helpful, but will never be an adequate expression of your

responsibility in this area. You need to imbue your people: Chairs of Board, Directors, Executives, those holding the lowest-ranked positions, with all that is strong and good about being Catholic which will of course be in harmony with the wisdom they bring from other sources including other faiths. We live in a time when we are far more aware of the Church's weaknesses than its strengths and this is understandable even while never the full story. → In our Church we, in particular Bishops and leaders of Religious Institutes, have failed and failed all too often to be the message of God's love and mercy for the world. Instead the message has been twisted, sometimes in truly shocking service of distorted power and self-gratification. It is very likely that you are personally quite innocent of such behaviour, but the dark side of our recent past and present collective story of being Church cannot be ignored. It is vitally important that you reflect deeply on your responsibility to ensure that people throughout your organization know how to exercise servant leadership and see themselves as custodians of the Gospel message. → Initial and ongoing formation is and will continue to be essential to your organizations being authentically Catholic. This is an area in which your working together will surely bear fruit.

The guidelines might be helpful, → but attention to rules will always need to be informed by conviction around the dignity and importance of every person, the need for our organizations to care for the whole person. → Is pastoral care in your ministries seen as essential or a drain on profitability? How are people formed and trained for these roles? Do your people really understand they too are leading in the name of the Church? Is there a treasured place for prayer in your ministries? When the ministry is an outreach largely to the non-Churched, (and a great number of the poor and needy are not part of Church although they too are the People of God) how do you balance respect for the diversity of belief of those you are helping with giving them access to a life-sustaining spirituality?

Then there is a responsibility to be attentive to the edges, to the ways in which God's message is being revealed to us now, in these times. I spoke just a minute ago of the raw and harsh aspects of the current times in Church, but that is not the whole story. Your organizations are themselves part of the hope that calls us forward to a better future. We are being called by the Pope to responsibility for what he has so simply called "our common home". → He has given us all a new "work of mercy" – care of our common home. Are you taking responsibility for ensuring that these life-giving messages are being heard by those who work in your ministries and those who come to them seeking help of any sort? What other life giving messages might your PJP be offering to those who are in contact with its ministries?

Ministerial PJPs in Australia differ markedly from those in the USA in one respect, here most have been founded by particular RIs. These RIs have gifted PJPs with stories of their founder or founders, women and men of the Gospel, and this is a wonderful gift to take into the future as you reflect on the messages these founders would bring to the Church in our era. However, it worries me that I have sometimes heard PJPs described as carrying on the work of a particular RI in words which suggest they are almost the continuation of that RI. You are not the continuation of anything as you are indeed "a New Thing", but you can and should treasure the gifts given as you work from your starting point into the future. While treasuring the heritage you bring from the past you are essentially about Church ministry

now and into the future. You are responsible for ensuring that you are not trapped by Tradition but instead have it as a secure base from which to move forwards.

Again, all this takes deep reflection and deliberate efforts on your part. You will hope that all of this is happening throughout your organizations; in your PJP Communities, but you are finally responsible for making it happen.

I have emphasised “authentic Catholicity” and your responsibility for embedding mission. Of course most of the reserve powers you hold give expression to your responsibility for Church property and assets →. It is likely that you understand these responsibilities very well and spend a good deal of time on them, but here too you need to be vigilant. I was rather shocked to hear some board directors saying in effect that the Board held the assets, they had the money, and they seemed to be suggesting that the PJP was a rather unnecessary and powerless appendage to them. This is of course a completely erroneous understanding and hardly a reflection of Christian thinking. I have experienced the tension that can develop between PJPs and their boards and think some tension is inevitable, whether the PJP is a newly formed ministerial PJP or a long established RI. It can be a healthy tension but has to be one that is founded in mutual respect for the different roles. Responsibility for encouraging a healthy and informed relationship between the PJP, its boards and its executives, is very much in your court and is, of course, a matter for formation of all concerned.

I could go on at length about the responsibility of PJPs, but this seems a good time to put the questions back again to you: →

*What has been important for you in developing a strong understanding of your responsibilities as a Ministerial PJP?  
What have been some of the difficulties?*

*[Again, it would be helpful if you jot down any thoughts, comments, questions that arise for you as you share]*

### **A Blessing for the Church**

The third aspect of PJPs that I would like to address this morning is the particular blessing that PJPs are for the Church. Again, this is “A New Thing”. → I see each of you separately as such a blessing, and together in this association you are even more evidently a blessing. → Many other churches have avenues through which the non-ordained have some form of leadership in the Church. Catholics have had only Religious Orders and now Ministerial PJPs, both, it is true, with authority in defined areas. However, your leadership can be for the whole Church, well beyond your immediate sphere of influence and the Church needs you to be leaders at this time in its history.

A Plenary Council has been called for the Australian Catholic Church in 2020. → You could say that the experiences of the Royal Commission has left the Catholic Church in no doubt that it needs to change if it is to be what it is called to be. Perhaps the abuse crisis alone

would be reason enough for change. Certainly the Pope, in addressing abuse in the Argentinian Church which culminated in all the bishops of that country offering him their resignation, left us in no doubt that he sees the need for deep seated change in the Church.

However, it would be limiting to see the abuse crisis as the only incentive to change. Just over fifty years on from the event itself we are finally starting to build on the theology of Vatican II. As I mentioned earlier, your organization in which lay people are given real authority in the church comes out of this Vatican II thinking on the call to ministry of all the Baptised.

We are facing a crisis of imagination in the Church →. We can all support key characteristics of a church of the future. We know it needs to be accountable, listening, transparent, a church with a genuine acceptance of women etc, but how these characteristics are translated into future structures is, I think, beyond the imagination of any one of us either personally or as individual PJP's. But together we can listen to the Spirit present within us and among us and find the way forward. Your contribution as lay people who have stepped up to the challenge of Church leadership is invaluable. If what we imagine is to be a creative and faithful response to the Spirit it will need to be founded in a sound and authentic understanding of God, →our best possible understanding of what God asks of us, and our best possible understanding of humanity and all of God's creation – in short, good theology.

Leading theologians are helping us to move from a sin/redemption focussed theology to a grace/nature focussed theology which understands God as active in the whole of creation. Jon Sobrino reminds us that our whole approach to life is rooted in our theology, in what we believe about God. A God of the past who lived in magnificence in a distant heaven, occasionally deigning to dive down to earth to intervene in our affairs, is very different from a God who is truly connected with all that exists, and is part of our daily struggle. What we believe about God who is all truth deeply influences how we live and work. I urge you to draw on your traditions → and also draw on contemporary wisdom to ensure that you are basing your approach in a consistent a solid theology, a freeing theology that enables you to lead into a future.

→ The Association you have created gives you avenues for Church leadership. While I feel sure each of your PJPs is in relationship with Bishops in the Dioceses in which you have ministries, there is also the need for you to have a voice in all of church affairs, and for you to be in dialogue with all of the Bishops, through the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the leaders of RIs, through Catholic Religious Australia. I see your leadership in Church as a sign of great hope for the future, a sign of hope in a Church which badly needs such a sign. God is doing "a new thing", it is for us "perceive it" and make "a way in the wilderness".

What exactly will be the role of the Association will be for you to decide and it is likely to emerge as you reflect further. I certainly think you need forums in which to reflect together on this "new thing" that you are and how together you can influence the whole church in very positive ways. It is evident that the association also holds great promise for collaboration around practical aspects of your exercise of authority and responsibility, for

example in the area of formation which is a demanding responsibility even for the bigger entities and more so for the smaller, less well resourced PJPs.

One of my own future-oriented concerns for PJPs in Australia is that they become and remain credible voices within the church. Will there be need for some level of accountability into the future? Perhaps in the form of a type of accreditation? We see the need for much greater accountability of other forms of church leadership. What should this look like for PJPs?

I could go on, but think we have reached a point where there will be value in conversation with each other about leadership in the Church and how the Association might contribute. I will hand it over to Kerry who will guide us in this and any broader conversation that develops, perhaps using these questions as starting points. →

*Do I and my organization have an awareness of a call to Church Leadership? How might we lead in contributing to a Church of the future? What blocks/challenges do we experience or anticipate in taking up this leadership? How might the Association support our exercise of leadership?*