



"WOMAN AND MAN: ONE IN CHRIST JESUS"

The Australian Catholic bishops are grateful to the very many women and men who participated in the research which led to the publication of the report, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*. We especially wanted to hear the voices of women themselves about their experience of and hopes for participation in the life and mission of the Church. While we acknowledge that not all women believe their views are adequately represented in the report, we nonetheless would wish to respond as well as we can to those women whose views are reported.

From the research we have learned that there are many women who feel frustrated because of their experience and hope for greater opportunities for participation. There are other women who have

expressed concerns because of the changes which have occurred in the church and their fears of further changes. We have also learned that there are many Catholic women who are largely content with the level of their participation in the life and mission of the Church and who are quite open to further developments. The bishops would want to respond whole heartedly to each of the women who participated no matter what their perspective might be.

Bishops cannot and would not wish to change the teaching of the Church on any matter despite the difficulty some respondents have had with some elements of the Church's teaching. Likewise they cannot reverse the changes in the Church asked of us by the Second Vatican Council or turn away from its path, to satisfy the

concerns of others. In both cases they are willing to dialogue with women about these matters for the sake of mutual understanding and in a spirit of Christian love.

We would wish to work with all women in the Church and to increase the level of their participation where it is insufficient, because the Church needs their gifts in all its life and mission. Our understanding of the Church is that it is a communion bound together in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Through Baptism men and women enter into the new world of that communion. Baptismal consecration of all into the universal priesthood of Christ's faithful is the fundamental reality. Jesus uses the image of the vine and branches and Paul speaks of the Church as the Body



of Christ. These images express the intimacy between Christ and the faithful and among the faithful themselves. It is at this level that each of the faithful makes their greatest contribution to the life of the Church. This is the place of vocation or the call of Christ to each person to the special way in which they contribute to the life of the church and serve their sisters and brothers. Along with those who are ordained, women and men in marriage, single life, and consecrated life offer their diverse gifts to the building up of the

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church.

The Church is built up by the very diverse gifts of all members. We wish to draw attention to the significant role that mothers play in the life and mission of the Church and society, lest their participation be taken for granted or considered of less value than other forms of participation. After all it was through Mary's role as mother that the world received its Saviour.

All members of the Church have an equal dignity and a unique gift to contribute. Diversity of gifts should not lead to different degrees of personal participation in the life and mission of the church. If it has led to this, steps must be taken to remedy such a situation. We would also wish to acknowledge the efforts already being made in parishes and agencies around the country to move forward in this regard.

We have decided to take some steps at the national level to ensure that the dignity of women is honoured and their gifts are given space to flourish for the sake of the Church's life and mission.

Our practices and policies are not always the same as those of civil society because they arise from our faith in the Church as a communion of life in God with a divinely ordained structure, though they must express the equality of all within that communion.

PRACTICAL

As Cardinal Clancy stated at the launch "Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus" at the National Press Club on 18 August 1999, the challenge that faces the Bishops is to find ways within the integral Catholic Tradition to engage the wisdom, the talents and the experience of women for the enrichment of the Church and society, and for the fulfilment of their own lives.

From the outset of the research project, it was intended that the information obtained would provide a solid basis for theological reflection, pastoral planning and dialogue with women and women's groups on particular issues. These issues focus on women's involvement and participation in the different areas of Church life and ministry.

The report pointed to women being as involved as possible in the processes of decision making at the different levels of Church life. It also suggested that the nature of ministry within the Church, and in particular the role of women in ecclesial ministries, be addressed, and that programs be developed to promote the equality and dignity of women, enabling a better balance of women and men, clergy, religious and laity on Church bodies.

It encouraged the training of indigenous women and men for leadership and ministry to their own people and expressed the



STEPS

desire that cultural expressions of the Catholic faith be recognised, welcomed and integrated into liturgy where they are appropriate.

Further, the report asks all in the Church to focus on the ever relevant message and attitude of Jesus Christ and his relationship with women. "Transcending the established norms of his own culture, Jesus treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness" (Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women n.3).

In addition to the following decisions, other proposals which have arisen at various stages are included for possible action by diocesan bishops and eparchs.

Catholic Women's League

A nationwide organisation promoting the role of women and families in the church and society.



NSW members congratulate The Bishops' Conference for their efforts to further the recommendations contained in "Woman and Man—One in Christ Jesus"

For details on CWL contact 02 9390 5153 website: www.cwlsydney.org email: nsw@bigpond.com.au

DECISIONS

1. That the ACBC commit itself to work to establish, where necessary, and within the divinely ordained structure and communion of the Church:
 - a) a better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity on existing councils, organizations and advisory bodies, at the national level.
 - b) a better balance of men and women in leadership roles at the national level.
 - c) a better balance of men and women in professional roles within the church at national level.
2. That the ACBC request the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations to develop policies to assist church bodies to develop programs to promote the equality and dignity of women
3. The ACBC commits itself, through its various committees, to foster research in the following areas:
 - a) contemporary ecclesologies and their theological, catechetical and pastoral implications, especially for the participation of women in the church.
 - b) ministry in the church and in particular the role of lay faithful and especially women in ecclesial ministries, from the scriptural, historical, theological, liturgical, socio-logical and canonical perspectives.
 - c) the drawing up of guidelines concerning the use of inclusive language in the liturgy, prayer, pastoral and social life of the church.
 - d) the establishment of guidelines to assist with the understanding and implementation of Canons 766 and 767 concerning lay preaching.
4. That the ACBC commits itself through the Bishops Committee for the Liturgy to study the following areas:
 - a) the possibility of providing at the national level guidelines and education, as well as appropriate resources, to provide rituals to be used in the absence of a priest in the prison and hospital apostolates.
 - b) in collaboration with the Bishops Committee for Aborigines, the provision of guidelines, materials and resources directed to integrating elements of indigenous culture into the celebration of the liturgy.
 - c) the theology of the human person, sexuality, marriage and family life, especially as it refers to the contemporary life of Catholic women.
5. That the ACBC commits

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itself through its committees to draw up policies of care to respond to the pain of people and groups of people within the church who are struggling with the implications of church teaching:

- a) by providing pastoral and spiritual support for those suffering the pain of failed marriage or divorce and those who have entered into another marriage.
- b) by the provision of guidelines to assist in the pastoral care of those who are finding difficulty in understanding and accepting the

church's teaching on the restriction of ordination to males.

- c) by the provision of appropriate pastoral statements concerning Catholic teaching on such areas as sexuality, marriage and family planning.
6. That the ACBC commits itself to foster at a national level, educational possibilities to assist in the implementation of the recommendations of this report:
- a) by fostering programs of professional preparation and supervision for women and men involved in ministry.
 - b) by the promotion and publi-

cation of models of best pastoral practice concerning the involvement of women in the life of the church.

- c) by fostering continued study of the theology and practice of collaborative ministry as a contribution to the training of people involved at all levels in church leadership.
7. That concerning indigenous Catholics in Australia the ACBC asks:
- a) that the Bishops' Committee for Aborigines enters into dialogue with Australian indigenous peoples about suggested actions arising from the Report on the Participation of Women

