

# Canonical Stewards in Ministerial PJPs in Australia

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## Introduction

Over the past 27 years in Australia, thirteen<sup>1</sup> Public Juridic Persons (PJPs) have been established to sponsor Church ministries – mainly in health, education and social services. These are often referred to as “Ministerial PJPs” (MPJP) to indicate their stewardship is particular to ministries. MPJPs are Church Authorities that are authorised to make decisions on the direction of these ministries and the use of their resources in the name of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

MPJPs are characterised by:

- › Being largely autonomous in canon law;
- › Having an exclusive focus on their particular Church ministry(s);
- › Governance by a college of Canonical Stewards;
- › Having Canonical Stewards who do not need to be ordained or members of a Religious Institute; and
- › Having written structure/rules (Constitution/Statutes).

MPJPs are established with Statutes by a Bishop(s). These Statutes typically include the following structures:

- › Member(s) to appoint a group of people/council to ensure that the MPJP and its ministries are faithful to their mission.
- › Canonical Stewards (also known as Trustees or Directors), this college often then appoints a Board(s) to oversee the management of the ministries.<sup>3</sup>

The MPJP has an identity that is independent of its Canonical Stewards. The Canonical Stewards are the custodians of the charism and ministries of the MPJP but these are not merely a reflection of the views and preferences of the current Canonical Stewards. Canonical Stewards must be respectful of the heritage they have received and must consult widely and discern carefully before making significant changes to the MPJP’s charism and ministries. The MPJP is perpetual whereas the Canonical Stewards serve for a limited term.

<sup>1</sup> [Calvary Ministries](#); [Catholic Healthcare](#); [Dominican Education Australia](#); [Edmund Rice Education Australia](#); [Good Samaritan Education](#); [Kildare Ministries](#); [Mary Aikenhead Ministries](#); [MercyCare](#); [Mercy Partners](#); [St John of God Australia Limited](#); [Sophia Education Ministries](#); and [Mercy Ministry Companions](#). [The University of Notre Dame Australia](#) is not a member of AMPJP therefore its information was not available for this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The Code of Canon Law #1116 [https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic\\_lib2-cann431-459\\_en.html#CHAPTER\\_III](https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann431-459_en.html#CHAPTER_III). <accessed 29 Sept 2021>

<sup>3</sup> See AMPJP papers: “Ministerial PJPs in Australia” and “The ‘Member’ in Australian Ministerial PJPs”.

## Role of the Council of Canonical Stewards

A 2023 survey<sup>4</sup> of the Members of the Association of Ministerial PJPs Ltd (AMPJP), found that the smallest MPJP Council of Canonical Stewards has five members and the largest has nine. The average size of MPJP Councils was 6.7 Canonical Stewards.

The MPJP is the appointed Church Authority responsible for ministries of the Church. The MPJP's Council of Canonical Stewards collectively make decisions for the MPJP. They may delegate specific roles to an individual Canonical Steward, sub-committee of Canonical Stewards or to a Board but the authority belongs to the MPJP as articulated by the Council of Canonical Stewards. The individual Canonical Stewards is not a Church Authority as an individual – except when exercising a delegated role.

The Council of Canonical Stewards has responsibilities under Australian law. If the MPJP is incorporated under Australian law, the Canonical Stewards, as the Officers of the MPJP are responsible for its governance.<sup>5</sup> If the MPJP has established other incorporated entities, the Canonical Stewards are usually the Member Representatives with certain responsibilities, including: authorising Constitutional changes; appointing Board Directors; appointing external auditors and receiving Annual Reports. To fulfill their canonical responsibilities, MPJPs will also have reserve powers that allow their Council of Canonical Stewards to make certain decisions for the MPJP's ministries e.g., approval of loans/expenditure over set amounts, approval of mission integration programs, approval of formation processes for Boards.

While the functions performed by the Council of Canonical Stewards differ among MPJPs, generally they include ensuring that the MPJP and its ministries:

- › make progress towards the mission entrusted to them;
- › develop their Charism and Catholic identity;
- › use and grow their resources (aka ecclesiastical goods); and
- › foster collaborative relations with the wider Church and community.

There are a number of tasks and processes by which the Council of Canonical Stewards may fulfil their responsibilities, such as:

- › Approve mission, values and strategic plan for MPJP and its ministries;
- › Setting performance targets/outcomes for which they and their Boards are accountable;
- › Receiving and responding to regular reports from their Board(s) on the progress and activities of the ministries;
- › Ensuring budgets and finance/fundraising programs allocate resources are available meet the immediate and long-term needs of the MPJP and its ministries;
- › Approving loans/expenditure over predetermined values;
- › Approving the establishment or closure of a MPJP Ministry;
- › Monitoring budgets and asset management;
- › Making decisions for immediate action or set policy to determine later/ongoing action;
- › Approving and monitoring safeguarding and complaint/incident response policy/programs;
- › Setting and monitoring delegation policies and procedures to enable accountable decision making by the most appropriate person/body;
- › Approving formation programs;
- › Approving mission integration programs;
- › Discerning how the MPJP will speak and act on a relevant issue;
- › Providing information and formation opportunities to the Members of the MPJP (especially when there are changes in the membership);
- › Implementing good practices and criteria for the recruitment of Canonical Stewards and the Boards that they appoint;

<sup>4</sup> AMPJP (2023) MPJP Canonical Stewards and their Boards (unpublished data)

<sup>5</sup> Only the MPJP, MercyCare, is unincorporated. The AMPJP paper "Ministerial PJPs in Australia" details the incorporation of other MPJPs.

- › Appointing and reviewing the performance of Directors to Boards;
- › Ensuring that, when a new Canonical Steward is appointed, adequate time is given to developing mutual respect and a shared understanding of the role and processes of the college of Canonical Stewards;
- › Meeting regularly with their Board/s for open discussion/formation/strategic planning;
- › Making themselves available for consultation with their staff, clients/students/patients and stakeholders.
- › Providing written and verbal reports to Members, the MPJPs Establishing Authority and to ministry stakeholders
- › Developing regular independent review and evaluation of the MPJP, college of Canonical Stewards, individual Canonical Stewards, and the Boards that the MPJP appoints.

## Background of Canonical Stewards

The 2023 survey of the 80 Canonical Stewards within the 12 MPJPs who are AMPJP members provides interesting insights about these people.

### Gender representation

MPJPs are a place within the Catholic Church where women are equally able to and actually do participate in governance.

In 2023, all MPJPs had at least two women as Canonical Stewards. The highest percentage of women was 100% and the lowest was 29%. The higher number of women on some Councils correlates to them being responsible for a large number of all-female schools.

Australia's MPJP sector has consistently had between 55-60% of Canonical Steward positions being held by women.<sup>6</sup>

### Lay representation

MPJPs are a place within the Catholic Church where ordination is not the prerequisite for governance roles.

In 2023, all MPJP Canonical Stewards are Baptised, 97% are non-ordained and 95% are not in Religious life.

### Qualified and experienced

In 2023, MPJP Canonical Stewards were found to have suitable qualifications for their civil and canonical governance roles:

- ☑ 28% had a Theology qualification; and
- ☑ 60% had a governance qualification e.g., from the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) or Governance Institute of Australia (GIA).

In 2023, the vast majority of MPJP Canonical Stewards had previous governance experience:

- ☑ 88% have experience as a Director on a Board;
- ☑ 18% previously served on one of the Boards established by their MPJP; and
- ☑ 23% were previously a Canonical Steward with another MPJP;

## Formation for Canonical Stewards

MPJPs recognise that Canonical Stewards need formation particular to their role, regardless of their previous experience and qualifications. To address these needs, the AMPJP developed a Formation Framework for MPJP Canonical Stewards.<sup>7</sup>

The Framework outlines the attitudes, knowledges and competencies required across six domains: Mission; Spirituality; Catholic thought and context; Leadership and governance; Ministry context and Human relations.

## Conclusion

One of the consequences on the emergence of MPJPs as new Church Authorities has been the opening of roles in their governance. Within Australian MPJPs these roles have been almost exclusively taken up by lay people – both men and women. These people have also come with considerable experience and qualifications which they need to fulfil these broad and complex governance roles. Recent Church teaching on vocation, mission and Church governance has an applicability to the role of MPJP Canonical Steward. With growing maturity in these roles, Canonical Stewards may soon contribute to the Church's understanding of the role of MPJP Canonical Steward and its significance to the Church.

<sup>6</sup> The AMPJP has no data on MPJPs before 2018.

<sup>7</sup> AMPJP (2021) Formation Framework for Canonical Stewards [https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AMPJP-Framework-for-Canonical-Stewards\\_June1\\_Web.pdf](https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AMPJP-Framework-for-Canonical-Stewards_June1_Web.pdf) <accessed 27 April 2022>