I CAN IMAGINE some readers picking up this issue of Compass and saying, ‘Priest shortage? What priest shortage?’ Perhaps they have not yet experienced a situation in which no priest is available to serve the community—they might at least be encouraged to consider the age of the priest they now have and draw the obvious conclusions.

Or perhaps they have heard that after years of decline the number of men training to be priests is on the rise in Australia. Certainly this news is true. A heartening number of young men in the last year or so have felt a call to priesthood and have responded to it. Seminaries around Australia have reported a significant rise in new admissions this year. A few weeks ago an inter-seminaries football carnival brought together 160 students from Victoria and New South Wales.

The rise in numbers of trainees for the priesthood is seen as in part the result of recruitment and evangelization efforts over the years, including World Youth Days, but also as a sign of a reaction to the bleak non-religious and even anti-religious culture of the last decades. In my ministry I am discovering that some young and not-so-young adults are critical of their parents for not giving them any religious experience when they were children—they feel deprived. One can sense the Spirit at work there.

Whatever the stimulating influences, and the Holy Spirit is to be counted as the principal stimulating influence, the new surge of candidates for the priesthood is very good news indeed.

Nevertheless, it is far too early to declare that the crisis has passed. As with the global economic crisis we may say that there are some green shoots of recovery appearing, but the present and the future are and will still be difficult. Ask any bishop in Australia, especially a bishop in a country diocese, and you will learn that the priest shortage is already a fact of life.

Hence this issue of Compass which focuses on priests and the shortage of them, and on animating other forms of leadership in the Church, is still timely. We are invited to review the many ways in which, and the variety of conditions under which, communities of the People of God can survive even when priests are in short supply. Clearly, some of the solutions for survival that may be forced on communities are quite depressing to contemplate. The priest is truly essential for a community’s existence. A community can function without a priest for a time, but not permanently.

In his letter proclaiming the Year for Priests on the 150th anniversary of the birth of the Curé of Ars, Patron of Parish Priests, Pope Benedict quoted a few startling passages from the saintly Curé’s biography. The language and sentiments may be of another era, but there is no doubting the fervour:

O, how great is the priest!…If he realized what he is, he would die… God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host… (Le curé d’Ars. Sa pensée—Son cœur. Présentés par l’Abbé Bernard Nodet, éd. Xavier Mappus, Foi Vivante, 1966, p. 97.)

Concerning the sacraments and the Sacrament of Holy Orders, John Vianney stated:

Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest. And if this soul should happen to die...
[as a result of sin], who will raise it up, who will restore its calm and peace? Again, the priest… After God, the priest is everything! … Only in heaven will he fully realize what he is. (Ibid., pp. 98-99.)

And, concerning the absolute need of the priesthood, he affirmed:

Were we to fully realize what a priest is on earth, we would die: not of fright, but of love… Without the priest, the passion and death of our Lord would be of no avail. It is the priest who continues the work of redemption on earth… What use would be a house filled with gold, were there no one to open its door? The priest holds the key to the treasures of heaven: it is he who opens the door: he is the steward of the good Lord; the administrator of his goods. (Ibid., pp. 98-100.)

‘These words, welling up from the priestly heart of the holy pastor, might sound excessive’ Benedict conceded, ‘Yet they reveal the high esteem in which he held the sacrament of the priesthood.’

Pope Benedict acknowledged the need to balance St John Vianney’s words about the priesthood with a statement about the role of the lay faithful. He recalled the words of the document of Vatican II on the Priesthood (Presbyterorum Ordinis) which encouraged priests to appreciate and promote the dignity of the laity and their special role in the Church’s mission, something which the Curé of Ars modeled in his own way:

They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and acknowledge their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able together with them to discern the signs of the times. (Presbyterorum Ordinis, par. 9.)

Benedict went on to point out that ever greater co-operation between priests and lay faithful still needs to be promoted in our time. And so, he affirmed, the statement of the same Decree of Vatican II needs to be heeded:

While testing the spirits to discover if they be of God, priests must discover with faith, recognize with joy and foster diligently the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, whether these be of a humble or more exalted kind. (loc. cit.)

‘These gifts’, Benedict states, ‘which awaken in many people the desire for a deeper spiritual life, can benefit not only the lay faithful but the clergy as well.’ Quoting himself, he goes on to state that such co-operation between priests and faithful can provide ‘a helpful impulse to a renewed commitment by the Church in proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel of hope and charity in every corner of the world’. (Benedict XVI, Address to Bishop-Friends of the Focolare Movement and the Sant’Egidio Community, 8 February 2007.)

Thus, the lay faithful need priests and priests need the lay faithful. There is no community without priests and likewise no community without the lay faithful.

In Australia we have always relied on priests from other lands to supplement those who were born here. In the early days the Irish-born priests came to our rescue. In later times we have priests from many lands working here, and they are much needed for our multicultural society.

But both priests and lay faithful, both native born and those who have come from other lands, have been diminishing in Australia for quite a few years now. Would it not be wonderful if the current rise in numbers of seminarians were accompanied by a proportionate rise in the number of committed lay faithful. The priest shortage is a challenge for the whole of the Catholic community.

As Ron and Mavis Pirola affirm, families are where the best communication of human and Christian values is done. What is not important to the parents will not be important to the children.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor.
THE MISSION HAS A CHURCH, 
THE MISSION HAS MINISTERS

Thinking Missiologically about Ministry and the 
Shortage of Priests

STEPHEN BEVANS, SVD

BEGIN THESE reflections with you this morning with not a little trepidation. I speak to you as a complete outsider—I am not and never have been a major superior; I am not a bishop; I am not an Australian. What I share with you will be only out of my small competence as a theologian, a religious priest deeply interested in and committed to mission, a practitioner of ministry in the church, and a scholar interested in a theology of ministry. I speak to you this morning out of the context of the U. S. American church, a complex church of many cultures and a rich history. It is a church scarred by scandal, and yet a church that is incredibly vibrant and alive, especially at the grassroots level.

How might these theological, missiological and U. S. American reflections help you as Australian church leaders and pastors? I hope that they will serve as a catalyst to theological and missiological thinking yourselves—that you will take what I say and reflect on it from your own experience, in your own Australian context. The point is not to agree with me, or to take the examples I will give as something that have to be duplicated here. The point is rather to let me get you thinking, to enter into real dialogue with what I say, and ultimately to come up with your own ideas.

This said, I’d like to begin by quoting a section from the e-mail that Tim Norton sent me when he asked me if I could be with you this morning. Here is what Tim wrote. Here is the issue about which I’d like to get you to reflect with me this morning.

You may be aware that Australia and New Zealand are facing a steeply declining number of priests. Many senior priests are staying on as PPs because they know that when they retire, their parish will probably not have a resident priest. Many parishes have now been closed or twinned because of this. (We SVD are assisting in six Dioceses across these two countries in a variety of situations). It is becoming a very difficult reality.

Tim’s intuition was that perhaps by thinking in terms of the mission we might find a way to get ourselves out of this conundrum. I think Tim is right, and so this is the tack that I’m going to take in this input session to get you thinking yourselves. Mine will be the reflections of a theologian, one who deeply respects church tradition and church teaching, but is convinced that on the theological level one needs to think as freely, as creatively and even as playfully as one can.

I’m going to offer these reflections in three parts. First, I’d like to reflect on the fact that the church does not so much have a mission as that the mission has a church. The church is not about itself; it is about the Reign of God that it preaches, serves and witnesses to, and this makes all the difference. Second, if such is the case, any structure of leadership in the church serves the church by helping it be faithful to God’s mission. Ministry in the church—be it that of reader at Mass, director of religious education in a parish, bishop of a diocese or head of the college of bishops—is relative to mission. It does not so much direct it but is directed by it. The third part of my reflections will
offer you some examples of how ministry might be conceived if this missionary perspective of church and ministry can be put into practice. I’ll focus on some of the ‘obvious’ solutions to the problem of the shortage of priests that is so vexing our churches today, several of which are impossible, and others of which are being put into practice but are nevertheless somewhat ambiguous. Then I will outline two solutions in the context of a wider development of lay ministry from my own context of the U. S. This will be followed by two suggestions out of my ‘missiological imagination.’ Having done this, I’ll hand the reins over to you, in small and large group discussion, for reactions and reflections out of your own rich experience and the Australian context.

The Mission Has a Church

Our understanding of the church’s evangelizing mission has been expanded in the last several years. Vatican II’s Decree on Missionary Activity (AG) locates mission in the very life of the Trinity, in the overflowing fountain that is Holy Mystery sending the Word and the Spirit into the world (see paragraph 2). That God as such is mission means that in its deepest identity reality as such is not about itself, but finds itself in going out to the other. Nothing is enclosed upon itself, not even God. Theologians today insist that Ultimate Reality is not a monad. In the beginning was communion, says Latin American theologian Leonardo Boff. God, as the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said, is not the great exception to reality, but its greatest example. God could not be God without freely and joyfully creating, revealing Godself to that creation, and being present and active in the healing and redeeming that creation because it had not been faithful to its own inner dynamic of going beyond itself in risk and love—like God. The ‘missions’ of the Son and the Spirit, classical theology has always argued, are simply the processes of the Trinity within history.

Although the standard way of expressing the ‘missions’ of the Trinity is to speak, like Vatican II, of the ‘Father’ or ‘Holy Mystery’ sending the Son into the world, and then sending the Spirit subsequently as God’s continuous presence in the church, I have found it more ‘useful’ theologically to reverse the order and speak rather of Holy Mystery first sending the Spirit into the world. After all, it is not as though the Spirit was not in the world before Jesus was incarnate (see AG 4). John Paul II talks about the presence of the Spirit ‘in every time and place’ (see Redemptoris Missio [RM], title before paragraph 28). In this perspective, the Spirit is the way God as Holy Mystery is present to the world from the first nanosecond of creation—giving life, courage, wisdom, prophecy, healing as the Old Testament describes her. The Spirit is God, as it were, ‘inside out’ in the world.

‘In the fullness of time’ (see Gal 4:4), God’s ever-present Spirit took concrete form in Jesus of Nazareth, and the Spirit’s mission becomes his: speaking words of wisdom and prophecy, offering God’s healing and forgiveness, revealing God’s loving but challenging presence in people’s lives. Jesus gives the Holy Spirit a human face. Jesus’ ministry of teaching, healing, wrestling with the power of evil in exorcisms, including even those who are usually excluded reveals in a concrete way who God is and what God is about in the world.

Even during his life Jesus shared his mission with those who followed him and especially with those whom he chose to be in his inner circle. But it was only after Jesus died—as a consequence of his mission—and was experienced as raised again to life did his disciples realize—gradually, painfully, and yet
surely—that they themselves had been called now to continue Jesus' mission in the world, in every time and in every nation and culture. As the Spirit had anointed Jesus at the start of his ministry (see Lk 4:16-21), so Jesus sent the Spirit upon his followers to lead them to this realization. It was the same Spirit whom Jesus had embodied in his own ministry; now that Spirit was given to Jesus’ community, who began to call themselves the church, God’s new People, Jesus’ very bodily presence in the world, created by and a dwelling place for the Spirit.

This is why we say, with Vatican II, that the ‘pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature’ (AG 2), or as twentieth century German theologian Emil Brunner put it so beautifully: ‘the church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.’ Mission comes first. The church does not have a mission. The mission, rather, has a church. The mission is first that of God’s mission—through the Spirit, in Christ. We have been called into the church to share and continue that mission.

What this means is that the be all and end all of the church is not itself. The church does not exist to expand itself, the church does not exist to perpetuate itself. The church exists not as an answer, as it were, but as a response—a response to God’s call to continue God’s loving, redeeming, healing, reconciling, liberating, forgiving, and challenging mission. Jesus called the aim of his mission the establishment of the Reign of God and envisioned it as a community of those who were forgiven and forgiving, who included everyone, who recognized and rejoiced in the abundance of God’s grace. All this could happen if women and men would just let God reign.

The church is not the Reign of God. Yes, it is a foretaste of it, it is a sign and instrument of it, but it is not identical with it. It certainly has an internal mission of what has come to be called pastoral care—being present at the crucial moments in its members’ lives: when they are born, when they marry, when they die, when they need healing, when they need forgiveness, when they need counseling and consolation. But a crucial part of that pastoral care is equipping the members of the church for ministry—to each other in the church, but also in the world, beyond the church’s boundaries. The church needs to work that it itself be a worthy sign and sacrament of God’s Reign, but it has also to work—through witness and proclamation, through working for justice, through interreligious dialogue, through the work of reconciliation, in the outwardness of its prayer and its efforts of inculturation—for the world. It has to work to transform the world into a place where God can worthily reign. It doesn’t do it alone. The Spirit is always the principal agent of evangelization. But God has called the church to work with the divine purposes—so amazing is God’s grace.

In the light of mission, then, any exclusively inward focus is a betrayal of the church’s identity. If we are not equipping our people for mission, if we are not willing to risk the comfort and prestige of the church (e.g. its tax exempt status) for principles of the gospel, if we are more interested in building impressive cathedrals and churches than in witnessing to the simplicity of the gospel, if we are more willing to save the church’s good name than expose priests as criminals—then we are not being faithful to what God has called us to in Christ through the Spirit. These are some of the implications of recognizing the primacy and priority of mission in the church. This is what it means that the mission has a church.

The Mission Has Ministers

If we begin to think of the church as missionary by its very nature, meaning that it is mission that gives identity and purpose to the church, any structure in the church will be understood not as an end in itself but as existing to contribute its part to serve the mission. Every ministry in the church, whether that of a sacristan, a minister of social justice, a minister of bereavement, a professed religious engaged in the ministry of contemplative prayer, a parish priest, a theology teacher, a diocesan bishop or the head of...
the episcopal college, is about working with God to prepare people’s hearts to accept God’s Reign. Ministry in the church exists not merely in order to contribute to or build up the church. It certainly does this, but its ultimate purpose is to form the church so that the church can get on with its work in the world. Ministry is called forth in the church for the sake of mission, and exists for the sake of mission.

Ministry is always for mission, but it belongs to the church, the entire church. We might argue, as the U.S. bishops did a few years ago, whether we should designate as ministry the work that lay people do in the church and in the world. We might want to limit ministry, as does Thomas O’Meara, to public, recognized work by the church. But about this we cannot argue: all Christians are called to participate in God’s mission, to somehow promote in their lives the Reign of God. This is their privilege, right and duty because of their baptism. Whether they do that by being dutiful parents, honest lawyers, exemplary employees, members of a church choir, a member of a commission for fair housing, leading a parish or leading a diocese does not matter. What matters is that they live lives of giving and service, lives that in small or great ways are signs of God’s loving and healing presence in the world.

If this is true about every ministry in the church, it is true in a more graphic—indeed, sacramental way—of those who participate in the Sacramentum Ordinis, the Sacrament of Order or ordained ministry. Notice that I have translated the Latin literally: the Sacrament of Order, as it appears, for example in Canon 1008. Traditionally, and this even appears in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the name of the sacrament is understood and often translated in the plural, referring to the persons ordained or commissioned into a special state, class or ‘order’ (a term going back to ancient Roman times). Many theologians today, however, suggest that the singular is deliberate. As sacramental theologian Dennis Smolarski expresses it, for example, when the singular is recognized, ‘we may be led to think of the Church as a whole, and how order is necessary in the Church through leadership.’ If the entire church is an ordered community, the ministry of those ordained is to be a sacrament of that order. I myself have suggested that the word ‘order’ should be taken as a verb, emphasizing the idea that the ministry of the ordained is the service of holy ordering. Bishops, priests and deacons order the church—order its faith expression, order its ministerial structure, order its liturgical celebrations—so that the church might better work for God’s Holy Order (the Reign of God) in the world. Every ministry, but in a particularly sacramental way, ordained ministry, is at the service of the mission.

Specifically, ordained ministry calls forth the ministry of the church. John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV), says this in a particularly powerful way. He is talking about the priesthood, and it cannot be said of the deacon, but I think it could be said of the bishop as well: ‘Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received’ (paragraph 17). Ordained ministers are not to ‘do it all,’ but to inspire, discern, see to the training of, regulate, admonish, console the variety of ministries so that the church, well-equipped for ministry, can faithfully witness to the Reign of God in the world. The ministry of bishops and priests is specifically to call forth the ministry of the whole church, so that the church can do mission. The mission has ministry—at every level of the church’s order.

It is a special responsibility of the bishop to ensure that the ministry of the church at all levels is being exercised, and when we realize that this ministry is at the service of the church’s mission—not for the exclusive pastoral care of the faithful, and certainly not for the survival of the ministry itself—the bishop is called upon to do some rather creative thinking. This is true in any case, but it is particularly true in our own times, when we are suffering from a lack of vo-
cations to what has developed as the key ministry of ordering in the church. There is, it is said ironically, no lack of vocations to the episcopate, and there will probably be no lack of vocations to the diaconate. The neuralgia point is the lack of vocations to the priesthood.

As it has developed in the church, the priest nudged out the deacon as the ‘right hand man’ of the bishop. It is with the priest that the ordinary Catholic has contact, and it is the priest who is most closely responsible, in the name of the bishop, for calling forth the church’s ministry, and so inspire people to participate in God’s mission in the world.

Given the lack of vocations to the priesthood in this context, then, what are some ways that we might think creatively—not just to keep up a tradition, but to better serve the mission? How can the people of the church continue to be called forth to ministry so that the church can engage in mission? The issue, actually, is not just a shortage of priests. It is a shortage of Christians who can call people forth to ministry. Otherwise the mission would be without ministry.

This is what I hope we can begin thinking about together, but first let me, in a third part, make a few suggestions—some from my own context of the United States, others from my own imagination.

**Calling Forth Ministers for Mission**

This section is going to have four parts. In a first part I’m going to rehearse some solutions that are impossible in today’s church. Second, I’m going to reflect on three solutions that are already in practice, and offer a constructive critique of each. Third, I will offer two examples from my own context in the United States in general and then in Chicago, my home, in particular. Finally, I will let my imagination roam to see if we can’t ‘think out of the box’ a bit in the light of the urgency of the issue, and so that God’s mission might be served.

### A. Solutions That Are Not Possible

#### 1. Inviting Back Resigned Priests and Lifting the Celibacy Requirement

Three solutions are obvious, but at least for the moment are not possible. The first, of course, is inviting those men—or at least some of them, the best—who have left the priesthood for one reason or another, to return to active ministry. This would depend on a second option, and that would be to make the requirement of priestly celibacy optional, admitting unmarried men who might want eventually to get married, or ordaining men who are already married and have proved themselves to be effective leaders in the church. I am not sure whether this would greatly ameliorate our urgent situation, since many resigned priests would probably not come back, and, if memory serves me right, surveys indicate that young men—at least in the United States—are not interested in the vocation of priesthood, whether celibacy be required or not.

In any case, the lifting of the celibacy requirement is clearly something that could be done, since it has been admitted in several magisterial documents that it is indeed a requirement of the church, and not a divine mandate. In fact, there are a good number of married priests in the church already, whether in Eastern rites or ministers from another church (e.g. the Anglican communion) who have joined the church and requested ordination. Still, at the moment a general directive making celibacy optional is not something that will be given in the foreseeable future—although I would personally urge bishops to keep on pushing the issue, as some are doing.

#### 2. Admitting Women to Ordination

A third option, naturally, is the admission of women to ordained ministry, perhaps with the celibacy requirement intact, perhaps not. While the door to discussion of this matter is open ever so slightly—the ruling against it has not been declared formally infallible and some of the wording of the documents could be in-
interpreted as ‘we would if we could see clear to do it’—but as we know the firm teaching of the church is that the church does not find itself free to admit women to ordination.

At least in countries like ours, however, this is an issue which has so far refused to die, and so issues of doctrinal reception may be at stake. Scholars continue to reflect and research on the issue, and it is certainly within the realm of possibility that greater evidence may surface in favor of women’s ordination. My own conviction is that the answer lies in a clearer understanding of the nature of tradition, the argument which founds the prohibition: does change necessarily mean infidelity? Do changes in circumstances and culture call for change in doctrinal understandings and ecclesial practice?

In any case, it is very clear what the teaching of the church is on the matter, and I personally have very grave reservations about the women in the United States and other places who have defied the church and gone ahead to be ordained.

As I have said, implementing these solutions are not possible. Nor is it completely proven that any of them will actually solve the problem that we are encountering. Nevertheless, one wonders whether at least the first two might not be tried in the light of the urgency of the crisis and the priority of the mission of the church. One might ask what is more important, that Christians are served and called to ministry, or that the integrity of the priesthood as we have known it for at least a millennium should remain intact. The answer is not simple, but it poses a question well worth pondering. The legitimacy of the question, in any case, is warranted by reversing things: the mission has a church, the mission has ministers.

**B. Possible But Ambiguous Solutions**

1. **Priests from Other Countries**

   At least three other solutions have been proposed, but have had mixed results. The first, already in place, I understand, in most dioceses in Australia and New Zealand (and in many dioceses of my country) is the importation of priests from countries where, for the moment, there is an abundance of priestly vocations and, if not a surplus of priests, at least a good number.

   I say that has had mixed results because, on the one hand, parishes are supplied with priests and the Christian people in them have ready access to the sacraments. The fact that people in our parishes have the opportunity to be ministered to by a priest not of their own culture can also be a strong witness to the catholicity of the church, and can make the church more aware of its mission to all parts of the world.

   This second factor is certainly one of the motives, I believe, that my own congregation (Divine Word Missionaries) has invited missionaries from all parts of the world to minister here in Australia.

   On the other hand, there are several negative factors that have been experienced. These priests often have not mastered English, or speak it with such a heavy accent that many people cannot understand them. (This is ironic, I often muse: what is happening to us today is what has happened for centuries in mission lands, where missionaries often had little or no grasp of local languages). Even more distressful, however, is that priests from other cultures do not readily adapt to Australian, New Zealand (or U.S.) culture, and bring attitudes of clericalism, clerical privilege, and even abuse of authority to the parishes in which they work.

   Priests from other countries often do not respect the lay ministries which have developed in many parishes over the last several decades.

   When the lens of mission is focused on this practice, it seems to me that some serious questions emerge, as do some serious recommendations if the practice of inviting priests from other countries is to be continued.

   The serious questions revolve around whether the practice actually is driven by mission—are such imported priests challenged by their bishops and religious superiors to work to call the church to ministry within the church and the world, or are they invited into our countries so that the church can continue to function
as normally as possible in terms of its sacramental life? If this is so, what is the theology of the priesthood behind such an attitude? Is it formed by the vision of Vatican II, Pope John Paul II’s *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, and contemporary thinking on the priesthood? Or is the tridentine understanding of priesthood as essentially powers to offer sacrifice and forgive sins the one that is operative? From another—still missiological—perspective, one can ask the question whether our affluent countries should continue to deprive countries like the Philippines, Nigeria, and India of their own indigenous clergy. Is this not another form of exploitation of natural resources, and a continuation of colonialism?

The serious recommendations also revolve around the reversal of perspective that this paper offers. If the mission has a church, and the mission has ministry, how might these priests from other cultures be challenged and formed to be truly missionary themselves and call forth the missionary ministry of the people they serve? It seems that competence in English would be an essential condition for their work, as well as education in the culture/cultures in which they minister. Generally speaking, clericalism and clerical privilege is on the wane in our countries. Priests from other cultures need to be educated out of such attitudes. Bishops and major superiors need to exercise *episkope* or oversight over these men, to ensure that they continue to grow in their acculturation to the countries and cultures they work in, that they become an integral part of the presbyterate of their new dioceses, and that they continue in improving their language skills. In this way the great advantage of these priests’ witness to the church’s catholicity and missionary nature will only be enhanced.

2. **Promoting the Permanent Diaconate**

A second solution that is currently being practiced—or in serious discussion for implementation in Australia and New Zealand—is the greater development of the office of deacon. In many ways this is a laudable solution. The potential of the diaconate has often been neglected since its restoration at Vatican II, and current literature, both of the Magisterium and in theology, has begun to become quite extensive.7 As Vatican II pointed out in its Decree on Missionary Activity, the work of catechists and other men in the church who are actually already doing the work of deacons might ‘carry out their ministry more effectively because of the sacramental grace of the diaconate’ (*AG* 16). Deacons are able to preside at Baptisms, witness marriages and preach at the Eucharist. In this way they can offer assistance to priests who might have to lead several parish communities, and travel long distances to preside at Eucharists on Sundays and throughout the week. Deacons, many with long experience in business and administration and with theological training and formation, could also administer parishes, as is happening more and more in the U.S.

But there are some disadvantages in the practice as well. First, as New Zealand theologian Susan Smith has written, one cannot help suspecting that a move toward more deacons is a move to exclude women from a more active role in the church’s ministry.8 Second, in actual practice what has been experienced is that deacons often see themselves as ‘little priests,’ and are not a little influenced by clericalism. In addition, deacons have not had the more extensive training that priesthood candidates receive, and enter the ordained ministry with a sometimes naïve understanding of both Scripture and theology. As a result, their preaching is sometimes quite shallow (as is the preaching, of course, of priests who do not continue to grow in theology and scriptural expertise).

None of these disadvantages should rule out the wider development of the deacon in today’s church, but the development must be done with these cautions in mind. Deacons who are deeply engaged in the church’s social apostolate and can bring that consciousness to the people they serve, calling forth that kind of ministry, could be a great advantage to the mission that has a church. It could be a ministry that is called forth by mission.

3. **Inviting Religious Priests to Staff Parishes**
A third solution is to invite more religious priests to take over parishes that are not able to be staffed by diocesan priests. This is actually a very traditional solution. It has been in practice for many years—centuries even. Religious priests have not always been called upon to work in regular, diocesan parishes, of course. The First Lateran Council, for example, in 1123 forbade monks to ‘celebrate Eucharist in public anywhere,’ and St. Charles Borromeo in Milan, once forbade religious priests to preach in his diocese of Milan.9 But practically every diocese has parishes staffed by Franciscans, Passionists, SVDs, Carmelites, Columbans, MSCs, etc.

The idea today is to ask these religious congregations to expand their commitment to parish work. For the most part, religious congregations have responded generously, and in many ways are quite happy to establish themselves in a particular diocese. The possibilities for vocations become greater, they can become known by more people and that gives new possibilities for fund raising, and many parishes taken over by religious are quite appropriate to the charisms of many congregations. In the United States, for example, our SVD Chicago Province has expanded to take on multicultural parishes in Memphis, TN and Wheeling, IL, and we have become involved in Latino and Vietnamese parishes in various parts of the country. Here in Australia, I understand, our parishes are highly multicultural and for the most part in poorer neighborhoods. These are worthy apostolates for a missionary congregation like our own. We are happy; bishops are happy.

But there is, of course, a shadow side. Religious working in parishes can certainly develop parish communities according to their particular charisms, they can model community for the people of the parish by their intense community living together, and they can form the parish into a prophetic community, on the vanguard of social justice or ecology. However, the danger is also present that the priests of particular communities can simply run their parishes like any other diocesan parish and become very much like diocesan priests. Whether a parish is run by SVDs or Benedictines or diocesan priests doesn’t really matter, and the people in the parish might hardly know the difference. This is a real loss of the communal, prophetic and particular character that religious priests can bring to the church. At the same time, when religious priests are recruited to take over a parish it pulls them out of some of the other special work that their communities are engaged in: centers for interreligious dialogue, for example, or retreat ministry, or centers for theological reflection and inculturation. Several years ago, the SVDs went to New Zealand to engage in working with at-risk Pacific Islander youth. Soon the bishop invited us to take a parish. We moved to the Archdiocese of Wellington eventually taking a small parish with the intention of continuing the important, cutting edge, very missionary work with youth. But soon the Archbishop invited us to take an even bigger parish and parish duties soon put the youth ministry on the back burner. We are still doing good work—excellent work—and work much appreciated by the Archbishop. But perhaps our work is more that of maintenance of a parish than the more boundary-breaking work that we as missionaries should be doing.

I’m only signalling a danger here, but it is a real one. If religious congregations are going to take over more and more parishes, perhaps they need intentionally to emphasize the particular charism of their congregation in ordering the parish community. The mission has ministry; a particular charism of a religious community has a ministry.

C. Greater Development of Lay Ministry

There is no doubt that one of the solutions to the shortage of priests in our countries is the commitment to a greater participation in the ministry of the church by religious women and men, and women and men who are lay persons. Of course, these are all technically considered lay persons. This is certainly a practice that is current here in Australia, and it is one that is flourishing in the United States. The American
journalist and religious writer Paul Wilkes, for example, writes glowingly of religious and lay women who administer parishes in various parts of the United States, and several parishes I know in the Chicago area are alive with lay ministry and truly missionary parishes. But let me give two particular examples here.

1. Lay Ecclesial Ministry

The first example is the development of what has come to be called ‘lay ecclesial ministry’ (LEM). The U.S. Bishops’ document that formally introduced this kind of ministry to the U.S. Church, Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, was the product of years of meetings and several drafts and was finally issued in 2005. While it insists on a difference in essence between ordained and lay ministry—ordained ministry is not simply a more perfect or more intense form of lay ministry—it does in a way create a new category of ministry in the church: one that is still thoroughly lay, and yet one that participates in some way in the pastoral office of ordering the church and calling it to ministry. The bishops did not create this kind of ministry. They are only describing a phenomenon that has emerged in the U.S. Church (and no doubt others) in the last several decades, particularly in the light of the Second Vatican Council.

The document begins by recalling the fact that all Christians are called to ministry, and many serve in specific ministerial positions within the church, most often on a volunteer basis. There has emerged a smaller group of lay ministers, however, that is distinguished by being authorized by a local bishop for leadership in a particular community in a way that involves a closer collaboration with ordained ministers that requires more extensive preparation and formation. Although the bishops hesitated to speak of lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation, and therefore something that is more permanent in the church, many LEMs understand themselves as truly called in a permanent way to real leadership in the church. The bishops’ document does not lay down a law or a policy, and it does not limit LEM to particular positions in the church. It does give several examples: LEMs could be ministers who are pastoral associates, directors of religious education, directors of liturgy, directors of youth ministry, and even ‘participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish,’ although this latter ministry exists, the document says, only because of the shortage of priests.

It is this last point that is relevant for what we are reflecting on here. Lay people, sanctioned by canon law (517.2) can actually function as genuine pastoral leaders of Christian communities. This means that they can, in the name of the bishop and the priest that is assigned the official title of ‘pastor,’ actually call forth ministries in the Christian community, that they can make sure that the mission does indeed have a ministry.

The U.S. Bishops are quite cautious about this new role that they are describing, and they clearly do not want people to get the impression that these lay people are some kind of ‘unordained priests,’ or ‘priests in everything but name.’ But the great advantage of this move, through the lens of mission, is that people other than ordained men can do something that is at the heart of what the ordained do: call people forth to ministry. No, they cannot preside at Eucharist (although they may be able to preside at Baptisms and perhaps even marriages). But by the bishops calling forth this ministry, the mission is able to have ministry. This may be dependent on the present crisis of the shortage of priests, but one wonders how things will develop as LEMs continue to work closely with clergy and continue to reflect on their particular identity. This may be a practice to watch. It may at least be a partial solution to the shortage of priests.

2. A Lay-Run Community

A second example of a possible solution is one that I myself am involved in. In Chicago, where I live, I have served in the last seven years as a regular Mass presider for the St. Giles Family Mass Community in the west Chicago sub-
urb of Oak Park. The community traces its origin to the early 1970s, when several families in St. Giles parish asked if the parish could provide a special Mass on Sundays that was more participative and geared to families with children. The pastor at the time agreed to the idea, but he agreed only on the condition that the group find their own priest to preside regularly. This they did, and from small beginnings the community grew both in size and independence. Today the community numbers about three or four hundred, and in the community are second and even third generation women, men and children from the original group. While the Archbishop of Chicago has recently curtailed the community’s independence somewhat, it is totally organized by the lay members of the community, although now with much more dependence on the pastor of the parish.

My involvement, together with several other priests, was originally only to preside once or twice a month at Mass, but in many ways I have become integral to the community. I am not the pastoral leader of the community, but I do participate in that leadership—if course, always under the direction of the pastor (with whom I have a very good relationship). Besides the weekly liturgy, the community has organized its own catechetical program, a men’s group, a women’s group, a group that works on liturgical matters, and several groups that do outreach both in Oak Park and as far away as Appalachia and even Nicaragua, Haiti and South Africa.

This is a community of Christians who are able to call forth a variety of ministries that serve the mission. I wonder how many other communities like this there may be or could be if Christians were given the freedom by their pastors and bishops to do so. It would demand close oversight, of course, but, except for the Eucharist and other liturgical services, it could get along quite well without the leadership of an ordained person.

Such communities, probably, would be the exception. In fact, the St. Giles Community is made up of quite highly educated women and men, many of whom even have theology degrees (going for study, though, has often been a consequence of their involvement in ministry, rather than a strict preparation for it). Might the bishops discern the possibility, however, of such communities? Might the leaders of such communities share their wisdom with the wider church and help other communities to be formed? True, the role of the ordained person in the community is greatly reduced, but the community would still come under the episcopate of the pastor and bishop. The point is, though, that in such a community like St. Giles the mission is being served by ministry. If this is the case, being church is being done well.

D. Solutions from a ‘Missiological Imagination’

In this final section I want just to throw out two ideas out of what I might call my ‘missiological imagination.’ If the mission really has a church, and not vice versa, and if the mission has ministry, and not vice versa, would it be possible to ‘think outside the box’ from this perspective. I am not necessarily advocating these ideas, but I’m hoping that they might provoke you to think imaginatively within your own Australian context.

1. Non-Ordained Presiders?

Does, for example, the presidency of the Eucharist and other liturgical functions need to be tied exclusively to ordination? Raymond Brown pointed out in his classic work, Priest and Bishop, that the New Testament never tells us who presided at Eucharist. Somebody must have, of course, but since a clear understanding of bishop, priest and deacon only emerged clearly at the beginning of the second century, and since priesthood was only attributed to bishops at the beginning of the third century, one might speculate that a number of people might have presided. My colleague Carolyn Osiek suggests that since early Eucharists were held in house church settings, it would have been natural for the host or hostess to preside over the meal and to have recited the eucharistic blessing.
Given these conclusions by scholars, and given the urgency for Eucharist to be celebrated by and within the Christian community, might it not be possible to designate proven community leaders as presiders at Eucharist, or women and men who might celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation (another practice rooted in lay leadership)? We might call these ministers ‘extraordinary presiders at the Eucharist,’ like we speak of ‘extraordinary ministers of communion.’ When a priest regularly visits the community, he would preside at Eucharist in the bishop’s name, or occasionally the bishop would visit and preside as the pastoral leader of the diocese.

These eucharistic communities would not necessarily be parishes. There would still be a ministerial priest who would lead the parish. But his ministry would be that of the one who orders all the communities, helps discern who would be worthy presiders, who might be insightful preachers, who would fulfill other ministries that would engage the world in mission.

I admit such an idea is far-fetched, but I think it is not, theologically, outside the realm of possibility. I hope it is not heretical, since I’m just proposing it out of my imagination. We would have to do much more serious study as to the historical precedence of the practice of non-ordained presidency, and we would have to think differently about the organization of parishes. They might look more like small dioceses—like North African dioceses at the time of Augustine. But if the mission has ministry, this might be something seriously to think about.

2. Non-Eucharistic Catholicism?

My second idea is perhaps even more radical. In many ways so far we have been presupposing that Eucharist is the center of the church’s life, and one of the main reasons we need ordained ministers is to ensure the regular celebration of the Eucharist in our Christian communities. What if we would conceive of a non-eucharistic centered Catholicism? The absolute need for ordained ministers would be lessened dramatically in that case, and lay ecclesial ministers or lay ministers could work with bishops, priests and deacons in calling for the ministry of the church for mission.

My colleague Gary Riebe-Estrella has suggested in several of his writings that a eucharistic-centered Catholicism is only one legitimate form of Catholicism. He points out that, because of the lack of priests in Latin America, the church there has been effectively non-eucharistic for the last five hundred years. And yet, Catholicism has thrived, and the faith of Latin Americans is deep. It is not, however, a eucharistic faith. It is a faith based more on lay-led devotions and celebrations and prayers in the home, often presided over by the abuela (grandmother) of a family. He proposes that this situation evidences another kind of Christianity that has developed in Europe and North America, an authentic Latin American Catholicism. One might also refer to the church in Japan, after the violent persecutions of the seventeenth century. For some three hundred years a small group of Catholics in Nagasaki secretly kept the faith, especially devotion to Mary, until Catholic missionaries were able to return in the nineteenth century. For well over a quarter of century, the church in China was not able to have regular eucharistic celebrations due to the persecution of the church there. And yet, it seems, the number of Christians, including Catholics, continued to grow, and the faith of the people thrived.

Recognizing that, due to the shortage of priests we are close to becoming a non-Eucharistic church, does not at all mean that Eucharist could never be celebrated. Eucharist would be celebrated, however, less frequently than once a week as a general rule. In its place there might be Bible Services, Communion Services, or Celebrations of the Liturgy of the Hours. But all of these could be done by lay women and men, or by religious women and non-ordained religious men. The prayer of the church would still be celebrated, but it would not be eucharistic. Priests would not have to frantically travel to two or three parishes on a Sunday, and the need for a large number of priests would be
greatly lessened. Priests could concentrate more on calling forth the ministry of the community for mission in the world, giving more time to homily preparation, and personal prayer and study. Lay men and women would enjoy an even closer partnership with the priest and his ministry of ordering.

**Conclusion**

This paper has been an attempt to think theologically and missiologically about a pressing problem in our church today—my church in the United States, and your church in Australia. I hope you will take what I have said about the mission having a church and the mission having a ministry very seriously. I think this is a crucial reversal of how we have usually thought about these ideas and doctrines. But I hope you will take what I have offered as solutions—to paraphrase Reinhold Niebuhr’s famous comment about symbols—seriously but not literally. In many ways theology is play, and what I’ve done is to try to play with some ideas in the light of the important truths about mission and ministry. If what I have presented is something that is provocative, something that helps you think a bit more differently about church and ministry my reflections have achieved their purpose. These are hard questions, and there are no easy answers. But now it is time for you to reflect on these ideas yourselves—from a theological and missiological perspective, but also from your own context as Australians.

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8Ibid., 5.


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S I BEGAN to think through this topic, I realised just how large and complex it is. So at the outset I’d like to warn you that I am not offering any quick solutions. What I hope that I can offer you is an exploration of some of the issues as thoughts for further reflection. The title of this session could simply have been, animating lay leadership. However, I have deliberately chosen the rich scriptural image of the people of God as an inclusive image of who we all are, to focus specifically on animating lay leadership.

The Contemporary Context

We are all perhaps too well acquainted with living in a time of unprecedented change in all facets of society and in Church. I came across the following little reflection from Yves Congar that really brought home to me something of the magnitude of that change: ‘On this Ascension Day in the year of grace 1958, people are more interested in Sputnik III than in the Lord whom Christians worship. I can clearly recall my father taking me into the backyard to look for Sputnik III. Yet in July this year, I could watch on my laptop the launch of the Endeavour space shuttle heading for the International Space Station (ISS) that now constantly orbits 220 miles above us. The ISS involves the collaboration of fourteen nations, with staff that represent this diversity and it has been visited by people from more than thirty five different countries. It is a remarkable example of advances in science and of human collaboration. This event was in the news of course, but it competed for media space with many other items, particularly the almost global concern with swine flu. We live in a world of enormous choice that becomes just so explicit when we enter the virtual milieu of the internet.

One of the Russian astronauts on the ISS is quoted as saying: ‘This is the best partnership that human beings have ever had…in space we work things out differently.’ Perhaps there are some learnings there for us who are earth bound. As Timothy Radcliffe so realistically observes, ‘We hear wonderful stories of a new collaboration, but it usually appears to be happening somewhere else, and not where we are!’

With full consciousness that we are standing in the last years of being a post Vatican II church, that is, that in a short time the actual living memory of Vatican II and its exhilarating immediate aftermath, is gradually passing into history, it is an interesting experience for many of us to be living as historical bridges from a recent dynamic history into a future that we are still part of shaping, but whose ultimate outcome we won’t be here to witness. It seems that all too quickly those of us who were the enthusiastic vanguard of a church who was so energised by the intake of fresh air from John XXIII’s open windows, are now the somewhat wistful, but hopefully, wiser elders.

And yet for many of us our experience of church now is often that,

We have beautiful documents from Vatican II proclaiming the dignity of the lay vocation… We have a new vision of the Church, as the pilgrim people of God. But sometimes we may feel that nothing much seems to have changed. In fact, sometimes the Church seems even more
clerical than it was before. And so for many Catholics this is a time of mixed feelings: of hope and disappointment, of renewal and frustration, of joy and anger.  

As a layperson I feel that I can credibly comment from experience on the perpetuation of a clerical culture in church that is in many ways kept alive by lay people. As leaders we know all too well the power of modelling leadership. I wrestle with both compassion and anger whenever I encounter a leader in church who is locked into a form of leadership that draws authority only from the office or title they have been given. This is so often eons away from gospel leadership and also from contemporary understandings of leadership.  

There are, of course, many current signs of hope within Church, but in reality we live with quite a degree of ambiguity and an increasing polarisation that saps the energy out of aspiration to lay leadership. At a recent parish assembly I was facilitating, in response to dreams for the future, the spokesperson for one group declared that ‘we are over church politics and scandals, we just want to get on with living the gospel’. He was voicing a widely held weariness and frustration that is alienating even those who are choosing to stay connected with Church. For those who have already walked away, for varied and sometimes complex reasons, Church has a credibility problem.

**Pursuing Catholic Identity**

In times of great transition, such as now, there is a tendency to want to safeguard and fortify identity. This seems to be the impetus behind the current quest for explicit Catholic identity, particularly for Catholic schools. But it is proving to be problematic because of polarised understandings of what it means to be Christian and Catholic. One writer describes a response to these times as:

> The churches themselves react with uncertainty. They rigidly retreat...back to their legal and doctrinal positions, positions which they then try to assert and defend with authoritarian or fundamentalist tactics.

It is not only a recent observation. Rabbi Abraham Heschel offered a similar observation during the early 1950s:

> The fact is that evil is integral to religion, not only secularism...When religion speaks out in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message becomes meaningless.

As Eamon Duffy puts it:

> A sense of identity cannot be supplied by the exercise of authority...Tradition is not orders from above, or the status quo, a code of law, or a body of dogma. It is a wisdom...a way of life which has to be practised before it yields its light...

Perhaps one of our most urgent tasks as Church right now is to be able to work from a shared exploration of a common inheritance and the shared pursuit of a common hope. That may go a long way towards creating a climate that inspires leadership aspiration in lay people.

The secular media rarely reports a good news Catholic story, but it certainly adds to the disillusionment of both disconnected and connected Catholics. In a time of declining participation in parishes, stories of Church in the media are perhaps the only connection some people have with Church. It takes quite a toll on the consciousness of lay people. As Duffy goes on to say:

> To recall the Catholic community to the shared labour of living the tradition, attentive to its wisdom, open to its fresh possibilities, seems a
good item on a Christian agenda for the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{10}

This of course begs a few questions, not least of all is how.

\textbf{Signs of Hope}

Colleen Griffith uses the Burren in County Clare, Ireland as a pertinent metaphor for these times. If you have been to the Burren, you will know that it is hard to imagine a more bleak and stony landscape. However, rainwater penetrates lines of weakness in the limestone and gradually vertical cracks known as grikes form in the rocks. Ironically these cracks give rise to some rare and amazing wildflowers. This has proven to be a surprise to archaeologists, botanists and ecologists. She says, ‘I suspect that our present ecclesial time will prove a surprise as well. There is after all much that is flourishing in our grikes, the cracks in the rocks of a bleak-looking ecclesial landscape.’\textsuperscript{11} As Charles Taylor reflects, ‘…we are just at the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no one can foresee.’\textsuperscript{12} William Johnston is another voice of hope as he describes, ‘Beneath all the confusion a greater power is at work, and something new is coming to birth.’\textsuperscript{13}

For those of us involved in Catholic school education, animating lay leadership may on the surface seem not to be an issue. From one perspective, the movement to lay leadership of schools looks as though it has happened seamlessly. From another perspective, there are real concerns about how sustainable this really is into the coming decades. As recent research shows, the reluctance to take on principalship tends to centre around the expectations associated with being a spiritual leader.\textsuperscript{14} I wonder if we began with spiritual leadership that drew authentically from our Catholic tradition as the central motif, just how all of the complexities of Catholic education leadership might be arranged.

So here we are nearly at the end of the first decade of the third Christian millennium, perhaps somewhat scarred by the efforts to hold on to a dream that seemed to so deeply resonate with the dream of Jesus for those who would continue his mission as church. Fifty years ago who could have predicted what all of humanity has experienced in that time? Fifty years is such a small time in our two thousand year history as church. It’s roughly the time from the death and resurrection of Jesus to the time of Paul’s first letter to the church in Thessalonica.

The Year of Paul that has so recently come to conclusion, was a brilliant initiative for these times. My experience is that people came to know Paul the man and something of the difficulties Paul addressed in his letters, and that these have deep resonance with many of the issues that are part of church in this third millennium. I am not at all suggesting that the era of the very early church is some halcyon time that we should return to by imitation. We know from Paul’s letters that all was far from perfect!

It is now crucial that those of us who are in leadership positions are able to take an informed long view of who we are as church and know that things have been worse, and that things can be better. To quote Timothy Radcliffe again, ‘crisis is part of who we are as church, it is our \textit{raison d’etre}’. That’s a sobering reminder that our origins lie deeply within the crisis of Christ crucified and a disappointed discipleship as described by Luke’s story of the journey to Emmaus and Mark’s constant portrayal of the disciples of Jesus who, in colloquial terms, simply didn’t get what Jesus was on about. Mark’s own ending of his gospel has the women at the empty tomb seized with terror and amazement and very afraid. An ending so shocking that it was expanded into something more hopeful around the second century.

\textbf{The Call to Holiness in a Secular World}

It is not helpful to label the secular world in which we all live as the enemy. While this is
not to deny that there are aspects of our secular society that need to be challenged, it is simplistic and alienating to label the complex reality of secularity in this way. To do this carries an assumption that living in the world is somehow detrimental to spirituality; it places limits on the grace of God.

Secularity should not quickly be demonised or divinised. It is neither simply a ‘culture of death,’ nor is it simply ‘a culture of life.’ Morally it is ambivalent. It is full of grace, even as it is full of many things that make grace, faith, and a moral life more difficult.

As Ron Rolheiser points out, secularity is the child of Judaeo-Christianity. There is, however, a form of secular fundamentalism that exists as an ideology, but this is not what most of us usually encounter as we live our daily lives in a secular society. One obvious benefit of a secular society is the freedom of religion that allows choice, particularly in school education. Although the Australian Government’s articulation of values for schools caused controversy, it is difficult to argue against values such as compassion and the others that clearly echoed those of Christianity on the Government posters. The real issue was the imposition that threatened the freedom that accompanies living in a secular society. In our wider church scenario it is imperative that we can publicly define who we are by saying what we are for rather than what we are against.

The fifth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* invites us to think creatively about what it could mean to live a full Christian life in the midst of the challenges of contemporary life. I wonder how well we have responded to that invitation. That is, what meaning does the universal call to holiness actually have for most people? Quite often the meaning is associated with being very pious and somewhat separated from the realities of everyday life. In other words, something quite impossible in the midst of a busy contemporary life. Yet, If we recall the wisdom of Irenaeus of Lyons, ‘the glory of God is humanity, fully alive’ echoing Jesus’ statement in John’s gospel, ‘I came that they may have life and have it abundantly’, the way of holiness is a real possibility for all of us. The following quotation from Dewitt Jones comes from a DVD Sheila Flynn OP shared with the Dominican Education Council earlier this year. It has stayed with me because it says something quite profound about creatively living the ordinary so that it becomes extraordinary.

Creativity involves having the right lens and the right focus; accepting that there is more than one right answer and continually asking, why do we do it this way? How could it be better? This is the way of seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary.

The questions are vital. Why do we do it this way? From my experience many people are totally unaware that through their baptism they are called to mission—that this is their vocation as Catholic Christians. Mission is another problematic word, still often only meaning overseas mission. Just as confusing is the understanding of vocation. For many people this is equated with a state of life, most usually to ordained ministry or religious life. I looked with interest at the website for the recent National Vocations Week and found just this reinforced yet again. A descending order for women: Sister, Consecrated Virgin, Canonical Hermit, Laity. The list for men of course includes Diocesan and Religious Priest. How different and so much more encouraging this could be if number one was listed as the vocation to the mission of God to which all of us are called through baptism. After all, this doesn’t change for any of us, regardless of how we are called to live this, either as vowed religious, ordained ministers, or in the married or single life. Or, as it is for some, a lived experience of two or more of these states of life within a lifetime. A limited understanding of vocation delivers just that—limits. Living a prophetic faith is an invitation to all of us.

Ron Rolheiser quotes Jim Wallis, the founder of *Sojourners* on this:

Prophetic faith does not see the primary battle as the struggle between belief and secularism. It understands that the real battle, the big strug-
gle of our times, is the fundamental choice between cynicism and hope. The prophets always begin in judgement, in a social critique of the status quo, but they end in hope—that these realities can and will be changed. The choice between cynicism and hope is ultimately a spiritual choice, one that has enormous political consequences.17

**Our Animating Story**

Here I will borrow from a recent presentation by Fr David Ranson where he used the following quotation from Peter Berger.

It is through [the central animating stories of an organisation] that people are lifted above their capacity in the ordinary, attain powerful visions of the future, and become capable of collective actions to realise such visions...By definition, [central animating stories] transcend both pragmatic and theoretical rationality, while at the same time it strongly affects them.

Our animating story is the story of the grace of God. Beginning deep in the life of God and flowing out as both Breath and Word of God, as the mission of God into all of creation, inviting all of us into God’s mission of transformation. It is the mission that Dominic preached—the theme of our conference—Dominic Preacher of Grace.

I am grateful to be living in a time when the retrieval of our animating story of a triune God is opening the way to fresh understandings of mission, church and leadership. As Catherine LaCugna states:

The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for the Christian life…it is a theology of relationships.18

There is something wonderfully captivating about Andrei Rublev’s now very familiar icon that we have come to name as an icon of the Trinity. It is perhaps worth contemplating why this wonderful icon emerged early in the 20th century after centuries of being somewhat muted by the smoke generated by innumerable candles and even at one point in time, being partially covered by a silver oklad. The emergence of this icon seemed to herald a shift in spiritual consciousness with which we are still grappling. The fourth place at this divine table somehow engenders invitation and inspiration that touches us deeply beyond the rational.

**Blossoming Hope**

I would like to conclude by returning to Colleen Griffiths’ Burren metaphor. These times are, I think, a uniquely blessed time. Through wonderful scholarship, the full richness of our tradition is being opened up to us as an enticing banquet. Far too much to be fully savoured by quick ‘take-aways’, where one might fleetingly taste something wonderful, but have no idea what it exactly is or who to ask to help you in finding it again.

I wonder if at times, church offers only a banquet for the well versed ‘gourmets’. Something that may in itself present as a barrier to others who are still tentatively seeking tastes. Henri Nouwen asks the ‘so what’ question, as do contemporary Catholic educators, in a diary he kept during a year long retreat at a Trappist monastery. It offers, I think, an honest point for reflection about formation.

For the past few weeks we have had a Friday night lecture by a visiting seminary professor. He has been speaking about the doctrine of the Trinity and especially about the Holy Spirit. For me these lectures are a special experience…I like the lectures, I am intrigued, I don’t want to miss them—but at the same time I feel dissatisfied on a level I did not understand in the past but is now closer to my consciousness…I kept saying to myself, ‘How interesting, how insightful’—and at the same time I said to myself, ‘So what? What do all these words about God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have to do with [people] here and now?’ As soon as I step outside the circle of this terminology, which is very familiar to me, the whole level of discourse seems extremely alienating.19

Perhaps you may remember the film *Babette’s Feast*. Its resonance with Eucharist was quickly recognised when it emerged during the 1980s. I recently sought it out again to
revisit just how it sparked the religious imagination. Yes, after twenty plus years the resonance with Eucharist was still clearly there for me. But in 2009 it also said more to me about how to invite, by those who have the responsibility to invite. Babette knows just how delicious each item of her feast is; she also knows how to bring all of the items together into the one wonderful experience for the people at her table. While some of us may have had the experience of being intimidated by an arrogant waiter, Babette simply offers exquisite food to her guests that she has lovingly prepared. Her hope is nothing more than that through the desire for her guest’s enjoyment of wonderful food, there might be created an awareness of something beyond their constant diet of dried fish; a taste for more. She echoes the invitation of Jesus to ‘Come and see’ and the invitation of Psalm 34, to ‘taste and see that the Lord is good’.

In these current challenging times for church, I am convinced that Catholic schools are carrying the church to a new place. I was recently enormously heartened by two HSC students in a discernment for parish pastoral council membership. They were typical northern beaches young people who enjoy all that life offers them, but were filled with a passion for what their church could be and were ready to contribute to making their vision a reality. Their articulation of their faith was way beyond piousness. They were for me an embodiment of hope for the future of who we all can be as church. As I listened to those two young people, I recognised that they are the result of many years of both vision and struggle. The struggle continues in many ways, but the fruit of that struggle is blossoming and about to bloom in ways that will surprise us and gladden our hearts.

NOTES

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THE FAMILY: TEACHER OF HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN VALUES

An Australian Perspective

RON AND MAVIS PIROLA

WE LIVE IN a continent with a population of only twenty-two million people living mainly on a coastal fringe. We have a strong multicultural and multiracial mix. About three quarters of Australians are at least nominal Christians, including about one quarter who are Catholic.

We are a typical Western secular culture with all the advantages and disadvantages that flow from that. In recent years, individualism and materialism have contributed to a loss of religious practice and ideals and breakdown of marriage and family life.

Yet it is still well recognised that it is in the family that basic attitudes are developed, for better or for worse—our attitudes to racism, sexism, care for the poor and even personal habits such as drinking alcohol. A recent Australian campaign to reduce alcoholism has the slogan ‘You are being watched’ and shows a picture of a child looking up at a wine glass in a parent’s hand.

When the Holy Father set the theme for this World Meeting of Families, he was expressing a reality: God communicates with us principally through those closest to us.

So every human interaction is a potential opening for God’s grace. That occurs most especially in families. So families are a major agent for social good and when we pass on Christian values, we are passing on values that develop the human person in the fullest sense. Families are teachers of human and Christian values.

This reality is often underestimated for a number of reasons. One reason is the number of difficulties facing many families. Their needs seem endless and quite rightly we give them a high priority. In Australia the Church has a highly developed system of diocesan agencies that have pioneered social welfare in our country.

However, it is important to recognise not only the needs but also the gifts that are present in all families. A focus on just needs without recognition of the gifts of families saps our energies and can induce a sense of hopelessness.

A typical example is amongst our indigenous people who comprise 2% of the population. Rural aboriginal communities have one of the lowest standards of living in the world. The destruction of traditional tribal and family values has undercut the heart of their cultural life and robbed them of hope. Large sums of money are being spent to address the urgent needs and much more has to be done. However, one of the lessons of this situation seems to be that the best hope for long term improvement is based on respect for aboriginal people themselves and that means their culture and especially their family values.
So family is an essential agent for passing on human values, across the whole spectrum of society, from the strongest to the most challenged.

**Family—Gift and Strength**

For this presentation, we will focus on some approaches that help us to learn from families and to encourage their giftedness. We will draw from our own experiences as chaircouple of the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council. This is an Advisory Council to the Australian Bishops. It grew out of the experience of Australian couples who attended the Second World Meeting of Families in Rio de Janeiro in 1997. They were inspired by the concept of the family, not only as an area of need, but also as ‘gift and hope for humanity’, in other words, the family as subject and not just object of pastoral care. The Council continues to promote this concept of ‘evangelisation through the family’.

**Affirmation**

Families need to be affirmed in this evangelising role. Families are not ‘ordinary’, they are ‘extraordinary’. We need to recognise their gifts and affirm them for the good that they do. When people recognise the good that they do, they do it better.

**Growth through challenge**

Affirmation does not in any way ignore the problems of families, rather, it gives them meaning. Families are strong and gifted, partly because of the challenges in their relationships, not just despite them. All relationships experience some degree of failure.

There is no such thing as a perfect family or a perfect marriage. When we first met we fell in love. Then when we ran into problems in our relationship, the real process of growth in our love began and the depth of bonding between us comes from having worked through hurts and disappointments. Families, with all their complex intergenerational relationships, face a myriad of problems. Yet these are major opportunities for growth.

**Learning from families with disabilities**

The response of families to a member with disabilities is one of the great lessons of life. Such families provide great lessons in hope, generosity, hospitality, commitment and courage. The witness of such families teaches us that each person is precious and wonderfully loved by God. It is a wonderful antidote to the utilitarianism of modern society.

Largely through the life experience and efforts of one couple, the Australian Catholic Disabilities Council, has been formed. Its national network provides resources for families and parishes. It spreads the message of Jean Vanier regarding people with disabilities. He wrote: ‘It’s not a question of going out and doing good to them; rather receiving the gift of their presence transforms us’.

**Learning from the experience of families in the ‘front line’ of social change**

Families also need to be affirmed for their role in the front lines of a changing society. The lived experience of families provides enormous insights into how to respond to a range of sensitive situations such as divorce and remarriage, premarital sex, cohabitation and abortion.

What do you say to your children when you are planning a family reunion at Christmas and one of the adult children wants to bring home a same-sex partner? How do you
express the truth of Christ’s teaching and Christ’s love to younger, possibly less mature children or grandchildren? While the institutional Church grapples with how to express issues at a very public level, families are working on this front daily. In the midst of these challenges, there can be wonderful compassion and respect for truth. The rest of the Christian community needs to be learning from their insights.

Again, single parent families represent about 14% of all Australian families, most often as a result of separation or divorce. Sadly, they often feel alienated and unwelcome by the rest of the Church community. Yet very often they provide examples of courage and commitment in the face of adversity from which others can learn.

At the same time, broken hearts need healing. The area of abortion is one of particular need as approximately one in five pregnancies in Australia ends in abortion. A recent initiative in Australia, under the direction of Bishop Eugene Hurley, Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life, is a national programme called ‘Walking with Love’. It is a listening, loving gentle process. It involves Bishops and laity supporting vulnerable pregnant women, with their husbands, partners and families, to choose life. It involves the embrace and support of those who suffer the after effects of abortion.

The point is that no matter what our circumstances, every family—your family, our family, everybody’s family—is a place where love is expressed and where the Holy Spirit can work powerfully.

**Technological Revolution**

Major challenges for the family as teacher of human and Christian values are two revolutions that have radically changed our social landscape—the technological and sexual. They present us with both difficulties and opportunities.

Through the technological revolution we have a wonderful explosion of information available at our fingertips. It can be used imaginatively and interactively to promote good human and Christian values. Increasingly, faith programmes use DVDs to provide good quality input for small group interaction around the world. Again, following World Youth Day in Sydney, an interactive website, Xt3, has been established to help pilgrims in their ongoing faith journey.

Unfortunately, technology limits our direct contact with each other. Parents feel shut out of the lives of their own children who often spend hours in front of computer screens. Communication with family and friends is increasingly by text messages, Face Book and other modern wonders. Furthermore, internet pornography is a major threat to families while popular TV shows more subtly undermine good human and Christian values.

We would like to make four observations in regard to these challenges:

**Importance of human interaction**

The first is that parents need to be reassured that they have a natural advantage over technology. We have a wonderful computer at home. It is very smart. Its memory is much better than ours! But our computer can’t show love to our children or grandchildren. Furthermore, a basic attitude such as a good work ethic comes from being with someone who enjoys his or her work. A recent government initiative to provide more classroom computers highlighted the point that these are useful but are no substitute for the interaction with the teacher.

**Embracing new technologies**

Secondly, it follows that parents need to travel the internet highway with their children. We know parents who make a point of watching TV or playing internet games with their children. This creates ‘prime time’ opportunities to discuss values and share insights.
Setting clear limits
Thirdly, parents also need to be like policemen on the internet highway, controlling unwanted material. In Australia, the Bishops Conference is strongly supportive of the Federal government’s plans to introduce internet service provider filtering. The Australian Family Association and other bodies lobby hard at government level to remove sexually explicit music clips shown on TV during prime time.

Using technology in catechesis
And finally, we need to make maximum use of new technologies in providing high quality teaching materials. One young couple use their professional skills to provide media resources known as ‘Choice-Ez’5. These help high school students navigate their way through the complexities of a sexually charged culture. Another recent example is a ‘Total Gift of Self’ which is an on-line resource addressing the Church’s teaching in the sensitive area of Natural Fertility Methods6. These are just examples of technology being put to good use in marriage and family formation.

Sexual Revolution
With regard to the sexual revolution, the biggest challenge is that sex is now seen as an activity independent of relationships and unrelated to procreation. This affects the marital relationship on which the family is based. Other major challenges are the pressure for same sex marriages, the availability of pornography and the premature sexualisation of young children.

Yet the sexual revolution also provides great opportunities. We have a wonderful message! The Church’s teaching on sexuality provides a meaningful and fulfilling answer to the major questions of human relationships. So the sexual revolution is an opportunity for evangelisation. As Pope John Paul II pointed out, sex, in a sense, is a ‘constituent part of the person’, not just ‘an attribute of the person’.7

Sexual intimacy
Transmission of this treasured teaching relies heavily on the witness of sacramental marriages, i.e. on couples who appreciate that sexual intimacy is very much part of their marital spirituality—they grow in marital spirituality through their sexual relationship and not despite it.

Children are attracted to a message that not only makes sense of sex within God’s plan for humanity but is expressed in warm, relatable human terms. This is something that is transmitted daily by the married couple themselves in untold numbers of sensitive ways. The more conscious they are of the significance of their sexual relationship, the more effective they are in passing on these values.

Romance
An important antidote to the utilitarian approach to sex is romance. Romantic love is a gift from God. Working on one’s romance is part of sacramental love. Young children love to see romance between their parents. Teenagers are far less open about this but possibly even more watchful and interested.

There is an increasing trend in Australian dioceses to honour married couples on their anniversaries in some appropriate liturgical way. This primarily acknowledges their commitment but also affirms the warm human ways in which that is expressed.

Premature sexualization of young children
At the same time families need support to stand up against the pervasive debasing of sex and in particular, the premature sexualization of young children. One good news story is the recently established Womens Forum of Australia which has published an impressive pseudo-magazine that looks like an issue of one of the popular magazines but which exposes the seductive myths of such publications.8
Marriage Education and Preparation

To withstand the aggressive onslaught of a secular society, one of the biggest difficulties we face is the low level of ownership and practice of the faith in families. Mass attendance is now 14% compared to about 75% forty years ago. Consequently, many families today have very little contact with the faith community. Even though we have a very highly developed Catholic school system it can only build on what is formed in the family.

So, we need to work towards developing a welcoming and strong catechesis for families. What is needed is a radical turning to Jesus with strong habits of prayer, scripture and the sacraments.

We need to work at this on many fronts. We would now like to touch on some developments and initiatives in response to this situation.

Marriage enrichment

The starting point needs to be the married couple, whose relationship is the foundation of the family. The love and witness of husband and wife give special meaning to the values of commitment and faith that parents pass on to their children. To support couples in their sacramental vocation, a number of dioceses now have Marriage and Family Life Offices. In the Archdiocese of Sydney, a Family and Life Network between parishes was recently established. Also active in marriage enrichment are movements such as Marriage Encounter and Teams. A more recent initiative in Australia is Celebrate Love, a weekend seminar that specifically explores the practical application of the Theology of the Body. This ongoing enrichment and education for married couples needs to be encouraged in the same way as ongoing renewal for clergy and religious.

Marriage preparation—at every level

Just as urgent in today’s world in today’s world is the need for marriage preparation at every level.

First of all, there is immediate marriage preparation. This is now an established expectation for couples planning to marry in the Catholic Church in Australia, largely through the efforts over many years of the Catholic Society for Marriage Education. At a parish level, preparation is usually through the priest, in conjunction with a Diocesan agency or a Movement.

Immediate marriage preparation is an ideal ‘teachable moment’. However, in today’s society, promotion of Humanae Vitae and the Theology of the Body is extremely difficult. One promising approach is a programme called ‘Embrace’ which ensures orthodoxy of content through DVDs that are presented in the home of a mentoring couple who provide welcome and witness and ongoing contact.

Then there is proximate marriage preparation. Most youth ministers in Australia are young single adults. However, there is a growing awareness that youth groups are a part of the process of marriage preparation, bringing boys and girls together in a spiritually healthy environment. Where possible it is important to call on the charism of married couples to act as role models in youth groups. One of the most appreciated workshops at World Youth Day in Sydney was on the Theology of the Body and was given by an American speaker, Christopher West to 10,000 youth. It highlighted the fact that youth respond well to clear relatable teaching when it explains not only what the Church teaches but why it teaches it.

Remote marriage preparation takes place in childhood. It depends heavily on the faith and love of the married couple. Parenting starts with and is sustained by the love of Mum and Dad for each other. ‘By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children.’

Family rituals

Family rituals play a major role in this
task. Rituals are powerful educators. They are repetitive, meaningful, familiar actions that link us with our past. They prepare us for the challenges of life and they are the building blocks of good habits.

The domestic church is the natural centre for faith-based rituals. They can be highly structured or very simple, like grace before meals or a simple blessing as one kisses a child goodnight. Family relationships are always changing, so enormous flexibility is required.

A major family ritual is the family meal. In our country, most meals are not taken as a family and even when the family does sit down together to eat it is often in front of a television screen. However the family meal is a major liturgy of the domestic church. It is a major way in which our values are passed on. Human needs do not change, only human situations. So we need to work on new ways of reclaiming the family meal.

Sacramental preparation in the family

One key opportunity for faith formation arises through family-based preparation for the sacraments of initiation. This should offer a welcoming and strong catechesis. It is a special ‘teachable moment’ for families. As Pope John Paul II said, ‘Family, become what you are’.

Sacramental preparation provides opportunities for like-to-like ministry and the creation of supportive networks of faith families. It works specially well when it is a combined effort between parents, parish and school. It is of particular value for those parents who have had little formation themselves and are not part of the faith community. They do not know how to pass on the faith even when they want to. This is an evangelising process that needs to be seen in the context of a much-needed Catholic culture in the home.

Daily Diary for Catholic Primary Schools

A small but significant initiative in this direction last year was the introduction of two innovative products: ‘My School Diary’ and ‘My Reading Record’. They are for Catholic Primary Schools and this year 30% of attending children will have these in their homes. They are short daily opportunities for parent-child interaction around school events and homework. Each page also contains motivational comments about faith, liturgy and prayer. There are also links to family websites where points of interest can be followed up. Both parents and children can use it at their own pace in their ongoing faith formation.

Grandparents

Grandparents play an increasingly significant role in passing on faith values. In Australia, nearly one fifth of grandparents care for grandchildren for an average of about 12 hours per week—a high figure when one considers the problems of distance and poor health that often prevent contact.

Grandparents fulfil quite naturally the role of what psychologists call ‘significant other adults’ in passing on values. This allows children to hear the same messages about common values, but expressed in a variety of ways.

A very small but rapidly growing percentage of grandparents are engaged in primary care of grandchildren. This presents enormous challenges to the older generation as they grapple with emotional pressures, loss of income, changes to their retirement plans and re-learning of parenting skills.

It is worth stressing that the law does not require them to do this. But rarely do they walk away. They are beacons of hope, love and stability for the youngest generation and often are the main support in passing on the faith.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the family remains the first and vital teacher of human and Christian values. The family will always be the natural place in which our deepest yearnings are met—for acceptance, committed relationships and enduring love. It is in the family that children will first hear the word of God and learn to inte-
grate it into daily life. Our challenge is to recognize and value the inherent gifts that they have to carry out this mission that God has entrusted to them. When a family is aware of this gift, ‘all the members evangelize and are evangelized.’

And as Pope Benedict XVI said, ‘Today it is necessary to proclaim with renewed enthusiasm the Gospel of the family.’

NOTES

2 ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Services) Info 380—September 2005
3 The incidence of abortion cannot be accurately stated (see Med J Aust 182: 447-452, 2005, Annabelle Chan and Leonie C. Sage) but the above figure is widely accepted on the basis of an annual live birth rate of 285,000 (Aust Bureau of Statistics) and a generally accepted figure of about 80,000 abortions per year.
4 www.walkingwithlove.org.au
5 ‘Choicez Media’: Values based sex education www.choicez.com.au
6 ‘Total Gift of Self’ : Natural fertility methods www.totalgift.org
7 Pope John Paul II, Wednesday Audience, 21 Nov 1979, 1
8 ‘Faking It’ www.womensforumaustralia.org
9 www.celebratelove.com.au
10 www.embrace.org.au
11 Pope John Paul II, FC 39
12 Pope John Paul II, FC 17
13 www.livingwellmedia.com.au
14 Australian Census Bureau 2006
15 Pope Paul VI, EN 71
16 Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting of the Presidents of the Episcopal Commissions for the Family and for Life of Latin America, Rome, 3rd Dec 2005, par. 4.

This paper was first presented at the Sixth World Meeting of Families at the International Theological and Pastoral Congress, Mexico City, 14-18 January 2009, and was subsequently published in the journal of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Familia et Vita, Anno XIV, No. 2-3 2009 pp439-448.

The Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity.

—John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, November 22nd, 1981
IN A RECENT issue of Compass (2009/2), two articles appeared in regards to Eastern Catholic students. ‘Eastern Catholic Students in Catholic Schools’ was co-authored by Fr Olexander Kenez and Fr Brian Kelty and addressed issues in the education of Eastern Catholic children in Latin Catholic Schools. This paper elicited a response from Richard Rymarz in his article ‘Eastern Catholic students in Catholic Schools.’ Rymarz offered arguments on how and why Eastern theology should be incorporated into the existing curriculum. The following in response, provides Eastern Maronite Rite details that may be readily incorporated in teaching lessons.

The Arguments

Kenez and Kelty wrote on behalf of the Maronite, Melkite, Ukrainian and Chaldean Churches to the Latin Church Australian Bishops’ National Catholic Education Commission, Catholic Education Offices and Catholic Teachers of Australia. A major concern was that children of Eastern Catholic descent in Roman Catholic schools were educated in Latin Catholic spirituality to the extent that they abandoned their Eastern Church of origin. Ignorance among Catholic teachers was demonstrated by the regular religious practices of one-size-fits-all approach.

Recommendations put forward by the Eastern Bishops included inviting Eastern Catholic priests to celebrate the Eastern Divine Liturgy, as well as extending pastoral hospitality to Eastern Catholic clergy in cases where large numbers of Eastern Catholics were enrolled. It was further recommended that in-services be offered in regards to the needs of Eastern Christians in schools.

The raising of these concerns is a timely reminder that in the classroom there are numerous contexts that need to be attended to, including religious beliefs, nationalities and cultural practices of students.

In response Rymarz wrote, ‘In terms of the formal religious education curriculum there is a case for including more material on Eastern Catholic Churches in existing units as well as developing the new ones that have a distinctive Eastern theological focus.’ However, getting one’s hands on relevant information that can be included in an RE curriculum that is relevant to Year 7-10 students is not always easy. The intention here therefore, is to provide material on Eastern spirituality with particular regards to Maronite spirituality and Liturgy.

Spirituality of the Eastern Churches

According to Roccasalvo (1992), the Eastern Churches reflect a spirituality that has four central ideas. First, for the Eastern Christian, holiness is concerned with remaining attentive and ready to be interiorly transformed. Second, tradition and customs are observed with great reverence. Third is the ascetic tradition of silence and mastery over one’s passions, in order to experience contemplation and union with God. Eastern Christians are fond of repeating the phrase, ‘Lord have mercy’ in their prayers and Eucharistic service. Fourth, the Eastern Churches celebrate the feast of the Resurrection as the main event of the liturgical year. The faithful greet one another with the refrain, ‘Christ is risen!’ This is preceded by an intense celebration of Great Lent beginning with a rigorous fast on Ash Monday (un-
like the Ash Wednesday of the Roman Catholic Rite).

In the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgies, a sense of the sacred and transcendent is conveyed (Roccasalvo 1992). In the Maronite Church, the Eucharist is called the Divine Service of the Holy Mysteries. The service exhorts the faithful to celebrate the liturgy with heartfelt praise, gratitude and need. This is done joyfully yet with dignity, carefully preserving the sense of mystery and transcendence. The celebration of the Sunday Eucharist represents the high point of the week.

In body praise, Eastern Churches perform the sign of the Cross not only to praise the Trinity and to revere the cross but also to symbolize the sacredness of their bodies as temples of God. Numerous Eastern Churches are resplendent with the visual beauty of icons and liturgical furnishings. Incense is used to reverence the interior of the church building, the offertory gifts, the icons and the faithful.

The Eastern Churches call the faithful to honour Mary because she is the one who bore God and is appropriated a place with her Son in the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgies. Maronites hail Mary’s strength and fidelity under the term ‘Cedar of Lebanon.’

Maronites hear the words of consecration solemnly proclaimed in Syriac (Aramaic), the language used by Jesus. Retaining, in part, the mother tongue, reflects one of many ways in which the lifeline to the past is kept alive in Eastern Christian worship.

**Maronite Spirituality**

Maronite spirituality has distinguished itself from other Eastern Churches through attachment to the land of Lebanon, ecumenical openness, and emphasis on a spirituality of the suffering, crucified and risen Christ. Furthermore it is a spirituality which has remained faithful to its monastic character of a daily eremitical life in work, prayer, obedience to the Church and devotion to spiritual authorities. It was around the monasteries that the Hourani community continually re-formed (Hourani and Habchi 2004).

Maronite spirituality has an ecumenical character, stemming from its belonging to the universal Catholic Church, a fact which distinguishes it from other Syriac Churches. Its universalism has also been manifested through a dialogue with the Arab-Muslim world, a result of Lebanon’s situation as the only Middle Eastern country where Christians hold some degree of political power. At the same time the Maronite Church in the predominantly Islamic Middle East has also been burdened by its political role.

The cross is at the centre of Maronite spirituality. The crucified Christ allows Maronites to understand the persecutions they have endured and offers meaning to their sufferings.

The Maronite Church claims a special devotion to the Mother of God. In villages, homes, mountains and the streets of Lebanon, one finds shrines to Our Lady. On Marian feast days, particularly the feast of the Assumption, Maronites gather in prayer at Churches named in honour of her. Mary is often referred to as Our Lady of Lebanon. Hymns, feast days and the liturgical life of the Maronite Church also express this devotion.

The high esteem for asceticism and respect for hermits has also been part of the Maronite people’s faith. To them, hermits attest to the spiritual life and message of Christ. Four particular saints hold special admiration by the Maronites. Saint Maroun is considered the Founder of the Maronites and three modern...
day saints, loved for their consecration and fidelity to Christ include Saints Charbel, Hardini and Rafqa.

The Maronite Divine Liturgy

It was noted at the beginning of this article that recommendations put forward by the Eastern Bishops included inviting Eastern Catholic priests to celebrate the Eastern Divine Liturgy at Latin Rite Schools. If this is to occur an understanding of the structure of the Eastern Divine Liturgy is essential. The following presents a brief look at the Maronite Divine Liturgy to enable students to be more attentive and active participants. With the dawn of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the importance of the Divine Liturgy was renewed. The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons and daughters of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of the Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord’s supper. Along with the recognition of a Liturgy where all participated, there emerged a new understanding of the importance of the Lectionary.

For Maronite residents in Australia, participating at a Maronite Divine Liturgy or Roman Catholic Mass is a possibility and reality. Yet the affinity towards the Maronite Divine Liturgy often sees Maronites returning to their parish on such occasions as baptisms, weddings and funerals. Christmas, Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter attract gatherings of people numbering in the thousands. Perhaps it is the nuances apparent between the two lived Liturgies that lead to Maronites showing a fondness for their Divine Liturgy. The following intends to clarify some of the differences in the hope of a better understanding and fuller participation at a Maronite Divine Liturgy celebration.

In the Maronite Church, the celebration of the Eucharist is known by several names which include Qurbono (Syriac), Quddas (Arabic), Divine Liturgy, and the Service of the Holy Mysteries, which is derived from the Syriac meaning of ministering at the altar. The liturgy is replete with prayers, gestures and music, which reflect the glory and loving mercy of God. The Eastern Rites particularly focus on the call of worshippers to forgiveness and rebirth.

The Maronite Liturgy has two main sections involving the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The first part of the celebration which involves prayers of forgiveness, focus on the Church Season. Between the two main parts of the celebration is the Creed and pre-Anaphora which includes the Offertory. The second half of the liturgy is based on one of the eight Anaphoras, which include the Twelve Apostles, Saint Peter, Saint James, Saint John, Saint John Maroun, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Mark or Saint Sixtus. These Eucharistic prayers are similar in structure but vary in their prayers. However the Narrative of the Eucharistic Institution (Consecration), the Memorial of the Plan of the Son (Anamnesis) and the Invocation of the Holy Spirit (Epiclesis) do not vary.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, often the celebration of the Eucharist revolves around the memory of a saint and serves as a reminder of all who have faithfully gone before us and still now celebrate with us in the glory of God. The Maronite Catholic Divine Liturgy tends rather to dedicate its Opening Prayer and the Prayer of Forgiveness to the recollection of the Season currently celebrated in the Church. God’s plan of salvation plays an important role in the Maronite Liturgy as does the recollection of the past events, the present time and the future second coming. The Church recalls the past saints, the present people and those who have passed away.

The Holy Spirit is the principal minister in the liturgy. The Spirit is the beginning, the end and the perfection of all things. This is seen particularly in the emphasis on the Epiclesis in the Maronite Liturgy.
Invocation of the Holy Trinity is more common in the Maronite Catholic Liturgy than in the Roman Catholic Liturgy. In fact all prayers end with the invocation, ‘...through the Father, his only begotten Son and living Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.’

The use of incense in the Maronite Tradition conveys a sense of mystery and awe. The incense is a reminder of the sweet smelling presence of the Lord and the imagery of our prayers being offered up to God, ‘Let my prayer be set forth as incense before you; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice’ (Pm 141:2).

The communal aspect of worship is emphasized in the Maronite Liturgy as the people experience themselves involved in a continuous dialogue with the celebrant. There is a significant participative role for the laity not only in the responses but also in the role of cantor, reader, choir member, and in the taking up of the offertory.

The sign of peace occurs just after the offertory, or more precisely, immediately prior to the Eucharistic prayer. It is a reminder that we gather and celebrate as one community, one body in Christ, as Eucharist is not only a personal matter but also a public event. This early insertion of the sign of peace is a further reminder that before we even think of communion and unity in the Eucharist, we acknowledge the unity with one another. As Scripture states, ‘So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift’ (Mt 5:23-24). Peace is exchanged from the altar without words but by a simple gesture of hands open to receive the hands that are joined to give.

The greatest emphasis is placed in the Maronite Divine Liturgy on the maintenance of Aramaic (Syriac). This was the language that Jesus used and is retained in the Narrative of the Eucharistic Institution. It is also heard in the entrance prayer the priest recites and in the triple invitation to the greatness of God known as Trisagion (Qadishat) which is chanted in Syriac by all present, prior to the First Reading from the Epistles:

Qadishat aloho; qadishat hayeltono; qadishat lomoyouto. itraHam ‘alain
Holy are you, O God; Holy are you, O Strong One;
Holy are you, O Immortal One. Have mercy on us.

The use of Greek is seen in the triple invocation by the congregation of Kyrie Eleison (Lord have mercy). The triple invocation highlights the emphasis on the Holy Trinity and is said during the Epiclesis, where the Invocation of the Holy Spirit occurs.

The Maronite Divine Liturgy echoes the Eastern theology of becoming divine. As Irenaeus stated, ‘God became human, so that humans might become God.’ This understanding is articulated in the communal hymn during the elevation of the Eucharist:

You have united O Lord, your divinity with our humanity,
and our humanity with your divinity;
your life with our mortality and our mortality with your life.
You have assumed what is ours and you have given us what is yours,
for the life and salvation of our souls. To you be glory forever.

Immediately prior to receiving communion, the gathering pray as one:

Make us worthy, O Lord,
to sanctify our bodies with your holy Body
and purify our souls with your forgiving Blood.
May our communion be for the forgiveness of our sins and for eternal life.
O Lord our God, to you be glory forever.

It is the accepted knowledge that the people have been forgiven by God and there is a deep awareness of God’s mercy. In the Roman Catholic Mass it finds its equivalent in the prayer, ‘Lord I am not worthy to receive you. Only say the word and I shall be healed.’ This echoes the centurion’s plea to Jesus, ‘And Jesus went with them, but when he was
not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, ‘Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed’ (Lk 7:6-7).

Finally the Maronite Divine Liturgy has its own Maronite hymns and chants. These hymns tend to be more solemn rather than upbeat.

**Conclusion**

Immigration to Australia from distant parts of the world along with a high birthrate among migrants of Eastern Catholic faiths, will witness to an increase in the number of Eastern Catholic students. With limited numbers of Eastern Rite Schools and parishes within Australia, Latin Rite Catholic schools become the location for educating these students in their Religious Tradition. Therefore, readily available resources in Eastern Catholic Traditions, becomes an urgent need. This paper intended to offer an introductory understanding of Eastern Spirituality and comparisons between the Maronite and Roman Catholic Divine Liturgies that can be readily used in any RE curriculum.

**NOTES**


2 A detailed explanation of the differences between the Maronite and the Roman Catholic Lectionaries can be found in the article ‘Comparative Study: Roman Catholic and Maronite Catholic Lectionaries’ in *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 11, no. 2, 2008:43-63.

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SEXUAL ABUSE
AND CANON LAW

BRENDAN DALY

SEXUAL ABUSE by Catholic Clergy has received enormous coverage in the secular media in the last few years. The figures are appalling. In the United States, the Criminal Justice Department of John Jay University audited the over 300 American dioceses and found that 4% or 4019 clergy out of a total of approximately 100,000 who had served the American Church since 1970 had credible accusations against them. Dioceses in the United States have paid out more that US$2 billion in compensation claims. In July 2007 the Los Angeles diocese alone paid out US$660 million to 500 victims. In Canada in 2003, 81 victims at the Mount Cashel Orphanage were paid US$16 million. In New Zealand, in 2003 the St John of God Order paid out over $4 million to 56 complainants of sexual abuse by brothers. In Ireland, the report on child abuse in the Dublin archdiocese examined the responses of 19 bishops to the sexual abuse of more than 400 children by at least 152 priests in Dublin. There have been cases of serious abuse in Australia, Chile, Canada, England, Austria, sometimes involving bishops as well.

Victims often feel strongly that abusers hide behind concepts of sin and forgiveness to both seek forgiveness and make their actions seem less harmful. Abusers are allegedly just able to simply receive forgiveness and get on with their lives without really facing the true reality of the harm that they have done. However, the feelings of abhorrence towards sexual abuse of minors are reflected in the fact that it is not only seriously sinful but it is also a crime in canon law. A key issue is whether this law is used or not.

Canon law

Canon law is the name for the law of the Catholic Church. It includes the Code of Canon Law and many other canonical documents issued by Popes, Roman Congregations, Bishops’ Conferences and Bishops. All of canon law has the ultimate aim of salvation of souls according to canon 1752 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Canon 1401 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches explains the purpose of penal law:

Since God employs every means to bring back the erring sheep, those who have received from him the power of loosing and binding are to treat appropriately the illness of those who have committed offences, by correcting, reproving, appealing, constantly teaching and never losing patience, and are even to impose penalties in order to ensure that the wounds inflicted by the offence may receive a cure and to preclude the offender from being given to dissoluteness of life and contempt of the law. So sinners are to be recalled to right Christian living, the innocent faithful are to be protected from bad behaviour, ecclesiastical communion is to be promoted.

External and Internal Forum

Canon law makes a clear distinction between the internal forum and the external forum. The Church’s penal law does not refer primarily to the individual’s relationship with God in the person’s conscience, but is aimed at public acts affecting the community. The law is concerned with the external forum while encompassing some relatively private acts such as solicitation in the sacrament of penance, because of the
potential harm to the community. The Council of Trent taught:

The Apostle warns (1 Tim 5:20) that public sinners should be openly rebuked. When, therefore, someone commits a crime publicly and in the view of many, by which others are offended and scandalised and disturbed, then without a doubt a fitting penance for the crime in question should be publicly imposed on such a person, that one who has incited others to evil by example should recall them to an upright life by the evidence of the person’s penance.⁶

Penalties are considered to be a last resort when all other pastoral efforts to help the erring individual by warnings, instruction etc. have been attempted and have failed. (c. 1341)

**Distinction between Sins and Crimes**

A clear distinction is made between sins, grave sins and grave sins that are crimes as specified in law. A crime is the violation of a law that brings with it a penalty. The law defines that it is an offence because it is so diametrically opposed to the Church’s mission to save souls. Offences are considered to be opposed to everything the Church stands for.

Some crimes are described as grave crimes. These are reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith or to the Sacred Penitentiary. The Ten Commandments guide the faithful about the content of grave matter.⁷

To commit a mortal sin one needs full knowledge, full consent and it has to be serious matter.⁸ For delicts or crimes there has to be a significant amount of all three factors. A person needs to know how wrong an act is and what penalty is attached to it. Furthermore, the person must consent to the action relatively freely.⁹ If the offender is insane they cannot receive a penalty.

However, the Church teaches clearly that people are usually free and are responsible for their actions. People are not determined by the fact that they have been sexually abused themselves or that they have suffered some trauma as a child.

For the most part crimes concern clergy, although a number of crimes can be committed by religious. A relatively small number of crimes concern lay people. The most common one would be the crime of a woman having an abortion when she is over the age of 16 years, and all those involved in the crime such as doctors and nurses, plus parents and the boyfriend/husband applying pressure on her to have the abortion.¹⁰

**Types of Penalties**

Canon law has two types of penalties: expiatory and medicinal.

1. Expiatory penalties are to deter offenders, to restore right order and to repair the harm caused to the community. Expiatory penalties include someone being removed from being a parish priest because of sexual abuse.

2. Medicinal penalties are aimed at reforming the offender. They include penalties such as suspension and excommunication. Unless they are automatic penalties, the offender must be warned first and told if he carries out this action then he will be suspended. (c. 1347)

Other penalties can be imposed on people after death, such as a refusal to allow the person to be buried from a Catholic church. This has sometimes happened with IRA bombers or prominent members of the mafia.¹¹

**Prescription**

Prescription (c. 1362) means that there is a statute of limitation on pursuing a criminal action to impose or declare a penalty after a
certain period of time. All crimes in canon law have a prescription of 3 years except for crimes reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith such as sexual abuse of minors (c.1395). The prescription for this is now 10 years after the victim has reached age 18 years. In civil law in New Zealand there is no prescription and a person can be prosecuted for an offence no matter how long ago it took place. This can be controversial as it affects the right to defence. E.g. It is difficult to remember exactly what we did one day last month let alone what we did one day 10 years ago.

New Testament Origins of Penal Law

The churches in New Testament times developed rules and standards of behaviour for the early Christians. There was an authority structure (Acts 20; Phil 1:1). They had in place processes to resolve disputes as reflected in Mt 18. Furthermore, there were regulations and rules to punish offenders including excommunication as demonstrated by Mt 18:17 and 1 Cor. 5:1-5. Jesus condemned a person who would lead a child astray and warned that their punishment would be worse than being forcibly drowned.12

In 1 Cor. 5:1-5, 9-13 Saint Paul attacks the case of incest amongst the Corinthians. Saint Paul also warned the Corinthians and Ephesians (Ephes. 5:5-7) that evildoers such as fornicators, adulterers and male prostitutes would not enter the Kingdom of heaven.13 In fact he warns that ‘the wrath of God’ will come down on them.14

History of Law on Sexual Abuse

The Church has always been aware of the sexual abuse of children. Sexual abuse of girls or boys was always seen by Christians as being contrary to the 6th commandment in Deut 5:18. Sexual abuse by a priest was considered to be especially evil.

The Didache in the second century commanded Christians: ‘Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not practice pederasty, do not fornicate.’15

Polycarp (c. 69-155), the second bishop of Smyrna, wrote to the Philippians: ‘the younger men must be blameless in all things, caring of purity before everything and curbing themselves from every evil...whether whoremongers nor effeminate persons nor defilers of themselves with men and boys shall inherit the Kingdom of God.’16

Athenagoras of Athens (c. 133-190) was a significant apologist and Christian thinker in the second century. He defended the Christian concept of purity and described pederasts as enemies of the Church.17

Canon 71 of the Council of Elvira (305-306), in Spain, condemned those who rape little boys.18

The Council of Nicea (325), in canon 9, ordered that unchaste priests before or after ordination could not exercise ministry.19

The Books of Penitentials which were common between the 6th and 11th century give us an important insight into how the Church of that time viewed sins, especially homosexual and paedophile sins. In England the Penitential of Bede defined effeminacy and sodomy as capital sins with resulting penalties of 7 years for deacons, 10 years for priests and 12 years for bishops.20

Bishop Burchard of Worms made a 20 book collection of canon law completed in 1012. He wrote:

A Cleric or monk who is a perverter of young boys or adolescents, who has been caught kissing or in another occasion of base behaviour with young boys or adolescents, shall be whipped in public, shall lose his crown (tonsure), and so basely shorn, shall have his face spit on, shall be bound in iron chains, shall waste in prison for six months, and for three days of each week, shall be fed only on barley bread at evening time. After this, for another six months, he is to be kept apart in an enclosure, under the watch of a spiritual elder, intent on manual labour and prayer, subject to vigils and prayers, and he is always to walk under the guard of two
spiritual brothers, not being allowed to engage in private speech or counsel with any young men.  

Pope Leo IX, in The Book of Gomorrah, described sexual misconduct by clerics and said 'that those who are addicted to impure practices should be neither promoted to orders nor, if already ordained, should be allowed to continue.'  

Gratian in his Concordantia Discordantium Canonum classifies sexual acts contrary to nature, including paedophile activity, as crimes in canon law.  

In 1170, Saint Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered by four knights because he had earned the displeasure of the king. Thomas had insisted on the right held by the Church of that time to try a paedophile priest in a Church court, rather than allow him to be tried in the court of King Henry II.  

The Third Lateran Council of 1179 taught that:

All those who are caught to be labouring under that incontinence which is against nature and because of which the wrath of God visited the sons of infidelity and burnt down five cities: if they are clerics, they will be dismissed from the clerical state or else be confined to monasteries to do penance; if they are lay people they will be excommunicated and they will be considered as totally estranged from the assembly of the faithful.  

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 stated:

In order that the behaviour and actions of the clergy may be reformed the better, let all, especially those who are constituted in Holy Orders, strive to live in continence and chastity avoiding every lustful vice especially that vice for which the wrath of God descends from heaven upon the sons of infidelity. May they be able to minister before the almighty God with a pure heart and unblemished body.  

The Fifth Lateran Council in 1514 taught:

If anyone indeed, whether a lay person or cleric were to be convicted of the crime for which the wrath of God descends upon the sons of infidelity, let him be punished by the penalties respectively imposed by the sacred canons or the civil law.  

The Council of Trent forbade priests to be sexually active and required bishops to deprive them of office and punish them. Later, the Sacred Congregation for the Council was more specific about crimes and penalties as it sentenced a priest to the galleys and forbade him from celebrating mass again for sodomising boys.

1917 Code

Canon 2359§2 of the 1917 Code stated:

If they engage in a delict against the sixth precept of the Decalogue with a minor below the age of sixteen, or engage in adultery, debauchery, bestiality, sodomy, pandering, incest with blood-relatives or affines in the first degree, they are suspended, declared infamous, and are deprived of any office, benefice, dignity, responsibility, if they have such, whatsoever, and in more serious cases they are to be deposed.

More specific norms were issued about 50 years later when the Holy Office on March 16, 1962, promulgated an instruction Crimen sollicitationis dealing primarily with the crime of solicitation but also homosexual acts by clergy with adults and boys. Competence to deal with cases administratively or in a judicial process was given to the Holy Office.

1983 Code

The 1983 Code was promulgated by Pope John Paul II. Canon 277 of the 1983 Code legislated that clerics be celibates i.e. not marry, and that they be continent i.e. they abstain from sexual activity. Paedophilia was defined as a crime along with some other sexual offences in canon 1395 §2:

A cleric who in another way has committed an offence against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, if the delict was committed by force or threats or publicly or with a minor below the age of sixteen years, is to be punished with just penalties, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state if the case so warrants. There was a time limit of five years for laying a
complaint about an offence until the law was changed in 2001.33

It was soon after the promulgation of the Code that there was a wave of public revelations of cases of clergy and sexual abuse in North America. The law was inadequate to deal with the new scenario. Many bishops thought that using the canonical law and process was too complicated and difficult, and so they simply made no attempt to use the provisions of penal law that existed.

Thomas Doyle who, while working at the Papal Nunciature in Washington had become aware of cases in Lafayette, produced with others a Manual for Bishops that in 1985 was sent to each American Bishop.34 Most bishops did not act upon the manual. But many bishops did see the need for changes to be made in the canon law. The American Bishops Conference proposed to the Apostolic See a number of changes to the Code of Canon Law. However, they were not immediately accepted and in 1993 Cardinal Bernardin complained that the curia did not appreciate the situation in America and the difficulties that American bishops faced.35 Some key curia personnel came from countries such as Poland where false allegations were common and regimes said and did everything possible to discredit the Catholic Church and its clergy.

A year later in 1994, the Apostolic See recognised the seriousness of the American problem. Many more cases of sexual abuse and cover-ups had been reported from Boston and around the world. There was often a pattern of cover-ups and abusive priests being moved from parish to parish.

Pope John Paul II made several derogations or changes to the law for a period of five years for the United States of America. Canon 1395 §2, 2° was modified so that the age limit for crimes of sexual abuse was raised from age 16 to age 18 years. The statute of limitation in canon 1362 was changed so that a victim had until age 23 years to lay a complaint about sexual abuse while the victim was a child or a minor.36 Some American bishops continued to cover up and would still not use the full weight of the law against paedophiles. Cardinal Law resigned as Archbishop of Boston on 11 April 2002. He admitted that he had been reassigning paedophile priests to new parishes despite knowing how wrong this was.37 Cover-ups in many dioceses and countries had caused incredible damage to the universal Church.

Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela

Following the revelation of the extent of the problem of clerical sexual abuse in North America and in many other countries, Pope John Paul II issued motu proprio the apostolic letter, ‘Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela,’ on April 30, 2001.38 This document specified that a sin against the sixth commandment with a minor is a grave crime. Sexual abuse causes grave damage to the normal development of the victim, and causes grave damage to the Church and its credibility. Furthermore, it betrays the trust that people have in priests. He said that this crime deserves the strictest punishments. This document raised the age a person was considered a minor to age 18 years, and changed the time limit for laying a complaint until 10 years after the minor had reached the age of 18 years. Pope John Paul II was conscious that a priest who sexually abused a child had not only harmed the victim but the whole Church.

The Pope also appointed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to supervise investigations into credible complaints of sexual abuse of children and how they were handled. The Congregation was authorised to order penal trials for accused priests. Effectively the Apostolic See established a system of accountability. Now when a diocesan bishop receives a complaint of sexual abuse of a minor he must notify the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that he has received a complaint. The Congregation will then instruct the bishop about how the complaint is to be handled and will appoint a tribunal of its own or appoint a
local tribunal to carry out a penal trial.

The Regional tribunals in Australia and New Zealand deal with marriage annulment applications, but they are also able to conduct penal trials (criminal trials in the Catholic Church) when it is believed that crimes have been committed under canon law. Penal law exists not only to protect individuals from a violation of their rights, but it also has a role in protecting the integrity of the Church community by punishing serious crimes. A penal trial may result in remedial and if necessary punitive action against an abusive priest. The most serious penalty is dismissal from the clerical state. No penal trials have yet been held in Australia or New Zealand, but hundreds are being processed in North America.

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NOTES

5 *Communicationes*, 2(1970), 101. Penalties to be a last resort, merciful and respects rights of accused. This is reflected in canon 1319.
7 1858 Grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man: ‘Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and your mother.’ The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is graver than theft. One must also take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger.
8 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1857: ‘For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: ‘Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.’
9 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1859 Mortal sin requires full knowledge and complete consent. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God’s law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin.
10 Can. 1329 §1. If *ferendas sententiae* penalties are established for the principal perpetrator, those who conspire together to commit a delict and are not expressly named in a law or precept are subject to the same penalties or to others of the same or lesser gravity.
§2. Accomplices who are not named in a law or precept incur a latae sententiae penalty attached

Conclusion

The sin of sexual abuse of boys and girls is a grave or mortal sin. The extent of the problem has been a major scandal for the Catholic Church in recent years. While it has often not been dealt with by bishops and religious superiors as severely as the law allowed, it has been regarded as a grave crime in canon law from earliest times. This underlies the realisation that the crime has always been seen to have had serious effects on the victim and the Church in general. Therefore, as Pope John Paul II stated in an address to the American Cardinals on 23 April 2002, ‘People need to know that there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young.’ There is no doubt that the Pope considered that one conviction of sexual abuse was sufficient to have a priest dismissed from the clerical state.
to a delict if without their assistance the delict would not have been committed, and the penalty is of such a nature that it can affect them; otherwise, they can be punished by *ferendae sententiae* penalties.

11 Can. 1184 §1. Unless they gave some signs of repentance before death, the following must be deprived of ecclesiastical funerals:

1/ notorious apostates, heretics, and schismatics;

2/ those who chose the cremation of their bodies for reasons contrary to Christian faith;

3/ other manifest sinners who cannot be granted ecclesiastical funerals without public scandal of the faithful.

§2. If any doubt occurs, the local ordinary is to be consulted, and his judgment must be followed.

Can. 1185 Any funeral Mass must also be denied a person who is excluded from ecclesiastical funerals.

12 Mt. 18:6-7

13 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Ephes. 5:5-7.

14 Ephes. 5:7.


17 Athenagoras of Athens, ‘A Plea for Christians,’ chapter XXXIV, ‘The Vast Differences in Morals between Christians and their Accusers,’ trans. B. Pratten, [http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/athenagoras.html](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/athenagoras.html), accessed May 28, 2009. ‘For those who have set up a market for fornication and established infamous resorts for the young for every kind of vile pleasure,—who do not abstain even from males, males with males committing shocking abominations, outraging all the noblest and comeliest bodies in all sorts of ways, so dishonouring the fair workmanship of God,’


Clergy and religious are in a special position of trust and authority in relation to those who are in their pastoral care, e.g. those in their parish, people seeking advice, students at a Catholic school. Any attempt to sexualise a pastoral relationship is a breach of trust, an abuse of authority and professional misconduct. Such sexualisation may take the form not only of sexual relations, but also harassment, molestation, and any other conduct of a sexual nature which is inconsistent with the integrity of a pastoral relationship.

* * * *

Any form of sexual behaviour with a minor, whether child or adolescent, is always sexual abuse. It is both immoral and criminal. Sexual abuse by clergy, religious, or other Church personnel of adults in their pastoral care may be subject to provisions of civil or criminal law. Even when there are no grounds for legal action, we recognise that serious harm can be caused.

—Australian Catholic Bishop’s Conference and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, Towards Healing.
NEW RELIGIOUS BOOKS BY AUSTRALASIAN AUTHORS
KEVIN MARK

Achieving Inner Peace; Gerard Dowling; St Pauls; PB $14.95 [9781921032912]; 80pp; 185x130mm; 2008

Practical guide book for those who suffer from scruples, a form of obsessive compulsive behaviour in which they experience excessive and irrational guilt. Author has suffered from this condition for much of his life, and both explains scruples and presents a tested means of overcoming it, especially through the use of a spiritual director. Because scrupulosity, or ‘spiritual worry’, has long been associated with the sacrament of Reconciliation, author has appended to the book a seven-step program, based in the Scriptures, to prepare for the sacrament. Author has been a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne for over 50 years. His radio talkback program, ‘The Family Consellor’, has been broadcast since 1973. He has been a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne for over 50 years. His radio talkback program, ‘The Family Consellor’, has been broadcast since 1973.

Eschatology and Hope; Anthony Kelly; Orbis, USA, dist. by Rainbow Book Agencies; PB $34.95 [9781570756511]; 256pp; 235x150mm; 2006

Volume in the ‘Theology in Global Perspective’ series. Presentation of a modern understanding of Christian eschatology (‘theological discourse about the end of the human person and of history’), in which the key uniting theme is hope. The Paschal mystery, for example, is examined as a parable of hope. Successive chapters examine death, purgatory, hell, and heaven. The relationship of eschatology to Eucharist is also pondered, and the concluding chapter is both a summary and a presentation of how such hope can animate every aspect of the conduct of Christian life. Foreword by series editor, Peter C. Phan. Footnotes; bibliography; index of biblical references; index of subjects. Author is an Australian Redemptorist priest, Professor of Theology at Australian Catholic University, and was appointed to the International Theological Commission by Pope John Paul II in 2004. His numerous books include Experiencing God in the Gospel of John (with Francis J. Moloney, 2004) and The Resurrection Effect (2008).

Laughing with God: Humor, culture, and transformation; Gerald A. Arbuckle; Liturgical Press, USA, dist. by John Garratt Publishing; PB $76.95 [9780814652251]; 276pp; 230x155mm; 2008

Study of ‘divine humour’, especially seeking to uncover and recover humour in the Scriptures. Also examines the different expressions of humour that have characterised cultures through the ages. Argues that Jesus was adept at using humour as a medium of cultural and personal transformation, and his followers should do so also. By acting with justice, mercy and compassion, as did Jesus, we contradict the expectations of those who only think in terms of this world, and thus unite ourselves with the divine humour. Foreword by Jean Vanier; chapter summaries; appendix on ‘Origins and Theories of Humor’; endnotes; bibliography; general index; index of scripture. Author is internationally known for his application of cultural anthropological insights to the church, religious life and evangelisation. He is codirector...
The Little Brown Book: Mary MacKillop’s spirituality in our everyday lives; Sue Kane & Leo Kane; Helen Barnes RSJ (Illustrator); St Pauls; HB $17.95 [9781921472268]; 176pp; 155x155mm; 2009

Guideline for general readers to meditative Christian prayer, grounded in the spirituality of Blessed Mary MacKillop (1842-1909). Core of the book is a series of 74 sets of texts to assist reflection and prayer, each on a double-page spread. On each left-hand page is a theme, often phrased as a question, followed by a brief, related quotation, generally by MacKillop. On the opposite page is the authors’ reflection, which incorporates aspects of the life of MacKillop, as well as further brief quotations. Volume has a gift-book presentation, including simple illustrations, and can also be used as a resource for small groups. A 32-page guide by the authors to exploring MacKillop’s spirituality in such a group is available at http://www.marymackillopplace.org.au/store/_doc/product_466.pdf. Authors are a married couple who both have Masters in Theology, majoring in spirituality.

Lord, Hear Our Prayer: Praying the General Intercessions; Gerard Moore; St Pauls; PB $14.95 [9781921032998]; 61pp; 185x130mm; 2008

Study of the General Intercessions, also known as the Prayer of the Faithful, to assist readers to participate more fully in this aspect of the Catholic liturgy. The first chapter presents the history and theology of the Prayer of the Faithful, concluding with answers to specific questions such as whether intentions for the dead have a place in the General Intercessions. Chapter 2 examines the General Intercessions in their liturgical context, rites of intercession outside the Eucharist, and the practises of the Anglican Church and Uniting Church. The final chapter focuses on practical considerations, including guidance on how to compose intercessions. Includes a brief conclusion and a bibliography. Author is Director of Research for the Sydney College of Divinity, and has a doctorate in theology from the Catholic University of America, Washington DC. Other publications include Eucharist and Justice (2000) and Why the Mass Matters (2004).

Your Most Obedient Servant: Selected letters: 1938-1996; B. A. Santamaria; Patrick Morgan (editor); Melbourne University Publishing (The Miegunyah Press); HB $45.00 [9780522852745]; 592pp; 245x160mm; 2007

Collection of the personal correspondence of B. A. ‘Bob’ Santamaria (1915-98), spanning six decades. Santamaria was an influential and controversial figure both within the Catholic Church and in Australian politics, especially due to his role in the ALP-DLP Split in the 1950s. The editor holds that this selection of letters to friends and members of the public reveals a person more subtle in his views than his public persona would suggest. Each letter includes the addressees’ details, date and a topic heading, as well as editor’s notes at the beginning and/or end. Editor also supplies an introduction, brief overview of Santamaria’s life and career, and a concluding commentary. Preface by Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, CEO and State Librarian, State Library of Victoria; Santamaria’s archive, including these letters, was donated to the Library by his family. Photos; bibliography; index of addressees; general index. Editor has also produced a companion volume of Santamaria’s writing, Running the Show: Selected documents: 1939-1996 (2008). Morgan is a Victorian writer and academic who has edited texts on Australian literature and written regularly in magazines such as Quadrant on current affairs, including on the connections between religion and politics.
PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

October 2009 to January 2010

From the Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year B to Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year C (October 4, 2009 to January 31, 2010)

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from October 4, 2009 to January 31, 2010, from the Twenty Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B) to the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year C). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The Final Sundays of Year B

The First readings over the remainder of Year B are drawn from a diverse range of literary genres: prophetic, historical, wisdom, apocalyptic and from the first five books of the First (“Old”) Testament, the Torah.

• The prophets sought to bring God’s people back to the heart of covenantal loyalty. They continued to remind them that God was with them in difficulty, would offer them forgiveness and communion, and restore them to their land after exile. These readings also allow us to explore and celebrate the most important religious themes that at the heart of a life of faith. Key is communion with God and an open spirit to trust this God no matter what seems to happen. The prophetic reading from Isaiah in OT 29 reflects on how such communion is possible with God’s suffering servant figure. The Jeremiah reading in OT 30 presents us with a wonderful celebratory vision of God’s restoration to a struggling people. It is a vision that is needed today.

• The apocalyptic writing found in the book of Daniel are proclaimed towards the end of the liturgical year when our minds think of the new year and time beyond the present. It is natural to reflect on life’s eternity as one year merges into another. Apocalyptic writing was particular to a world and time which saw God’s hand at work everywhere and in every thing. The passages from Daniel (OT 33 and Feast of Christ the King) allow us to keep our focus on God, and God’s intention for humanity. It is this big picture rather then the literalness of the images which helps us to move beyond ourselves and our present into God’s vision for humanity.

• The wisdom reading on OT 28 (Wis 7) further leads us into a world where God’s presence was revealed in practical wisdom and attitudes that made life possible. Wisdom was God’s gift shared with human beings, but in
existence before time itself. No wonder Christians saw Jesus as the tangible presence of God’s wisdom.

- Our second readings over the final part of Year B (OT 27-33) principally come from the Letter to the Hebrews, addressing Jewish Christians familiar with Jewish liturgical imagery and practice. In this context, the writer presents Jesus as the quintessential Jewish high priest, close to God, human, prone to weakness, without sin and able to intercede effectively for God’s people. The power of these readings is lost to us if we are unable to connect to our Jewish roots.

- Finally, in the remaining Sundays of the year before Advent we proclaim the last half of Mark’s Gospel which portrays Jesus as God’s suffering servant preparing for the struggle and passion that await him in Jerusalem. The disciples accompany him, uncertain of their future. The story of Bartimaeus (OT 29) is reflective of the disciples: wanting to following Jesus, but in need of healing from a deep blindness that prevents them from really “seeing” and thus comprehending Jesus’ journey. The year concludes, as it always does, allowing us to focus on what is essential in life, what is called in classical theology “the last things.” These last Sundays culminate in the Feast of Christ the King (or “leader”) and the invitation for journeying disciples to allow Jesus to guide and teach us.

**The New Liturgical Year C**

When we turn to the new liturgical year C on Advent 1, we begin to hear from Luke’s Gospel and prepare for the God’s coming (“advent”) in Jesus, particularly celebrated in his birth.

Luke’s gospel was written in the late first century CE for a Greco-Roman urban household of Jesus followers. This cosmopolitan household seemed composed of a wide social cross section, from wealthy elite to artisans and poor. Lk addresses the wealthy to invite them to a change of heart and a spirit of openness to the socially reprobate and scandalous. Lk’s portrait of Jesus mirrors the kind of attitudes which the evangelist encourages in the gospel’s audience. As we trace the figure of Jesus and the disciples throughout the liturgical year we shall notice how often meals feature. They are frequently the reason for criticisms levelled at Jesus and his followers by some religious officials. One scholar has suggested that Jesus’ scandalous meal habits encouraged the religious purists to put him to death. In other words, *Jesus ate himself to death!* But more of this as the liturgical year unfolds.

**About Advent**

As we proclaim the Advent readings, it is important to recognise that the First Testament readings from the prophets (Jeremiah, Baruch and Zephaniah) are addressed to the Israelite people in their own day, and not texts specifically about Jesus or prophesying with Jesus in mind. Jeremiah (Advent 1) is writing to Jewish people in exile, promising a vision of restoration; Baruch (Advent 2) writes after the exile about God’s restorative intention for the people; Zephaniah (Advent 3) also celebrates God’s vision for Israel. These readings are not prophecies specifically about Jesus, but about the people of which he was a member. Our readings celebrate God revealed historically in this particular people confronting specific historical and religious issues. Our First Testament Advent readings are importantly scriptures that Jesus himself would have heard and reflected upon.

In Advent the first two Sundays look back as well as look forward. They seek to offer a link with the Liturgical Year B just concluded and look forward to the year that is about to unfold. The theme of these readings is about God’s Advent: at the end of time. Therefore a more cosmic, eschatological and universal perspective dominates the writer’s thought world. This helps us to understand the apocalyptic literary style of the first Sunday. The recognition of this unique literary approach...
Preventing us from being locked into a literal proclamation of this gospel.

- The Second Sunday continues this eschatological (end-time) perspective from 1st Sun of Advent. Here John the Baptist’s presence, inserted into the background of world history and politics, invites us to prepare for Jesus’ coming.

- This consideration of the context of the ‘big picture’ is further reinforced in the Gospel of Advent 3, with John the Baptist’s preaching spelling out the social, political and religious implications of conversion in following the one soon to be born.

- The gospel of Advent 4 presents a scene linked to the immediacy of the birth of Jesus. Here two female members from the same clan greet each other; one of them exults the future mother of Jesus. As the gospel listener soon learns, she is also the pre-eminent faithful disciple for Luke’s community. Here she is called blessed; later she will be noted as one fruitfully contemplative of God’s word.

At Christmas and the Sundays immediately after Christmas (up to the Baptism of Jesus), Luke’s Gospel offers particular insight for celebrating the meaning of Jesus’ birth in our midst. Luke emphasizes the birth of Jesus and the presence of God’s Word occurring within the context of political and world history. In other words, given our geo-ecological-political situation, the celebration of Jesus’ presence with us offers fresh hope. The Sundays of January begin with the feast of the Epiphany on January 3. In the earliest centuries this was the first celebration of the meaning of Jesus’ birth—his manifestation (epiphania, Greek) to the world. It was only later that the celebration of the birth of the Son (Sun?) prepared for his epiphany.

The celebration on the following Sunday, Jesus’ baptism, is an obvious moment to reflect on God’s communion with us realised sacramentally in our own baptism. The theme of the readings of this feast encourages us, through our baptismal commitment, to be agents of justice and peace to the world in which we live. The remaining Sundays of January move us into Ordinary Time. After the gospel from John in OT 2, we begin a more consistent proclamation of Luke’s gospel. In OT 3, we hear the commencement of Luke’s gospel and Jesus’ public ministry. The gospel of OT 4 reveals that Jesus’ ministry throughout the gospel of Lk will be tested. Eventually it will lead to his death.

The second reading over this month is from the powerful 1 Corinthians. This is Paul’s letter to a community deeply divided, jealous and stacked with members full of their own self-importance. Paul’s letter seeks to offer an alternative way of living as a Christian community, aligned to God’s spirit manifested among them.

**PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS**

**October 4—Ordinary Time 27: Gen 2: 7, 8, 18-24.** The creation of the ‘earthing’ (‘Adam’) leads to the creation of the human community—ultimately God’s act. Heb 2:9-11. Jesus is exalted by God and lives in solidarity with us. Mk 10:2-16. Jesus’ teaching on those who have been excluded through divorce. Jesus protects these and ‘little children’. **Theme—Community:** God’s vision for inclusivity and unity, especially between men and women becomes the basis for Christian community life. How is this divine vision expressed in our church local parish community?

**October 11—Ordinary Time 28: Wis 7:7-11.** The search for true wisdom is the focus of prayer. Wisdom is a rich, life sustaining gift. Heb 4:12-13. God’s Word is powerful, acts, reveals and is affective. Mk 10:17-30. Jesus teaches the heart of true religious life—not to be confused with wealth. Freedom from wealth is a gift. **Theme—Wisdom:** The attachment to wealth and power today is revealed in many stories of business and
politics. Jesus’ call, bound up with the search for Wisdom, is for a freedom not earned, bought or manipulated. Freedom is ultimately God’s gift.


Heb 4:14-16. Jesus can sympathize with us in our suffering and weakness. 

Mk 10:35-45. Discipleship is based on service, not power or prestige—a dilemma even for today’s leaders. 

Theme—Service: Servant leadership may be difficult to define but it is very active in the community around us. There are many examples in our communities of selfless service, not often noticed or celebrated.


Heb 5:1-6. Jesus was appointed as High Priest by God. He knows us and loves us in our weakness. 

Mk 10:46-52. A wonderful story of liberation of one seeking discipleship. The power of the community exercises freedom. 

Theme—Community Power: The story of Bartimeus reveals the power of community to either encourage or block liberation and discipleship. Through its action God heals and frees. How is that happening among us, in this community today?

November 1—All Saints: Rev 7: 2-4, 9-14. God’s vision to John, the writer of Revelation (not the John of the Gospel or the Letters) identifies God’s holy ones. It is an innumerable group, clothed in their baptismal garment and faithful to God through suffering. 

1 Jn 3: 1-3. We become like God as we see God face to face. 

Mt 5: 1-12a. Jesus acknowledges the blessedness of those who are poor in spirit, meek, merciful, peace makers and suffer. 

Theme—Sanctity: We know people who have been close to us and have died; we know their sanctity. Through celebrating them today, we affirm our call to sanctity and the many ways that we live this out in our faith communities and the world. And we celebrate those who have gone before us in faith.

November 8—Ordinary Time 32: 1 Kings 17:10-16. The widow’s hospitality to the prophet Elijah in difficult times brings her great blessing. 

Heb 9:24-28. Jesus is in the heavenly sanctuary with God, in God’s very presence. 

Mk 12:38-44. Jesus highlights how the unprotected ones, here the widow, can be victimised and oppressed by a religious system that fails to liberate 

Theme—Religious Freedom. The two widows in today’s readings (1 Kings and Mk) are contrasting figures: One is liberated and blessed by the prophet; the other is a victim to religion. 

Vatican II’s document on religious freedom affirms adult Christians in their daily lives. It is a document in harmony with the intended aspirations of our readings; it could be dusted down and highlighted for our worship.

November 15—Ordinary Time 33: Dan 12:1-3. God (= “Mich-a-el” = “One-like-God” Hebrew) will protect and deliver the people from cosmic anguish and bring them to everlasting life. 

Heb 10:11-14, 18. Jesus is at God’s “right hand,” an image emphasising Jesus’ as God’s agent and sharing in God’s power. 

Mk 13:24-32. An “apocalyptic” passage that emphasises Jesus’ continuing liberating presence with those who are faithful despite difficulties. 

Theme—God’s Apocalyptic presence. Dan and Mk presume their audience’s familiarity with apocalyptic thought. This unique form of writing does not offer a literal divine timetable for things to come, but a reassurance of God’s presence in the present struggles of those open to this presence. Who are those struggling around us? Who are those we know are constantly faithful to God?

November 22—Christ the King: Dan 7:13-14. God’s agent judges and comforts as he reveals God’s glory. 


Jn 18:33-37. The central message in John’s passion narrative, here revealed, is that Jesus is truly King. 

Theme—Jesus, revealer of God’s power: The final liturgical celebration of the year traditionally spotlights Jesus as God’s agent, revealing God’s power and presence. In a world broken, uncertain and seduced by political voices focussed more on terrorists than the poor, this is an important celebration. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate how this community has lived out its conviction of God’s presence and Jesus’ leadership throughout the liturgical year concluding today. Stories would abound, if only they were recorded or remembered.

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New Liturgical Year C

November 29—Advent 1: Jer 33:14-16. God’s prophet foresees a time of peace, harmony and communion when all will live safely. 1 Thes 3:12—4:2. Paul’s people are urged to live out their community life with love and holiness. Lk 21:25-28.34-36. Our first reading of the Gospel of Luke for the new liturgical year invites an attitude of alertness to Jesus’ coming. Theme—Alertness: Advent initially encourages us to be sensitive to the many ways God comes to us. This coming happens mostly unexpectedly, and especially in pain, suffering and death. This first celebration of our year invites us to ponder God’s presence to us in all these kinds of ways.

December 6—Advent 2: Bar 5:1-9. This is a celebration of God’s delight in creation and humanity. Phil 1:4-6.8-11. Paul delights in the Christians at Philippi. They witness to the gospel and he encourages their ongoing discernment. Lk 3:1-6. Baruch’s vision finds its expression in the historical and social preparation for the birth of Jesus. Theme—God’s delight. The advent of Jesus soon to be born among us reveals God’s delight for creation and humanity. Jesus’ birth involves the whole of creation that God has blessed. This powerful theme has profound ecological implications for our faith communities. It commits us to this planet and invites us to celebrate this world and our lives as good, holy and blessed.

December 13—Advent 3: Zeph 3:14-18. The prophet announces God’s gladness with humanity renewed through God’s love. This affirmation removes judgement and offers freedom. Phil 4:4-7. Paul encourages joy—a deep gift from God that alleviates ‘all worry.’ Lk 3:10-18. Jesus’ coming invites conversion back to God. This has economic and social implications for daily living. Theme—Joy and Conversion. These two themes (joy from Zeph and Phil; conversion from Lk) are powerful and appropriate on the eve of our Christmas celebrations. Joy is God’s gift in the midst of life’s struggles; not simply the ever-smiling Christian untouched by what is happening. The kind of conversion suggested by John the Baptist is an openness to be touched and guided by God. It has practical, personal and social implications for how we live out these days in preparing for Jesus’ birth.

December 20—Advent 4: Micah 5:1-4. The smallest and most insignificant tribe will be selected by God to rule Israel. Heb 10:5-10. Jesus comes to do God’s “will.” This “will” is to reveal God’s love and kindness towards all. Lk 1:39-45. Mary and Elizabeth meet. And the child whom Mary carries is recognised as Lord; joy surrounds this declaration. Theme—Smallness. Micah and Lk reveal that God’s attention is focussed on the insignificant and unknown. Israel’s smallest tribe is praised; Mary a village woman is blessed. Who are those in our communities that are God’s “little people” and reveal to us something of the presence of God?

December 25—Feast of the Nativity

Midnight

Is 9:2-4, 6-7. God’s light shines on a people that walk in darkness. Their hope is in the birth of one who will usher in God’s authority and justice. Tit 2:11-14. God’s love for us is tangible in the birth of Jesus. Because of this we live lives that are holy. Lk 2:1-20. Jesus is born to a peasant couple, victims of taxation, in a world controlled by foreign powers. Theme—God’s Welcome: So many will crowd into our churches this night. All seek to hear a word of hope and encouragement. In the birth of a child God is imaged as helpless, childlike, and welcoming. Mistaken notions of God as vindictive or vengeful are completely overturned. This affects the way we see our world and God’s embrace of us.

Morning

Is 52:7-10. The prophet reveals to an exiled people that a message of salvation will be heard and that God ultimately reigns over disaster. Tit 3:4-7. God’s utter love and compassion enabled Jesus to reveal God’s goodness and kindness to us. Lk 2:1-20. Jesus is born to a peasant couple, victims of taxation, in a world controlled by foreign powers. Theme—Hope. So many will crowd into our churches this night. All seek to hear a word of hope and encouragement. The readings powerfully provide the opportunity to celebrate a God revealed in a child, seeking to console and tenderly walk with us throughout the rest of our year and lives.

December 27—Holy Family: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14. Wisdom is found in respect and care for the older members of the family. Col 3:12-21. Mutual
love and compassion should characterise members of the Christian household. Special attention should also be given to the last verses of this reading, written at a time when subordination represented order and stability. Lk 2:41-52. Jesus is found as the teacher in the temple, and surprises his parents. Theme—Surprise. Families can be communities of great love and growth; at times they are also places of difficulty and pain. No family is ever perfect. Today’s readings encourage an attitude of openness, mutual respect and forgiveness in family or community living. Thought should be given to how to celebrate those who live on their own. In Australia, at least a third to a half of households have only one person dwelling in them.

January 3, 2010—Epiphany: Is 60: 1-6. The prophet’s vision of God’s light bringing peace, harmony and communion to where God lives. It is a universally attractive light. Eph 3: 2-3a, 5-6. The writer (not Paul but one of his disciples) celebrates God’s mystery now revealed, that is, that all, without exclusion, are to be included in God’s community. Mt 2: 1-12. The magi, perhaps a vast number (Mt doesn’t limit them to three!) are attracted to the light of Jesus symbolised through their attraction to the celestial lights. Theme—Light. We all seek insight, understanding, some sense of life’s direction. At the heart of our life’s journey, is the search for Jesus, the source of light and the end of our spiritual search. Today’s celebration allows us to acknowledge how everyone is committed to this search.

January 10—Baptism of Jesus: Is 40: 1-5, 9-11. Isaiah’s vision of God’s presence that brings comfort is expressed through the image of the shepherd gathering sheep and carrying them in the bosom. Tii 2: 11-14; 3: 4-7. Through Jesus we are reborn into God’s life, purified, and renewed through the Spirit poured out upon us. Lk 3:15-16, 21-22. Jesus’ baptism is a scene of prayer and communion with God. He becomes an agent of God’s spirit. Theme—Agent of God’s Spirit. Baptism is more than God’s recognition of someone, or of a person’s communion with God. It is a commitment to communal service and social justice. These aspects are found in all the readings. We are baptised to reveal God’s inclusive community. This is challenging in a world were exclusivity, prestige and favouritism permeate all sectors.

January 17—Ordinary Time 2: Is 62:1-5. In a time of exile and apparent abandonment, God reveals to the people of Israel that they will be God’s delight. 1 Cor 12:4-11. God’s spirit permeates the Christian community, releasing spiritual gifts within it. Jn 2:1-12. Jesus’ first sign reveals God’s joy with humanity symbolised in a wedding feast with extraordinary amounts of wonderful wine. Theme—Be Delighted. The first reading and the gospel invite us to celebrate how God delights in and cherishes us. Sometimes this theological conviction is hard to come by, especially when things seem pretty tough. Today’s word will help to offer another perspective.

January 24—Ordinary Time 3: Neh 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10. After exile, the temple is rebuilt, the Torah is found, and the first liturgy of the word celebrated. This is a fine picture of how the Liturgy of the Word should be celebrated in every generation. 1 Cor 12:30. Everyone is an important person in the Christian community. Those who are to be most honoured are those considered the most socially disrespected. Now that’s a challenge! Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21. The first verses of Lk and then (skipping over the story of Jesus’ birth) Jesus proclamation of his ministry. His ministry is essentially about liberating human beings. Theme—Proclaiming Freedom. Neh and Lk both present scenes of biblical preaching, one in the story of the renewed people of Israel, another at the commencement of Jesus’ public ministry. The scriptures are intended to nurture, liberate and bring their hearers a sense of happiness. This offers an opportunity to celebrate ways the Christian community continues this ministry today.

January 31—Ordinary Time 4: Jer 1:4-5, 17-19. The prophet is called to his mission even before birth; it is a divine commission that will succeed. 1 Cor 12:31-13:13. Paul celebrates the Spirit’s charism of love in the Christian community. It is the foundation of its life. Lk 4:21-30. Jesus’ preaching is not without its critics who seek to silence him. Their God is exclusive and not the one that Jesus seems to be exalting. Theme—God’s inclusivity. The prophet and Jesus in today’s reading reveal a God whose vision is to embrace all people. This spirit of inclusivity is difficult for religious people (ourselves?) who always think that God only responds favourably to those who think the right thing or act correctly.

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