Luci-anne Quinn

Title: Reimagining Mission from the Margins:

Abstract: Canonical Stewardship and the Future of Women's Representation in Church Governance in Australia

Despite the call of Vatican II to recognise the implications of a common baptism for clerics and laity and the equality of men and women as disciples, many women in the Church believe in the need to reform structures to increase opportunities for women's leadership and representation.

This presentation proposes that the emergence of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (MPJPs) as Church entities in Australia, offers a unique opportunity for lay women to assume positions of authority, shaping new ecclesial models and ways of leading through the vocation of 'canonical steward'. This vocation, animated in the role of trustee, calls lay women to lead in the governance of ministries in education, health care and community services. However, this presentation will also caution that given the relatively recent formation of these entities, there is a potential risk that the future demographic profile of those appointed as trustees may not reflect the inclusive Church envisioned in the fullest expression of this ecclesial structure.

Many MPJPs are responsible for stewarding ministries founded by female religious orders. As these orders come to the end of their congregational life with aging demographics, it is both imperative and urgent for women to continue to take on trustee roles to ensure that women's expertise, voices, theology, and influence continue to shape the Church into the future. Further to this context, the 2025 NCLS Canonical Stewards Survey report data raises questions about the diversity of backgrounds represented in the Australian trustee cohort. With 25% of trustees due to conclude their tenure by the end of 2027 there are implications for how this new model of being Church is promoted and sustained.

Pope Francis believed in mission being brought to life from the margins through encounter, dialogue and an attraction to the joy of the gospel. Many lay women with professional expertise suitable for governance know marginalisation through challenges and suffering such as gender discrimination and inequity, domestic violence, abuse, or gynaecological issues. They are best placed to be the bridge builders. Through this presentation it will be argued that contemporary theologies of mission, animated by Pope Francis in his writings *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Fratelli Tutti*, are a call for bringing the diverse experiences of lay women to the vocation of governance in MPJPs. Secondly, through their processes and ways of being, MPJPs are an opportunity for Catholic women, who may have become disenfranchised with the institutional Church, to reengage in a synodal and inclusive model of Church as a communion of missionary disciples. This ecclesial model promises a life giving and spiritually fulfilling experience for lay women and encourages the conditions for empowered leadership, service and evangelisation through proclamation and social action.

In conclusion it will be proposed that intentional, clear and transparent processes for attracting and forming a diverse range of trustees for roles in governance are necessary to ensure the promotion of MPJPs and the growth and development of this new way of being Church as an example of the gospel fully alive.