

Statement on Inclusive Governance in a Synodal Church Project

The issue of lay participation and leadership in governance in a synodal Church emerged in all three listening and discernment phases of the Synod on Synodality. There is an overwhelming desire of laypeople to fully realise their baptismal calling for greater inclusion in the life of the Church, including in governance roles.

Australian Catholic University and Durham University have received funding to increase knowledge of canonically distinct bodies within the Catholic Church where lay people are decision-takers. Most of these bodies were established over the past 30 years as a public juridic person (PJP) using canon 116 or as an Association of Christ's Faithful (ACF) using canon 298ff.

In its first year (July 2024-June 2025), this project will focus on anglophone countries (currently: Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, England, Ireland, Canada and USA). In several countries, these PJPs are referred to as Ministerial PJPs (MPJP) due to their sole purpose of ensuring the perpetuity of former Religious Institute ministries such as: schools, hospitals and community services. In Ireland and England, MPJPs are often known as Trusts.

The research project aims are:

1. Foundation setting – establishing networks of lay ecclesial leaders in MPJPs/ACFs and other relevant parties;
2. Mapping – working with MPJPs/ACFs to identify their relevant data within each country;
3. Meaning making – providing opportunities for academics and practitioners to develop a deeper theological understanding of the MPJP/ACF reality, its meaning and benefit (for now and for the future);
4. Engaging participants – inviting MPJPs to co-design aspects of this project and to reflect on their role and in so doing, to have an experience of a community of practice to consider future directions for MPJPs; and
5. Evaluating – engage participants throughout and at the end of the project to assess whether it met its goals and ascertain the quality of the participant experience.

The project will adopt a synodal process. The widest possible range of stakeholders will be kept informed of project activities and issues via regular emailed updates. MPJPs/ACFs will be invited to participate as partners throughout the project. Prayerful discernment processes will be used to hear the Spirit's call to individual and national gatherings of MPJPs/ACFs.

The expected outcomes of this project are:

- Position paper on theological and canonical background and nature of MPJPs/ACFs;
- A list of MPJPs/ACFs in Anglophone countries;
- Papers providing context of MPJP/ACF development in each anglophone country;
- Case studies providing in-depth description of 3-5 MPJPs/ACFs to describe their instigation, structure, processes and relationship with others in the Church
- Symposium - presentations to spark discussion of data in the position paper, country papers, case studies; and
- Final report - conclusions/recommendations drawing on papers and symposium

This project lays the foundation for further work on the optimal formation for MPJP/ACF leaders.

For more information, please contact:

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