

The Member/Sponsor in Australian Ministerial PJPs

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Summary:

Each of Australia's Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (MPJPs), has a position or body that appoints their Canonical Stewards. In most MPJPs, this position or body is called the Member/Sponsor's¹ or Member/Sponsor's Council. This summary paper provides an overview of the roles fulfilled by Members/Sponsors. This paper also touches on some of the issues that arise for Members/Sponsors. A more detailed paper relating to "MPJP Members" is available for MPJP personnel.

In some MPJPs, the Member/Sponsor role is limited to the appointment of Canonical Stewards. In other MPJPs the Members/Sponsors have many and significant roles including Appointer, Conduit with Establishing Authority, Guardian and Guide.

The "Member" in a MPJP

When MPJPs use the term Member to describe people within their structure but it is not the same as the use of the term in a community association, sporting club, company or Religious Institute. MPJPs are not 'owned' by their Member(s) but by the whole Catholic Church. The MPJP's Establishing Authority² assigns people³ or specific PJPs (e.g., diocese, parish, Religious Institute) within the Church to have the role of Member/Sponsor on behalf of the Church. The MPJP Member/Sponsor can be described as the Church community's most immediate connection with a MPJP and its Canonical Stewards (often known as Trustees). While there is a legal structure associated with the MPJP, its primary nature is spiritual. It is part of the People of God/Body of Christ. It is to be animated by God's Spirit. It exists to fulfill God's mission.

Most MPJPs use the term "Member". However, others use the term Sponsor or Sponsor's Council. Steward and Assembly are also used to refer to the position or position or body(s) that appoints their Canonical Stewards.

1 In some MPJPs the term Member is used to describe others within the MPJP, e.g., in EREA the Canonical Stewards are referred to as the Members.

2 The Establishing Authority is usually a Bishop or Province of Bishops. The Bishop of Rome, via the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, is the Establishing Authority for seven of Australia's eleven MPJPs.

3 The Statutes of MercyCare allow the people who are its Canonical Stewards to also be its Members/Sponsors.

The Role of the MPJP Member

This paper has categorised the roles which may be held by MPJP Members/Sponsors as:

1. **Appointer;**
2. **Conduit with establishing authority;**
3. **Guardian;** and
4. **Guide.**

These roles can be understood as comprising a further number of options, such as:

1. **Appointer**
 - a. Appoint MPJP's Canonical Stewards
 - b. Approve the admission of new Members
2. **Conduit with Establishing Authority**
 - a. Request merger and/or dissolution of the MPJP by the establishing authority
 - b. Request amendment of the MPJP's Statutes by the establishing authority
 - c. Approve the MPJP'd regular Report to be sent to establishing authority
4. **Guardian**
 - a. Establish and/or amend the Canonical By-Laws of the MPJP
 - b. Change the MPJP's Civil Constitution
 - c. Approve alienation of the stable patrimony of MPJP
 - d. Receive an annual report from MPJP
5. **Guide**
 - a. Approve and nurture the philosophy/ spirituality and mission of the MPJP
 - b. Approve and ensure compliance with the philosophy /spirituality and mission of the MPJP's ministries
 - c. Determine the content of the initial and ongoing formation for the Canonical Stewards
 - d. Determine the content of the initial and ongoing formation process for Board(s) appointed by the Canonical Stewards.

Each Australian MPJP has its own unique combination of roles assigned to its Member(s).

In almost all MPJPs there is a dynamic and two-way process of consultation, suggestion and preparation of information between the Member/Sponsor and the MPJP Canonical Stewards regarding the implementation of these roles. Sometimes this consultation process is required by the MPJP Statutes but more often it is a practice to facilitate trust and engagement.

Specific issues:

a. Recruitment of Canonical Stewards

In almost all MPJPs, the Member/Sponsor and Canonical Stewards share the role of recruiting Canonical Stewards.

b. Sustainability of Religious Institutes as Member/Sponsor

Where there is only one Religious Institute that is the Member/Sponsor of the MPJP there can be concern that the Institute may eventually not be able to find a suitable person(s) to fulfill the Member/Sponsor role.

One way that a Religious Institute can mitigate this risk is to appoint a Council to fulfill the Member/Sponsor role.

c. Member/Sponsor and Canonical Stewards negotiating roles/relationships

Occasionally tension arises between the Member/Sponsor and the Canonical Stewards. This can be due to personality clashes, miscommunication or from substantive differences in their understanding of the mission/philosophy and how it should be lived in the MPJP and its ministries.

Many MPJPs attest to the vital role of regular communication, especially via personal meetings outside of formal Member/Sponsor meetings in building trust and mutual understanding between Canonical Stewards and the Member/Sponsor.

Tension with MPJP Member/Sponsor can also arise where that person or body was formerly responsible for mission/philosophy and they have an issue with how the Canonical Stewards have developed the mission/philosophy in new situations.

Tension can arise where the MPJP is bypassed in communication between the MPJP ministry and their previous sponsoring Church Authority.

d. Negotiating roles and relationships when there are more than one Member/Sponsor

Tension among MPJP Members/Sponsors presents a difficulty for the MPJP as it can lead to contradictory instructions, requests and an inability to make decisions. Such tension is rare and can be minimised by appropriate group formation, role clarification and an effective Chair.

Conclusion

There is enormous diversity in the identities, roles and issues relating to Members/Sponsors in Australia's MPJPs.

While the Member/Sponsor of some MPJPs hold significant roles, this may not be as stark as it seems given, they consult and collaborate extensively with Canonical Stewards. More information is needed on the degree to which Members/Sponsors exercise their roles in communication, consultation and collaboration with Canonical Stewards.

Perhaps the most significant challenge for MPJP Members/Sponsors is the sustainability of Religious Institutes as the single Member/Sponsor of a MPJP. While the Member Council structure can assist it is no guarantee.

The MPJP Member/Sponsor can be an effective means of connecting the MPJP with the wider Catholic Church. More investigation is needed into how this can be strengthened.