



**VOL 31 NO 3 WATAC (Women and The Australian Church) News
September 2020**

ABN 48 406 052 808

Address: P O Box 952 Petersham NSW 2049

Mobile: 0460 891 290

Website: <https://watac.net.au/>

Facebook: WATAC - Women and The Australian Church

Editors: Tracy McEwan and Andrea Dean

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear WATAC Friends,

This newsletter explores the theme of 'Looking Forward, Looking Back'. Enjoy this challenging series of articles!

WATAC Presents continues to be very successful with over a hundred attendees for the last online session, entitled 'A Pilgrimage of Equality and Dignity'. The next session will be 14 October (note the change to Wednesday night) and will focus on the environment and the Pope's encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015).

WATAC Presents on 9 December will be a consultation with members and a Christmas Party (via Zoom). Guests (non WATAC members) are welcome.

The WATAC Committee has decided to institute a **Life Membership Award** for long serving members of WATAC who have made an extraordinary contribution to the organisation. We invite you to nominate WATAC members whom you would wish to see receive the Life Membership Award. The form is available on our website or from our secretary and is also attached to this Newsletter.

In the spirit of 'Looking Forward and Looking Back' I'd like to claim the date for the AGM on Saturday 6 March 2021 at a venue to be confirmed. This will be an important meeting as the vision and mission of WATAC will be reviewed as part of a review of our Constitution. The restating of the vision and mission is necessary so that WATAC responds to the current and emerging context of Australian women. An updated vision and mission will also inspire and guide the Committee and the members.

Following a two-hour AGM meeting you are invited to the WATAC luncheon where the Life Membership Awards will be presented, and International Women's Day will be celebrated. (If COVID-19 interferes with our planned meeting, we will find a way to connect via Zoom.)

The WATAC Committee is planning for the story of WATAC to be preserved. Dr Trish Madigan OP has been asked to capture events described in our newsletters and to conduct interviews with members

and others associated with WATAC' s story. Trish may be in touch with you in the future to tell your story and to be part of this project.

WATAC has received a small grant to support the development of the WATAC newsletter and to maintain *WATAC Presents*. As we try some new things, for example with the format of the newsletter, we will seek your feedback to find out the best way to communicate into the future.

WATAC membership is growing and one new group has been established in Canberra. I'd like to ask your help in promoting WATAC and increasing our membership. We have updated our systems and the form is now available online with payment possible by credit card or Paypal.

The Committee would appreciate some help with

- Planning the AGM luncheon (6 March 2021)
- Preparing the newsletter (four times per year)
- Administration of the 'WATAC Presents' (helping with contacting presenters etc)

Please email (chair@watac.net.au) to volunteer.

Wishing you every blessing in these COVID 19 times

Andrea Dean

President. WATAC Inc.

Table of Contents

Letter from Our President.....	1
Women who walk away	2
Unable to walk away Completely	5
A Litany for Those not Ready for Healing.....	8
Knockers or Rockers of the Barque of Peter?	9
Catholic lay groups harness energy for national reform	11
Book review: Gerald A. Arbuckle, Abuse and Cover-Up.....	13
Female theologians are calling for changes to leadership	14
Towards the Plenary Council – people of God on a pilgrim journey	16
Looking to future governance of our Church	17
WATAC Groups	21
Stamps	21
Dates for your diary	22

WOMEN WHO WALK AWAY

By Tina Beattie

Elisabeth Frink's *Walking Madonna* outside Salisbury Cathedral is a statue of a life-sized woman with her back to the cathedral, dwarfed by the medieval edifice behind her but striding resolutely towards the open spaces ahead. At a time when we are acutely aware of the communicative power of statues, that figure expresses where I find myself today, and I know that many Catholic women feel the same. Throughout the pandemic, we have been using social media to share our experiences, insights and stories from around the world. I have recorded a series of interviews with Catholic women from different cultures and contexts, and the same themes have emerged repeatedly

While priests continue to say Mass in empty churches and ecclesial hierarchies have receded into the background, a vibrant sense of lay renewal has been taking place in the midst of solitude, struggle and grief, often led by women. Some have longed for the reopening of churches and a return to the sacraments, but others have been ambivalent. The domestic church has come into its own as women have found creative ways of maintaining liturgical and devotional rituals in their families or religious communities. Those who live alone or who, like me, are the only Catholics in their households, have had to search deeply within ourselves for the resources to nurture our faith without sacraments or community to sustain us.



Confined to our homes, we were unable to do anything but pray for our wounded world and our suffering neighbours, and this gave prayer a new intensity and focus. The Black Lives Matter movement created a volcanic eruption in an already volatile social environment, laying bare the ruptures in our broken societies and heightening awareness of the gross injustices that fester beneath the self-congratulatory banalities of modern liberalism. We became aware of how the family home is a torture chamber for those trapped in abusive or violent relationships with no escape during lockdown. Migrant workers and refugees became the poorest of the poor, as wealthy nations afflicted by the pandemic turned in on themselves and those on the margins were abandoned. These issues will become increasingly important as the world emerges from the pandemic to face an era of profound instability and risk.

But many women have also described the joy they felt with the cessation of human activity and the healing of the natural world.

In our newfound leisure, we were able to cultivate a sense of attentiveness to nature and to appreciate anew the beauty of God's creation. This too was part of an awakening and a call to renewal and transformation. The vision of *Laudato Si'* has become not only possible, but essential, if we are to build a new world on the ruins of the old—a world in which the Catholic faith might offer inspiration, hope and freedom for those who want to work for the healing of the earth and the dignity and rights of our neighbours in need. From this perspective, to practice our faith would in future mean to stand in solidarity with all who are determined to resist the powers of destruction and exploitation and to use this opportunity to reimagine and recreate our relationships within our communities and in our natural and social environments. The Catholic Church is perhaps the only global institution with enough influence to lead such a movement for change, embracing the whole human family and all of creation in its vision—as *Laudato Si'* does.

All this is to explain why I felt such dismay when I read the new Instruction issued by the Congregation for the Clergy, with the wordy title, "[The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church](#)". This is a set of rules for the reorganization of parish life necessitated by changing cultural norms and a shortage of priests. It is an iron fist in a velvet glove. Its florid rhetoric of evangelization masks a ruthless grab for clerical power and the establishment of a rigid line of demarcation between priests and the rest of us. Not all men are ordained but all the ordained are men, and therefore this is also a reassertion of male authority and female subordination. I don't want to hear manipulative platitudes about priesthood not being about power but about service. I know too many women whose sense of belonging within a parish or Catholic institution has been destroyed by priestly abuses of power, and I know too many priests who will seize upon this document to wrest leadership roles away from women and to reinforce their sense of entitlement, privilege and superiority. Consider, for example, paragraph 96:

[I]t is the responsibility, first of all, of the diocesan Bishop and, as far as it pertains to him, the Parish Priest, to see that the appointments of deacons, religious and laity that have roles of responsibility in the Parish, are not designated as "pastor," "co-pastor," "chaplain," "moderator," "coordinator," "Parish manager," or other similar terms reserved by law to priests, inasmuch as they have a direct correlation to the ministerial profile of priests.

Pope Francis approved this document, but I doubt if he studied it; for it turns back the tide in the struggle against clericalism that has been a hallmark of his papacy.

I am writing this on the Feast Day of Mary of Magdala, the Apostle to the Apostles—a title finally given liturgical recognition in 2016 when Pope Francis elevated her memorial to a Feast Day on a par with the male apostles. If a woman can be called an apostle, why not a chaplain, pastor, coordinator—or even, priest?

When those clerics in the Vatican look up from their power games, they may discover that there is nobody left to lord it over except themselves. Like the Walking Madonna, like Mary of Magdala, sometimes a woman must turn her back on the institutions and structures, stop clinging to the past and stride with courage and determination towards a future that opens before us in all its unknowability, risk and opportunity, knowing that the risen Christ dances ahead of us along the precipitous path of faith.

Tina Beattie is professor of Catholic Studies, University of Roehampton, London.

UNABLE TO WALK AWAY COMPLETELY

By Louise Roach

I am not a theologian, scholar, practitioner, activist, artist, woman in a leadership position in the Church. I am a grandmother, a mother, a wife, a pensioner, a singer, a pianist and an unpublished writer. I am a “free-range” Catholic.

In adulthood, until the age of 56, I was a Catholic woman immersed in the ministry of teaching and completely committed to my point of connection with the institution, my Parish, within the Diocese of Maitland Newcastle. I am no longer connected.

I was a member of WATAC in the halcyon days of its fledgling beginnings in the 1980s. I had the incredible gift of being part of a group that was chaired by Bernice Moore. I met and was astounded by Dorothy McMahon. I received the regular publication, edited by Bernice. A publication filled with drawings comment and articles, wonderfully unique before fancy computer fonts and clip art! I remember devouring them. I was not yet 35 years of age.

On one occasion a friend and I attended one of the WATAC gatherings in Sydney. It was a day of wonder. Women only, were in attendance. Men were never excluded. My upbringing had been strictly Catholic. I knew no non-Catholics until the time I started at the Conservatorium at the age of 17. That’s not quite true because my father had become a Catholic before he married my Mum, so all my Paternal relatives were Presbyterian. I knew them and I loved them! I struggled with the thought of not being united in Heaven with them forever because they were headed for Limbo!

On this particular occasion I met Dorothy McMahon who had just recently become or was about to become the first female Uniting Church Minister in Sydney. It was at the height of the strength of the Movement for the Ordination of Women and I was in it up to my eyebrows! I was a Religious Studies Coordinator at the time, and it was before then Archbishop Pell produced his “Why Women Can’t be Priests” paper.

On the way home, my friend and I were hungry. This was in the days before McDonalds! It was getting towards late afternoon. I think it was at Mount Colah that we found a little restaurant, not opened for food but open for Coffee. Parched, we sat down. All day we had been talking about community, Eucharist, the first witnesses to the Resurrection, Jesus, Mary Magdalene. We were brimming over with joy from the experience. The owner of the restaurant took pity on us and offered to bring us a snack. He told us he was from Lebanon. The extent of my international food experience had been a night out with my Dad at a Chinese Restaurant after a trip to the pictures with my sister! I loved the food. She struggled with it and wrapped her prawn cutlets up in the serviette to take home to Mum! The smell of the prawns lingered for some time after rendering her handbag useless!

He brought out the “snack”. Two little bowls – one with oil, one with a sauce of some kind. A finger bowl with two towelettes and a loaf of damper like bread. He told us how to eat it demonstrating while he spoke. “You take the bread and you break it. You dip it in the bowl and then you eat. The bread is to share.” Across the table we were crying! It was and remains one of the most powerful moments of my life. All the way home we talked about our experience. Road to Emmaus? They knew him in the breaking of the bread. Who could believe what we had seen? I am with you always? Where two or three are gathered, there am I in the midst of them?

I don't know the NRSV reference for the words. I have often felt that by not knowing them I have made myself voiceless because of my lack of scholarship and theological qualification. In my early twenties I submitted a collection of writing to Graham English for his consideration. It was to be the start of my tome "Confessions of a Kitchen Sink Theologian!" At that stage I was a full-time teacher, mother of three children under 8, my husband had lost his job and my "escape" was to write and be heavily involved in music ministry in my parish. He was encouraging in his critique. One comment that Graham challenged me with, written in red ink and capitals was "Stop apologizing for yourself"! It's taken a while!

It has taken me to arrive at this stage of my life to know that remaining voiceless can no longer be a choice for me.

I taught in junior secondary Catholic High Schools from 1978 to 2016. My roles over those years included teacher, coordinator – curriculum and student, assistant principal – curriculum and pastoral care, acting principal and finally ministry coordinator. Many times, I would hear the catch cry, "our children are our future". The kids would voice it in many ways often with hope but more and more in my later years of teaching, with an increasing sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. My response to them developed into being "no one lives in the future. The only minute we are sure of is this minute. Anything can happen to any one of us at any time. There is no guarantee that we will all make it to tomorrow." This was usually followed by a discussion about my pessimism!

The time is now! I truly believe that the first Christian communities did not have the slightest notion of or interest in anything, any time, any place BUT the things, times and places they were living in THEN. They weren't interpreting the Gospel! They were living it! I wonder where that fits with the current interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes* #4! Having been in year 10 when those documents from Vatican II were hot off the press from Rome and studying them in Religion in senior school, I remember well the excitement of possibility!

Since retiring I have been involved in a number of efforts to contribute as a volunteer. One of these experiences provided me with the opportunity to attend a Uniting Church liturgy on the second Sunday of Lent, last year. The church is a tiny little weatherboard building in a small community in Lake Macquarie. The church community is elderly. Regular services are no longer held there although there is an agreement with the organisation that uses the hall, that anytime a long-standing parishioner dies and wishes to be buried from the church, the building will be available.

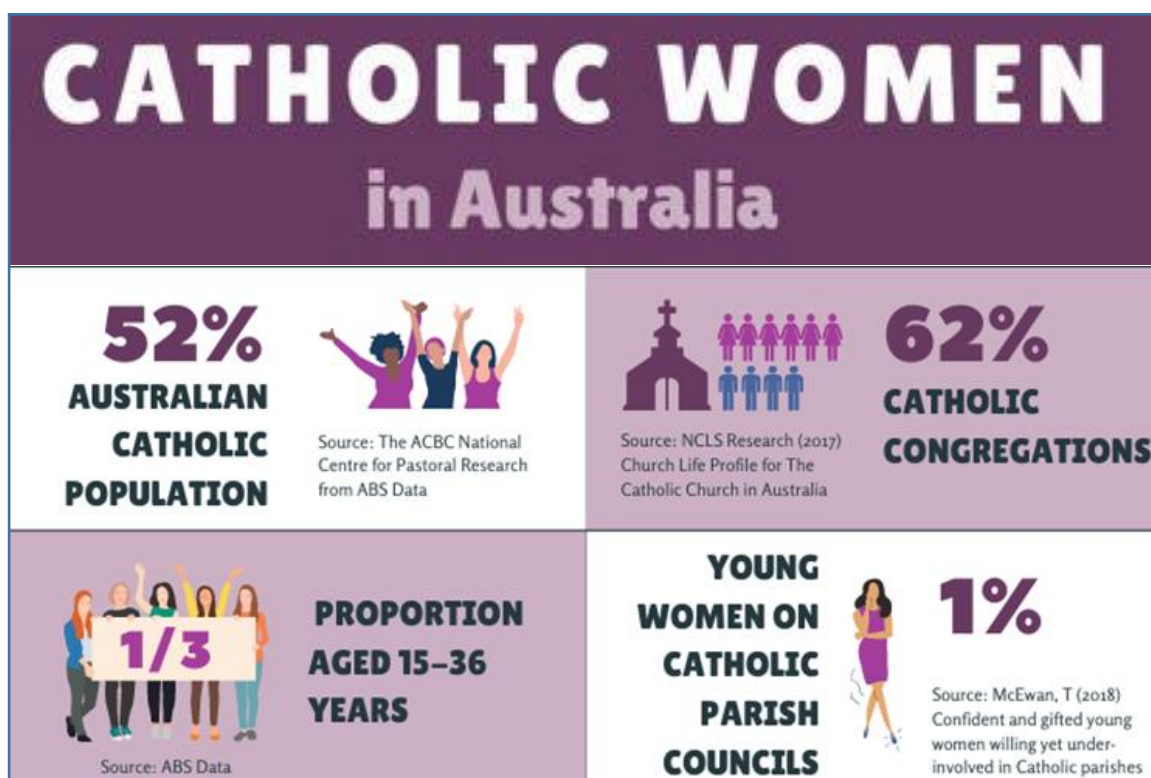
The day I went to Church the collective age of the congregation would have been a 5 figured number! One of the women had already met me. Her name was Shirley and she is 96. She invited me to sit next to her. The celebrant was a woman. Her husband provided the music courtesy of the data projector and the computer and a pipe organ soundtrack. There are about 10 pews in the church – each providing for no more than 4, comfortably. Two things struck me powerfully. The section which I think is now called the universal prayer for the Church in our liturgy occurred after the reading. The magnificent homily was something else! Praying for the Church in the world included a commentary, from someone in the congregation about the latest communication from their former parishioner who is working in New Guinea. Prayers for the sick were embellished, again, by updates on the progress of radiation treatment, scan results, return to work and so on.

I counted the number of people present. Including me, there were thirteen people. Thirteen people

identified at the Last Supper. Never a mention of the other attendees! Demonstrated for me on that occasion was that those thirteen present on the second Sunday of Lent were the church at that moment in time – the only moment we have! At the end of the liturgy we gathered out in the kitchen and had morning tea, laughs, told stories.

I have a good friend and mentor who tells me whenever I express my deep desire to reconnect to what I have lost, that it will not happen within the institution as it exists and that it is time to be part of a new way of being. I think of the outrage expressed last year by the winner of the Gold Logie (!!!!) “Lighten the five-star four letter word up!” Somehow that is necessary! Joy! Welcome! Hope! Inclusion! Growth! True companionship! Upon reflection, I don’t think I ever really, truly experienced those things in the many years I considered myself a Catholic. However, neither am I able to walk away completely. Paradox, I guess!

Louise Roach is a grandmother, a mother, a wife, a pensioner, a singer, a pianist and an unpublished writer. She is a “free-range” Catholic from Newcastle.



A LITANY FOR THOSE NOT READY FOR HEALING

By Dr. Yolanda Pierce

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a Band-Aid when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child...someone's beloved son.

Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder.

Instead...

Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.

Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.

Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbours and friends.

Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground

Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

God, in your mercy...

Show me my own complicity in injustice.

Convict me for my indifference.

Forgive me when I have remained silent.

Equip me with a zeal for righteousness.

Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.

Amen.

Written in response to Black Lives Matter. Yolanda Pierce, Ph.D is an Associate Professor of African American Religion and Literature and the Director of the Black Church Studies at Princeton Seminary.

KNOCKERS OR ROCKERS OF THE BARQUE OF PETER?

By Trish Hindmarsh

Let's not entirely knock the six Theme Papers from the Plenary Council Writing Groups.

Short comings? Of course. Are they a faithful representation of the *sensus fidelium* expressed through the 220,000 participants in the Plenary lead up? Yes, and no. Could other, more competent people had been working on them? No doubt. Are humans capable of reaching genuine consensus when confronted with a variety of worldviews, background experience and formation? Hopefully, but only with difficulty, patience, prayer, study and dollops of respectful listening. I came to some sharp realization of all this as a member of the Writing Group for the theme, 'Conversion, Renewal and Reform'.

It was challenging for me to work at a deep level with Catholics from totally different faith experiences ... converts too young to be steeped in Vatican II, knowing nothing from lived experience of those hope-filled years after the Council when the Adelaide Diocese set up its Diocesan Pastoral Council; the Australian Justice and Peace Commission was founded; the laity hungered for formation; the liturgy took on renewed life and immediacy; prophetic voices were being heard from the basic Christian communities in Latin America; the religious orders were re-founding themselves in response to the call to go out to the peripheries with Good News to the poor; ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue were flourishing.

We older, Vatican II Catholics in the group were among 'newer', youthful and fresh-faced Catholics for whom the Theology of the Body, loyalty to the tradition and its authority and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament are compelling fundamentals of Catholic culture. We did share common ground... a desire to listen to the Spirit; the power of prayer and the grace of the sacraments; a love for Christ; hope for a faith-filled future for our children ... During the months of work and reflection, we also came to consensus regarding how critical to God's mission are ecological conversion; openness to our First Peoples and their wisdom; reformed governance structures for a renewed, 'synodal' church; and recognition of how antithetical to the conversion, renewal and reform of the church are the structural 'sins' of clericalism and the exclusion of women.

The alternative to patient, respectful dialogue, to negotiated pathways through discernment, is factionalism, isolated self-righteousness, echo-chambers where the 'friend of my friend is my friend and the enemy of my friend is my enemy'. If we insist only on reinforcing our own position, without a willingness to sit together in our parishes, dioceses, homes and local cafes, engaged in fellowship and dialogue, face-to-face or online, difficult, tedious and utterly frustrating as that can be, we are left with division and dead ends. Ultimately a failure to engage in respectful, skilled processes of dialogue and negotiation leads to the sort of sabre rattling that we are seeing, terrifyingly, right now in our nation and across our planet.

The world needs the church to model a better way to go about the human business of peaceful coexistence, seeking alternatives to conflict and war. No-one needs to risk a schism in our own church because of unwillingness to enter into dialogue with one another. The People of God in Australia, at the Bishops' invitation to speak their minds, universally identified Christ, as the Way, the Truth and the Life, the ground of our common faith. They took up the invitation to dialogue and discern together, and spoke their truth openly, in their thousands, rejoicing in the opportunity at last to express their hopes for a more engaged, credible church.

It was *Gaudium et Spes* that offered 'dialogue' to the Church as one of the most important tools in

bringing the Good News alive:

By virtue of her mission to shed on the whole world the radiance of the Gospel message, and to unify under one Spirit all people of whatever nation, race or culture, the Church stands forth as a sign of that fraternity which allows honest dialogue and gives it vigour. Let there be unity in what is necessary; freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case.

That mission requires in the first place that we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, through the full recognition of lawful diversity. Thus, all those who compose the one People of God, both pastors and the general faithful, can engage in dialogue with ever abounding fruitfulness. For the bonds which unite the faithful are mightier than anything dividing them (Para. 92).

Working with a group of people who agree with oneself is a walk in the park, compared with the reality of working towards collaboration and mutual understanding in a divergent group, with sharply different interpretations of Catholicism. It requires more than human skill and wisdom. It is a call to carry the cross. The impulse to 'correct', to cut across people, to impose oneself is there. So too is the responsibility to courageously 'speak the truth' as one sees it. As the baptized we are as Paul puts it, 'One in Christ Jesus', but our Catholic Church is a 'broad church'. The net cast out into the deep contains all that the sea can turn up ... the uneducated and the highly educated; the more progressive and traditionalist, the poor and the wealthy, saints and sinners, the old, middle aged and young, people from every culture and ethnic background. There is no-one of good will excluded from the invitation to follow Christ. This is the nature of our church, and we need to 'deal with it'.

We do not have a perfect pathway into the Council, and many are disappointed about that. But it is as Robert Fitzgerald put it on Compass, 'the only show in town' ... a unique opportunity to convert, renew and reform our church.

'Behold I make all things new' is God's promise in the Apocalypse; I consider myself blessed to have been part of the listening, dialogue and discernment Plenary processes across Australia. I say to the Bishops, 'Fear not!' We are in this together. You do not have to have all the answers; as the baptised, we are co-responsible. The People of God have spoken from their deepest hopes and often their desperation for a converted, renewed and reformed Church. This historic moment is ours to claim. Collegiality between church leadership and the 99% who make up lay membership, can bring the Church to real connectivity with the needs of our time and our place. The change that can result, even if limited, is far preferable to a resistant, dying church.

If, at the very least, a genuinely 'synodal' style can become the 'new normal' for our church, with inbuilt opportunities for constant dialogue and discernment, that will be a great leap forward ... or to use a COVID phrase, something 'not to be sneezed at'.

Trish Hindmarsh is a retired teacher and educational leader who worked in Catholic Education in Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania. Trish has a lively interest in justice, peace and ecology and is a member of the Catholic Earthcare Australia Advisory Committee. She spent six years as a senior consultant working with groups of schools within the Sydney Catholic Schools Office and five years as Director of Catholic Education in Tasmania. Her doctoral studies relate to education for ecological sustainability within Catholic school settings.

This article was originally published at <https://johnmenadue.com/trish-hindmarsh-knockers-or-rockers-of-the-barque-of-peter> on 15 July 2020.

CATHOLIC LAY GROUPS HARNESS ENERGY FOR NATIONAL REFORM

Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR)

Catholics from reform groups across Australia and New Zealand met via Zoom on 18 June to support the growing movement for reform of the Catholic Church.

Participants representing 17 reform groups and other invitees joined the forum of the Australian Coalition for Catholic Church Reform to discuss the way ahead for Church decision making, especially in the lead up to the Plenary Council now scheduled for October 2021.

The 80 participants represent many thousands of Catholics who share deep concern about the state of the Church in Australia.

At the forefront of those concerns are issues of good governance and the culture of clericalism in the church, particularly the need for inclusion and gender equality.

Speaking shortly after the forum, ACCCR Convener, Peter Johnstone, said that the coalition is increasingly harnessing the energy for renewal Australia-wide.

‘Catholics want a Church that lives and models the teachings of Jesus. We believe that this is the most representative meeting of Catholic reform groups ever held in Australia. We were pleased to also have New Zealand Catholics share their views. Catholics are insisting that the now deferred Plenary Council, when it does meet, addresses the real issues of a debilitated Church and failed Church leadership. We are determined to press for reform and to challenge the Church leadership to hear and respond to the spiritual and community needs of the faithful,’ Mr Johnstone said.

Presentations at the meeting included several overviews of the Plenary Council process to date, reviews of the six official discernment papers meant to shape the Plenary Council agenda, and the Implementation Advisory Group’s recent governance report, *The Light from the Southern Cross*.

John Warhurst, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn was co-Chair of the Coalition’s forum.

‘We trust in the sense of faith of the faithful that has emerged from the submissions, but we are deeply concerned that the papers which have been written for the Plenary Council fail to marshal reform ideas into a relevant framework for a meaningful Council agenda,’ Professor Warhurst said.

‘The most prominent theme emerging from the 17,500 submissions is greater inclusion for all, especially women and minority groups. But the issue appears to have been sidelined in the discernment papers,’ he said.

Concerning the recently leaked governance document, it was noted that far from being an ‘interim report’ as subsequently described in an official response to the leak, this governance report was the final contribution of eminent national and international experts who delivered 86 recommendations, many of which could be enacted in parishes and dioceses across the country immediately.

Andrea Dean, President of WATAC (Women and the Australian Church) and also co-Chair of the forum, said the governance report is a progressive, wide-ranging report with implications which reach well beyond the remit of the Plenary Council.

‘That is one forum for consideration, but its recommendations are universal,’ Ms Dean said.

‘The reform movement can respond to the report by seeking to influence how bishops conduct their consultation, seeking to have the recommendations implemented in parishes and dioceses immediately and engaging in discussion about issues not included in the report,’ she said.

Peter Johnstone said that the attempt to keep the governance report secret is clear evidence of the Church’s lack of transparency and reinforces the Royal Commission’s condemnation of the Church’s governance and culture.

‘As the culture wars rage, it is imperative that all parties are driven by a commitment to Christ’s mission. The ACCCR will draw on these discussions for the next meeting in July which will come up with local and national action plans. The Catholic reform movement is harnessing the momentum for renewal by gathering the wisdom of the faithful in setting a path that truly reflects the gospel,’ Mr Johnstone said.

ACCCR Zoom Forum: Thursday 18 June 2020

The following groups were represented at the forum:

Australian Reforming Catholics

Cardijn Community

Catholics For Renewal

Catholics Speak Out

Communities of the Way

Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn

Concerned Catholics Tasmania

Concerned Catholics Wagga Wagga

Concerned Catholics Wollongong

Cyber Christian Community

For the Innocents

Inclusive Catholics

Rainbow Catholics Australia

Toowoomba Catholics for Church Reform

VOCAL (Voices of Catholic Australian Laity)

WATAC (Women and the Australian Church) (Canberra)

WWITCH (Women’s Wisdom in the Church) (Melbourne)

Other unaffiliated groups and individuals from Australia and New Zealand

MEDIA CONTACT: Mark Metherell 0417 603 697.

BOOK REVIEW: GERALD A. ARBUCKLE, ABUSE AND COVER-UP

By Patricia Gemmell

Gerald Arbuckle's latest book is a useful tool for those engaged in discerning a way forward for the Catholic church in the light of the Plenary Council. It resonates with the key themes that have emerged in the six recently published Discernment Papers (on the Plenary Council website). More than that, it clarifies what must be the essential foundations of a renewed church.

Arbuckle likes to use the word refounding rather than reforming or renewing. Our task is to refound the Catholic church, which means going back to our roots, to our sacred story, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Refounding is primarily a transformative faith journey, in which there are no quick-fixes." This emphasis on refounding deeply aligns with the desire of Catholics to get back to Jesus and the gospels, something I heard many times in Listening and Dialogue sessions but which also emerged as a major theme in the final report in July 2019.

The challenges are enormous, as Arbuckle details in chapters about Catholic church culture and practice. Culture is complex and deep-rooted and resists change. However, the abuse crisis has, in his words, "cast the church into the fear-evoking chaos of liminality." In this place of trauma, there are three choices: paralysis, a retreat into fundamentalism, or the work of refounding. Part of the rationale for this book is to push the case for refounding and to sketch some action plans to head us in the right direction.

What becomes clear in the course of the book is that unless certain things change, the culture will remain what it is. In other words, to refound the church requires some quite specific changes to business as usual. It can be stated very simply. We need structural changes to our current models of governance to give the laity some authority in decision making along with bishops and priests. However, structural changes alone will not suffice for true and lasting cultural change. We need a conversion of our ordained leaders so that they are committed to all that is entailed in refounding; and we need a conversion of the laity to realize that by their baptism they are called to be co-responsible for the mission of the church. For all of us, it is a call to holiness, to trust in one another, to work collaboratively, and to focus on mission, vision and values.

These three foundational principles are much more elaborated, of course, in the book, with well thought-out strategies for change. What Arbuckle calls for is along the same lines as what we have been hearing from thousands of Catholics through the Plenary Council process, and also what is being proposed by the governance review, *The Light from the Southern Cross*. What Arbuckle's book does, though, is to highlight the need for "rock-hard foundations: ongoing radical structural reforms inspired by profound conversion to the person and mission of Jesus Christ." Rock-hard foundations. For that very reason, it should be required reading for all those who will be writing the agenda for the Plenary Council.

Gerald A Arbuckle *Abuse and cover-up: refounding the Catholic Church in trauma*. N.Y.; Orbis Books, 2019. ISBN: 9781626983397

Patricia has a Masters in Theology, is a member of the Australian Grail National Leadership Team and has been a parishioner of St Leonard's Naremburn for 34 years.

AFTER THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS, FEMALE THEOLOGIANs ARE CALLING FOR CHANGES TO LEADERSHIP

By Siobhan Hegarty

Sixty per cent of churchgoers in Australia are women, yet in the decision-making ranks of the Catholic Church, female voices are largely absent.

The lack of women in leadership roles is a point of contention for many theologians — not just for equity reasons.

According to Robyn Horner, from the Australian Catholic University's school of theology, the church's sexual abuse crisis demonstrated the failings of a male-only leadership structure. "I think the church has protected itself for a long time with patriarchal attitudes and the exclusion of women from decision-making roles, even if they're not ordained roles," she says. "This just means there's always a temptation to involve secrecy and silence and keep it as a boys' club."

Associate Professor Horner views the sexual abuse crisis as a line in the sand, "which says either the church is going to change or it's going to die". As of this month, changes are being made.

Last Thursday, Pope Francis appointed six women to a group overseeing the Vatican's finances. These positions are thought to be the most senior female appointments in the Church's leadership structure. But reformers in the Catholic Church are pushing for greater structural change.

An early female 'doctor' of the church

Beth Doherty, a teacher, author and former communications director for the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, says women have held positions of influence in church history — so there's no reason they can't today. "There's of course the scriptural argument that Jesus chose only men as his disciples," she says. "But there's lots to suggest that people like Mary Magdalene and Mary and Martha of Bethany were disciples as well — and they were the first ones who actually saw Jesus as the resurrected Christ."

Ms Doherty also points to St Catherine of Siena, a layperson credited with convincing Pope Gregory XI to return the papal capital to Rome in the 14th century. "She was illiterate, but yet she ended up being one of the great doctors of the church," says Doherty. "She basically told the pope, who was in Avignon [France] at the time, to man up and get back to Rome and start leading the church properly."

Could women elect the next pope?

Female ordination is a contentious topic that often rears its heads in conversations about gender equity within the church. Female bishops and priests have not existed in the mainline church, but deacons have, says Associate Professor Horner.

In 1994, Pope John Paul II wrote an apostolic letter stating the prospect of women priests was not open to debate. The declaration was supported by Pope Francis four years ago.

But in April this year, Pope Francis created a commission of experts to examine whether women could become ordained as deacons, the first rank of the ordained clergy.

For Ms Doherty, there is no innate reason why women should be banned from priesthood. But despite that, she doesn't describe herself as a "big crusader for women's ordination". "I wouldn't say that the greatest way that we can achieve equality or power for women is by ordaining them," she says. "I think sometimes if we get lost in that conversation, we don't look at some of the other ways that they can already participate."

One such way, she proposes, could be through the College of Cardinals. "You don't have to be ordained to be a member of the College of Cardinals, because their main job is to elect the next pope," she contends. "[Catholic educator Anna Krohn] had this idea: If cardinals are princes of the church, couldn't women be princesses of the church? It's a loophole that's actually never been used."

According to Maeve Heaney, a theology lecturer at ACU and member of the order of Verbum Dei, lay men were involved in papal elections historically, but the practice hasn't occurred for hundreds of years. "The 1917 Code of Canon Law stipulated that all cardinals had to be ordained priests, and the 1983 code of Canon Law stipulated that all cardinals have to be an ordained bishop," she says. "Arguably, we could have lay people involved in the election of a pope. How that would need to come to happen would, I intuit, involve a lot of dialogue, discussion and synods. It would be a big decision, but it's possible."

In 2013, a spokesperson from the Vatican said such a move was "theologically and theoretically" possible, but "not remotely realistic".

'It can be frustrating'

Despite the gendered nature of certain Catholic leadership positions, Dr Heaney says there is "an awful lot happening" to promote equity within the church. "In times past, preaching was only a question of men doing it," she says. "Now, the church has approved ... there are groups emerging that train and recognise the gifts and charisms of women and lay people to preach."

Dr Heaney adds that Catholic education and health institutions are spearheaded, in the main, by women. She acknowledges that, given the Catholic Church is a large, universal institution, as well as a spiritual reality, changes can come slowly. "It can be frustrating, but I think that's the nature of such a big structure," she says.

Despite the organisational obstacles, Ms Doherty remains hopeful that the church will adapt to the times. "In 2020, we need to really recognise that men and women each have very specific parts to play," she says. "What I want to see is people going, 'OK, there's been a lot of evil, there's a lot of ugliness in the church, but ultimately if we go back to the reasons for its existence, there is the great beauty to be found.'"

This article was originally published on 16/08/20 at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-16/after-catholic-church-sexual-abuse-crisis-change-women-leaders/12543146> Beth Doherty's interview with Andrew West on the Religion and Ethics Report <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionandethicsreport/beth-doherty-empowering-women-in-the-catholic-church/12503872>

Siobhan Hegarty is the digital lead for ABC's Religion & Ethics unit. She works across platforms to create online articles, radio packages and short-form videos. She has previously worked as a print and online journalist, deputy editor and documentary researcher.

TOWARDS THE PLENARY COUNCIL – PEOPLE OF GOD ON A PILGRIM JOURNEY

Women and the Plenary Council was the topic for a gathering on Zoom last month when over 100 people registered for the first conversation in a new series, *WATAC Presents*.

WATAC (Women and the Australia Church) was established 34 years ago to explore women's experience and place within the Catholic Church. For many of the women, these years have been a long but rewarding journey of faith and appreciation of their own significant contribution to women's spirituality. Simultaneously, it has been a frustrating journey for some, who feel the Catholic Church still fails to honour women's experience of the divine in its liturgical, parish and missionary life.

The Australian Catholic Church will hold a Plenary Council during 2021 and 2022 as a vehicle for renewal within the church; a church battered by many failings over many years; battered by sexual abuse by clergy and cover up by bishops and other leaders, battered by failures to engage with changes in the role of women within society; and battered by an irrelevance witnessed by a rising disaffection of believers with their experiences of church. Only 12% of Catholics now attend Mass on a Sunday.

At the inaugural *WATAC Presents* on June 9 the President of WATAC, Andrea Dean, interviewed Debra Zanella from Perth and Good Samaritan Sister Clare Condon from Canberra about their hopes, expectations and disappointments about the forthcoming Plenary Council.

Debra and Clare expressed both their yearnings and despair as they contemplate church renewal, especially for women. As Debra said: "If we truly take Genesis seriously that all are made in the image of God, there is no alternative to a true democracy in the church where authority must be translated into service rather than the command and control that we experience. We need a Christian view of service where governance is about the empowerment of those most marginalised, those who actually do not have a voice, of whom women are many."

Clare identified three possible outcomes from this national process.

There could be simple window dressing, that is women being identified in more managerial roles at parish and diocesan level.

Secondly, there could be some incremental change through the mandating of parish and diocesan pastoral councils with equality of women and men representation.

Finally, there could be radical change in some of the outmoded philosophical and theological positions that underpin current clerical dominance within the church.

Clare suggested that we not hold our collective breath on this third option for a more inclusive church. There are clear divisions across the church and, therefore, the need for authentic deep discernment by all participants.

She also identified the gender imbalance already noted in the list of delegates so far appointed to the Plenary Council – more than 57% are male clerics, laymen represent about 14% and women just 29%. She encouraged women to seek out the delegates in their own Diocese and to have discussions with them, particularly with the local bishop about his attitudes to the key issues of concern to women.

In the last analysis, Andrea asked both Debra and Clare for their hopes for the church of the future.

Debra used an image from J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. "Think about the scene when the Phoenix dies but then magically is reborn. You know, the church constantly renews itself and comes back from periods of decline. While currently on the Plenary Council journey, I am not hopeful it will produce the change that I desire. But I do have hope that small movements create further movements and it is the collective movements, faithful to the Word of God, that will ultimately bring about the change in the church that is desperately needed."

Clare concluded by stating that her hope rests around the capacity of the members of the church to discern. "I hope for a greater ability to discern at an individual, communal and cultural level. Recently, I read a very apt definition of discernment; 'discernment arrives at what is crucial and necessary. It lets go of what is extraneous and secondary'. My hope is that we might become the church of the Gospel, a people of God on a pilgrim journey. We are the church."

Andrea thanked all those who participated in this new venture, especially those behind the scenes who organised the technology and the breakout groups, where participants were able to share with one another. A special thanks was extended to the executive members of WATAC, including Tracy McEwan and Lee-Ann Wein.

This article was originally published July 2020 in The Good Oil (used with permission)
<https://www.goodsams.org.au/article/towards-the-plenary-council-people-of-god-on-a-pilgrim-journey/>

LOOKING TO FUTURE GOVERNANCE OF OUR CHURCH

By Frank Brennan

During the week, I participated in a Webinar entitled 'The Light from The Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia'. Zoom conferences and webinars are now a common place for those of us enduring pandemic lockdowns.

This Webinar was run out of the offices of a large law firm in Sydney.

The proceedings were chaired by the distinguished Australian broadcaster, Geraldine Doogue. More than 150 committed Catholics tuned in. There was quite a buzz to the proceedings. And most of the time, the technology worked well.

Geraldine introduced the keynote presenter, Francois Kunc, who is a judge of the New South Wales Supreme Court. He had the unenviable task of providing a 15-minute overview of the [208-page report](#) containing 86 recommendations for improved governance of the Catholic Church in Australia. I was one of nine responders.

The other responders included three of the key authors who were part of the seven-member Governance Review Project Team commissioned to provide this report to the Church's Implementation Advisory Group which had been set up by our bishops after the royal commission.

Another responder was one of the theological advisers to the review team.

The discussion was lively, informed, and respectful. Men and women were at the table in equal numbers. Appropriately, the laity heavily outnumbered the clergy.

But something wasn't quite right.

There was no bishop on the panel. We were told that invitations had been extended, but to no avail.

Like most things in the Church, there's probably a back story.

But I was left thinking that a discussion about co-responsible governance in the Catholic Church could well do with a couple of bishops at the table.

Most of us who spoke would have been in our 60s. When looking to future governance of our church, it's probably best to start as we'd want to finish. If co-responsibility is to work, bishops and young people will need to be at the table.

This report had been presented to our bishops at the last minute before their last conference in May 2020. Instead of publishing it promptly, the bishops decided that they wanted to sit on it until their next meeting in November 2020. The report in draft form was leaked fairly soon after the bishops completed their meeting in May.

Following the leak, the bishops did a rethink on their schedule. On 12 June 2020, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, announced that the bishops 'would provide their feedback before 17 July'.

He wrote:

'After this feedback has been received, the report will be amended. The amended version will then be published in late July or early August, accompanied by a reading guide. This version will be widely available, and people are encouraged to read the full report (and not just the recommendations) and to provide feedback to their local bishop to help him in shaping his response.'

That's the last we heard from our bishops before the Webinar went ahead on 19 August. Late last Friday, two days after the Webinar, the bishops finally published the revised report.

If co-responsible governance of our Church is to be a reality, we all have to do better than this. And we all have to get moving if bishops are to receive feedback and formulate their own responses in time for their November meeting.

The introduction to the report states:

'The Catholic Church in Australia has been one of the epicentres of the sex abuse crisis in the global Church. But the Church in Australia is also trying to find a path through and out of this crisis in ways that reflect the needs of the society in which it lives.

'The Catholic tradition holds that the Holy Spirit guides all into the truth. In its search for the path of truth, the Church in Australia seeks to be guided by the light of the Holy Spirit; a light symbolised by the great Constellation of the Southern Cross.

'That path and light offers a comprehensive approach to governance issues raised by the abuse crisis and the broader need for cultural change.'

The responders in the Webinar included Catholic lay people with outstanding credentials in

governance in the corporate sector and in the public sector. And they love their Church.

As they spoke, I had a sense that whatever our differences, we all saw our Church as the privileged and graced place to break open the Word prophetically, to break the bread welcoming all sinners to the table, to constitute ourselves as the Body of Christ nourished by the sacraments, to serve the world, especially the poor, and to honour tradition and experience.

In truth, a strong motivation detectable in the group was a passionate desire for Catholic parents and grandparents to be able to hand on this uplifting and grounded vision, this fragile vessel, this responsibly governed community to their children and grandchildren.

But upcoming generations will be attracted only if we are able to provide both Good News and good governance.

The responders were all used to church documents handed down from on high. But they were excited by the mix of good theology and good governance in this report.

They enjoyed the conversation they heard between civil and ecclesial virtues, between civil and ecclesial experience, and between civil and ecclesial perspectives.

Being of the Church and of the world, they knew that each domain had much to contribute to human flourishing. Make no mistake: the Church needed the help of the State and the eyes of the world to address the plague of child sexual abuse.

The warning was sounded. It's all very well to speak about co-responsibility. But mature adult lay people will embark upon co-responsibility only if there is a sharing of authority. How is authority to be shared in the Catholic tradition when decisions are still made ultimately by the bishop(s)?

In the wake of the royal commission, the challenge is now urgent, but even those Catholics still committed to their church have despaired of how to respond.

One responder said, 'We've been brought up to be passive Catholics even if we've been active in civil life'.

Another spoke of his life changing experience when he came to Redfern parish in inner Sydney with Fr Ted Kennedy who offered completely open engagement with all comers while insisting that we always be open to the poor.

Francis Sullivan, who had been CEO of the Truth Justice and Healing Council that interacted with the royal commission on behalf of the Australian church, acknowledged that some Catholics (including some bishops) might fear that any discussion of co-responsible governance might lead to a non-episcopal led church.

One participant asked how change would affect those Catholics who saw no need for change at all.

Next day, I read a report from Cardinal George Pell speaking on a US Webinar saying, 'The more you adapt to the world, the faster the Catholic Church goes out of business.'

Francis Sullivan thought the authors of this report were wanting 'a relevant Church which can nourish our lives'.

The report notes something as ancient as the reading from St. Paul's First Letter to the Church in Corinth:

'Too often, the (Pauline) image of the body and its many parts has been overshadowed by the

image of the Petrine promise in Matthew 16:18-19.

'Here, the responsibility received by Peter to be the rock on which the Church is built, receiving the keys of the kingdom of heaven, binding and loosening on earth and in heaven, has weighed so heavily (and sometimes literally) on bishops and priests that they have neglected the legitimate and crucial contributions of the rest of the body.

'Good governance must be built not only on the legitimate authority (not power) of the priest or bishop in his diocese or parish but on the mutual respect for the rightful contribution of all members of the body of Christ, animated by the Spirit.'

When we do have the opportunity to reflect on this report with our bishops and with the young, we need to ask: How can this tradition, this way of life, this community of faith be made fit for purpose and attractive to the young and to those disillusioned by all they have heard in the wake of the royal commission?

We need examples of what works and what's affordable. We need to respond to Pope Francis's call to synodality which 'involves the active participation of all members of the Church in its processes of discernment, consultation and co-operation at every level of decision-making and mission.'

The Webinar participants enjoyed this observation by an American commentator: 'To embrace synodality is not a call to do away with hierarchical leadership. The Church is not a democracy. But neither is the Church a monarchy wherein local bishops, bishops' conferences, or even the Pope rule by fiat.'

Earlier in the day before the Webinar, I had presided at the requiem mass of a man with a wife, nine children, and 19 grandchildren. The Melbourne lockdown restrictions precluded the attendance of the grandchildren at Church. Using the available technology, they livestreamed their reflections on their beloved granddad and their prayers of the faithful into the Church and out on to the airwaves to the hundreds of virtual congregants.

Each of the 19 grandchildren spoke and prayed aloud. The vitality and spirituality of their involvement in the liturgy was palpable. If they'd been in the Church, we probably would not have heard from each one of them, and we'd have been the poorer for that.

With technology, good governance, synodality and the action of the Spirit, together, co-responsibly, let's pray that we might constitute the Church which Christ constantly builds, re-builds, and re-shapes on the rock of Peter.

Let's maintain our faith and our hope that 'the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it' and that it cannot be undermined from within.

Like Paul in his Letter to the Romans, we might then acclaim 'How rich are the depths of God – how deep his wisdom and knowledge – and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods!'

This article was originally published in La Croix International on August 24,2020. Reprinted with permission.

Frank Brennan is a highly respected Jesuit priest and lawyer.

WATAC GROUPS

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND: For more information contact *Therese Flynn-Clarke*
Phone: 07 3804 0636 or email: flynn-clarke@bigpond.com

NSW

EASTERN SUBURBS: This Group meets on the last Sunday of each month except December.
Venue: 8 Dudley Street, Randwick. For more information contact *Carmel Maguire* -
Phone: 02 9398 1004 or email: carmelm1@hotmail.com

ENGADINE: Group meets on the third Monday of the month in a member's home at 7.30pm. For
more information contact *Margaret Keyes* - Phone: 9520 4240 or email: keyes888@bigpond.com

INNER CITY: Group usually meets on the third Monday of each month. For more information
contact *Margaret Cody* Phone: 02 9692 9384 Mob: 0419 426 174 or email:
margaret.cody1@bigpond.com

LEURA: Group meets on the fourth Saturday morning of the month at 227 The Mall, Leura, at 10
am. All welcome. For more information contact *Monica Bright* Phone: 02 47573943 or
email: mbright45@bigpond.com (This group is not currently meeting due to COVID-19
restrictions)

MILTON/ULLADULLA: Group is not currently meeting – if you are interested in meeting in this
region please contact *Anna Flynn* Phone: 02 4455 3279 or email: bobans@internode.on.net

PARRAMATTA: Group meets five times a year, bi-monthly on a Monday evening. For more
information contact either *Chris Brenton* Phone: (02) 9670 1184 or *Patricia Mayne*
Phone: (02)9630 6721 email: tricia.mayne@froggy.com.au

ACT

CANBERRA: Group meets on second Sunday of the month, 3.30-5.30 pm at Merici College,
Braddon. For more information contact *Andrea Dean* Phone: 0487388873 or email
andrea@futurematters.net.au

STAMPS

If people wish to continue sending used stamps to Helen Coles, she will gladly ensure they get to Sr Jan Barnett rsj for the volunteers who process them to raise funds for the work of the Josephites in Peru. Please use this address: Helen Coles 37/121 Anzac Avenue, West Engadine NSW 2233.

WATAC Presents

Acting now:
Laudato si',
eco-theologies &
advocacy

with
Jacqui Rémond
& Dr Di Rayson



Wednesday 14th October 2020 at 6pm AEST

(6pm Sydney; 4pm Perth; 5:30pm Adelaide & Darwin)

Register at watac.net.au

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

14 October	WATAC Presents, <i>Acting Now: Laudato Si, eco-theologies and advocacy</i>
9 December	WATAC Christmas Party via Zoom
31 December	Closing date for nominations for Life Membership
6 March 2021	AGM and Luncheon