

## **Responses to Survey in 2014**

The questions posed in the survey are in **bold**.

A synopsis of the issues raised is included. Some respondents felt very strongly. For example, one woman who is very involved in a country parish which does not have Mass each Sunday was angry, disappointed, and frustrated that nothing is changing, even though Vatican II promised so much.

### **1. What are the ways in which women participate in the Catholic Church in Australia?**

- The role, the responsibilities and participation of women varies from parish to parish, depending on the parish priest's understanding and application of Canon Law and his general interest in having women participate in parish work.
- In some parishes, women are sacramental coordinators, catechists, pastoral care coordinators and participants, Mass coordinators, readers, organisers of children's liturgy, Ministers of the Altar and Eucharistic ministers, and many other roles, spreading God's Word.
- Women are very visible in the Church across all ministries but generally not in senior leadership, yet women head religious orders, hold senior positions in Catholic education, social services and nursing but not in the traditional male dominated roles in parishes, such as administration.
- Women have an essential role as wife, mother, sister, daughter to enliven families to live the love of God.
- Many women are living out vocations in consecrated life in new and interesting ways without any recognition.
- Generally, the priest is totally in control and as a result, roles for some women vary across the Archdiocese, including whether or not women are permitted as Senior Altar Servers and able to run a Liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion. In one parish, the nuns were not permitted by the parish priest to take Holy Communion to the sick.
- Some priests consult and discern, and others merely instruct regarding the way forward and the operation of the parish, including the role of women.
- Some priests do not consider lay people have the right to be involved in decisions relating to liturgy, faith formation or general administration of the parish, and merely instruct people on actions.
- Women generally undertake liturgical support and menial task-oriented roles in the broad range of service ministries.

### **2. What assistance and support are currently offered to women to participate in the Church?**

- There were a range of responses from those advising that some priests are strongly encouraging and supportive, through to those who have absolutely no encouragement, support or interest in having women in ministry.

- Some women and men in the pews object to women participating as Eucharistic ministers, altar servers, parish administrators etc
- Some priests find it threatening to discuss how lay people, and people in consecrated life, might even discuss ways of integrating and utilising the talents of women in a parish.

### **3. What are the barriers to women's participation in the Church?**

- Views ranged from those who considered there is no need for an increase in the participation of women, through to those hurt by the lack of it.
- Family and professional commitments and responsibilities, and lack of encouragement and fellowship were considered barriers to women's participation.
- Canon Law restrictions were considered a key barrier to women's participation. Despite the fact that up to 70% of the people in the pews are women, they have little authority in decision making/higher leadership roles. A number of women considered the inability of women to become priests or deacons is a barrier, but some responders considered this was of no consequence at all.
- Due to the shortage of priests, some expressed concern that use is not made of the married ex-priests who may have much to offer in some country parishes. Married deacons have added greatly to some parishes and often the wife has a supportive role. The Catholic Church has many married priests who have changed over from other churches.
- Many respondents considered that the focus on clericalism is damaging to the dignity and the role of women
- Change was considered a barrier to women's participation in the church, and it was noted that liturgical change needs to be better managed in some parishes.
- The negative response from some lay women and men is also a barrier.
- A consistent and significant barrier identified was the negative reaction from busy priests who do not respond to women's concerns and do not understand there are many issues to be considered. The lack of professional in-service education (a requirement of all professions other than the priesthood) was identified as a reason for these views, including that many priests are not aware of the roles that women can undertake in the Church.
- Some respondents noted that equality advances have been significant in all roles and professional careers but not in the Catholic Church.
- Another barrier identified was the low confidence and disillusionment some women felt because of the lack of equality of access to roles in the church.
- Some women felt betrayed by the actions of a few priests currently before the Royal Commission.

### **4. What are some ways in which women's participation in the Church can be increased?**

The following were identified as ways to increase the participation of women in the life of the Church:

- Education and discussion of the above issues at the parish level, including with priests.
- Education regarding what women can do in the Church, and encouragement of priests and parish communities to include adult women as ministers of the altar.
- Encouraging the Archdiocesan and national ecclesial leadership to examine practical ways to increase the participation of women at parish, deanery and national levels.
- Permission given to suitable women to deliver a Reflection on the Word, or portion of it, especially where the priest is inhibited by a language, cultural or age barrier.
- Encouraging parishes to provide invitations to younger women to participate more fully in parish life. Participants noted that invitations to women, and mentoring of young women, are both important and essential.
- Encouraging priests to focus on homilies, music and hospitality as a good base for enhancing the participation and worth of all lay people.
- Encouraging priests to advertise roles that women can participate in.
- Provision of more spiritual growth programs designed for women, including those targeting women from vulnerable and marginalised sectors, e.g., single mothers, women from diverse linguistic/cultural communities etc.
- Encouraging young girls to become altar servers (including young people in the pews, not just those attending Catholic schools).
- Encouraging parishes to increase pastoral care visits, as many housebound women of all ages benefit from interaction with other women.
- Support for Catholic women's groups at the parish and regional levels.