



**VOL 31 NO 4 WATAC (Women and The Australian Church) News
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LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear WATAC Friends,

When the WATAC committee started work this year, we discovered that the vision/aims/mission of WATAC had been expressed differently on the website, on membership leaflets and so on.

We were aware too that as an incorporated body, the WATAC constitution-needed to be updated in light of legislative changes and that the constitution-must include a current vision statement.

Normally members of an organisation work together to create vision statements. I did wonder if we could work on it via Zoom, but I think it would be a struggle. The draft statement, developed by the committee, is on page 7 for your consideration. Please contact me with suggestions for improvement before the end of December.

The next *WATAC Presents* entitled *Celebrating and Planning with WATAC* will take place on Wednesday, 9 December 2020 at 6pm AEDT. We invite you to be in conversation with the WATAC Committee and the wider membership on a range of topics, including how you have coped during 2020, what we can celebrate in 2020 and what is the best future you can imagine for WATAC.

To be part of these *WATAC Presents* (via Zoom) you must register on the WATAC website. You will be sent a Zoom link to use to join the conversation. Reminders will be sent out before the meeting.

Challenge 1: Come to the meeting on Wednesday 9 December 2020 at 6pm AEDT.

Challenge 2: Come looking like it's a Christmas Party: use your imagination!

Bring along to your computer screen a glass of something, maybe an exotic drink like a citron cocktail or a juice, and a nibble or two.

The Committee has introduced Life Membership Awards. The awards will recognise the extraordinary efforts of members for the good of WATAC. The nomination form is attached; applications close 31 December.

The 2021 Annual General Meeting, including a guest speaker, luncheon and a ceremony to award life memberships, will take place on Saturday, 6 March at Miranda RSL. If there are Covid restrictions, the event will be livestreamed. Please claim the date!

What a jam-packed newsletter this is! And what a year we have had! I take this opportunity to take the committee for their extraordinary efforts and the members of WATAC for your generous support (especially Tracey Edstein who co-edited this newsletter).

Wishing you all a blessed and peaceful Christmas and New Year,



President.

WATAC Inc.

Subscriptions Due!

Membership Form attached or you can use the [online form](#) on our website and pay by credit card or PayPal.

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WILL I GO BACK TO MASS?

Chris Sidoti

For almost 70 years I went to Mass virtually every Sunday. The only times I can remember when I didn't were when I was in a conservative Islamic country where churches were either non-existent or very hard to find.

All that changed in March, when the COVID-19 lockdown closed churches in Sydney. I haven't been inside a church since then. Now they are open again and the number allowed to attend makes returning possible. So, after more than seven months, I am confronted with the question: Will I go back to Mass?

The first thing I need to say is that my absence seems to have made no difference to God whatsoever. God is neither happier nor sadder that I haven't been there. I acknowledge that I have been going for years and years for my own sake, not for God's.

The second question, therefore, is what has been the effect on me of going? I firmly believe that I need to worship God as part of a worshipping community. The problem is that the experience of worshipping in community is so bad.

That abominable English translation of the Roman Missal

The "celebration" of Mass is rarely uplifting, rarely celebratory. It's been far worse since 2011.

That's when the Vatican imposed a new [English translation](#) of the Roman Missal, a terrible translation carried out by the "Vox Clara Commission" and its chairman, Cardinal George Pell. This translation is an abomination before God. It was supposed to be a close translation of the Latin original. But it is not. In some places it omits words that are in the Latin. In other places, it adds words. It was supposed to be more elegant. But it is not. All those interminable sentences without ever seeing a full stop! It is also riddled with heresy. For example, there is the frequent prayer that we may merit salvation.

For the last nine years now, I have gone to Mass each week and not said an audible word, apart from the Our Father, which, though archaic, has not been subjected to a new bad translation. I mumble the words of the 1973 version of the people's parts under my breath. I can't bring myself to utter a word of the "Vox Clara" translation, not even the great "Amen" at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer that affirms all the awful language that has gone before it.

I have not experienced the Eucharist as the summit and source of Christian life. Each Sunday I am angrier and more alienated at the end of the Mass than I was at the beginning. Is this what I go to Mass for? Do I want to go back to this? Can I go back? One question leads to another.

A crisis of ordained male leadership

The institutional Roman Church is like a failed state, hollowed out from within and imploding on itself. The sexual abuse crisis has been revealed to be widespread, affecting every country and every diocese and at every level. It seems that the most catholic characteristic of the Catholic Church is paedophilia. The sins of commission and omission can no longer be described as the work of a few bad apples. The institutional church is a paedophilic institution.

Then there is the crisis of leadership. The most defining quality of the episcopacy is mediocrity, at

least in Australia. It's hard to find a bishop in this country who is capable of leading. What most of them say and do is totally irrelevant even to most Catholics. The thought of them evangelizing the world is laughable.

Most diocesan priests in Australia are men totally out of their depth, expected to lead two or three parishes – alone, unequipped and unsupported. And they seem too frightened to empower their parish laity to take over the responsibility. I remember when the new translation of the Missal was introduced and every priest I knew expressed disgust at it. I said, "Then don't use it. In this priest- starved diocese, what can your mediocre bishop do to you? Sack you?"

They all hated the horrible translation, but none was prepared to refuse to use it. Sad men struggling to sustain a sad institution. The crisis in ordained leadership is not a crisis of quantity, but a crisis of quality.

The refusal to entrust women with real Church leadership

Then there's the misogyny. Not even the lack of male priests can induce a change of heart towards women on the part of the male leadership. If clear self-interest won't produce change, then what will?

Women constitute well over half the remaining church-going population. Without doubt, there are extraordinary leaders among them who could get us out of the mess our male leaders have put us in. But they are not permitted to do so. A failed institution is one that resolutely refuses to grasp the ways forward that God gives it.

Then there's the corruption, the product of the total absence of transparency and accountability. There are no clear procedures for decision-making, no due process or natural justice – and, of course, no financial responsibility. Even as the Bishop of Rome struggles to pry open the hidden finances of the Vatican, diocesan and parish finances in the Australian church remain opaque and secret.

None of these is a new issue. All of them have been issues for decades. But the context for me has changed. Before the pandemic, when I went to Mass every week, the default position was to continue going. Stopping would have required a decision to stop and there were many reasons not to decide.

Now, having not gone to Mass for seven months, the default position is to continue not going. Now, I have to make a decision to return if I am to go back. And a decision to go back to Mass is necessarily a decision to affirm and to assent to belonging to a Church that is characterized by paedophilia, mediocrity, misogyny and corruption.

Will I go back to Mass? Can I go back to Mass? I don't know.

Originally published in [La Croix](#), reprinted with permission.

Chris Sidoti is a lawyer and international human rights consultant. He served as Australia's Human Rights Commissioner and is a former member of now dismantled Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace.

WAITING WITH EXPECTATION

Moira Byrne Garton

As a child, I was taught that like Lent, Advent was a time of waiting, reflection and preparation. We give of ourselves and we heal. But unlike Lent, which focuses on the past and reparation, Advent focuses on the future and expectation. I welcome that sense of expectation this year.

Very shortly before the coronavirus reached a tipping point, my beloved father died quite suddenly. Between his death and the funeral, the National Cabinet was formed and border closures and lockdowns followed. (If there was one consolation, it was that he hadn't died a week later, because my immediate family is spread across five jurisdictions).

So, during Lent, it was easy to do 'sackcloth and ashes' as I tried to handle my grief amid my husband's and my demanding work pressures, stressed children and withdrawn support networks. The self-denial aspects that are often part of Lent were easy to incorporate into our lives while we couldn't go anywhere or see anyone.

At Easter time, it was weird to watch the Easter vigil with my family around our television. Then my feelings of discombobulation gave way to reflection and a little irritation. It's extraordinary the way that the Church, like many workplaces and places of business we may frequent, has been able to adapt quickly and smoothly and change to online options and safe physical distancing requirements.

One wonders why at times many struggle to create some other changes in the Church as quickly or smoothly. For many of us, this added to a sense of frustration.

But there are other events in 2020 besides the pandemic. Within our Church, there were a number of items of note relating to change. In April, Pope Francis created a commission to examine the issue of women deacons. In August, he appointed six women to senior positions overseeing Vatican finances. And in October, he spoke about the valued role of women and the need to promote them into decision-making in the Church. While this is too much for some, and not enough for others, it engenders a sense of expectation that we can bring into Advent.

For all of us, 2020 has been a time of waiting in some way. We've waited to see family and friends. We've waited for lockdowns to end. We've waited for a vaccine. And we've waited for life to return to 'normal', assuming it will. But as many experts have noted, every major event brings changes that last. Things will not return to what we knew as normal; they will return to a new normal - eventually. For me, that's also part of my grief as I adjust to life without my Dad. I suspect I am not alone in pondering the myriad of sad or otherwise negative elements we've seen and experienced throughout 2020 and contemplating the lasting changes made and those still to come. While I know I still need reparation, there is growth within me that was wrought by sorrow, as many others will know. As I approach Advent, I plan to reflect on our 'new normal' with more of a sense of expectation of seeing the positive growth across our communities and our Church, as well as that within us.

An original article by Moira Byrne Garton. Dr Moira Byrne Garton is a sometime commentator and writer, and a 2017 graduate of the Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship.

PATCHWORK QUILT CHURCH INHIBITS NATIONAL ACTION

John Warhurst

There is a good reason why the term Australian Catholic Church is frowned upon in official circles. It does not exist. Instead, it is a patchwork quilt of fiefdoms called dioceses. It lacks an energising central authority which, when it needs to, can generate and shape a national church response.

The kindest thing we can say about the Catholic Church in Australia in this regard is that we celebrate diocesan and other differences. The quilt shines forth in different colours and patterns. That has benefits, but it also has limitations. It can reduce the Catholic experience in Australia to a lucky dip.

During the pandemic Australians have learned a lot about federalism, including the strength of state borders and the limitations of central authority. The national cabinet has worked to respect the independence of the eight state and territory jurisdictions while maintaining some semblance of national cohesion.

Similarly, Australian Catholics are learning a lot about the territorial divisions within our church as it attempts to pull together in the lead up to our greatest contemporary challenge, the national Plenary Council (PC). If Scott Morrison finds national leadership difficult then so must Mark Coleridge, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops conference (ACBC) and Tim Costelloe, chair of the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council. They wouldn't even identify with the term national leader.

There are 28 territorial dioceses in Australia, plus five Eastern Rite dioceses. Imagine if the Australian federal system was dismantled and replaced by that many states and territories. How well would we have dealt with the pandemic and how would we have managed borders? That is the situation we are dealing with within the church.

We have national church institutions, such as the ACBC, and in this instance a Bishops Commission and a Facilitation Team for the PC, but they must direct by persuasion and education.

In the case of the PC observing progress towards the goal is a bit like watching the Sydney to Hobart yacht race. The boats are of different sizes and capabilities. Skippers vary in ability. Some seem to be becalmed while others have the wind in their sails. The diocesan fleet is zig zagging down the coast and spread out over hundreds of kilometres.

Work continues within the central apparatus, including the drafting of the *instrumentum laboris* by a small team, but much of the action and/or inaction is happening within the dioceses. Since selecting their diocesan delegates last year they have moved at varying speeds. The pandemic has been a big problem but not the only problem.

Sunday 4 October this year, the date on which the PC assembly was meant to have started before it was postponed by 12 months, was suggested as the date for the commissioning of delegates in each diocese. While some commissioning ceremonies have occurred, including in Perth, Darwin, Maitland-Newcastle and Armidale, many did not however, and the chance of some Australia-wide symbolic impetus was lost.

A few dioceses, including Adelaide, have scheduled other events to stimulate interest. Maitland-

Newcastle stands out as one diocese which has already called a diocesan synod, 2019-2021, as part of local PC discussions and wider reflection on the state of the church.

The renewal movement network, led by the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR), continues to call for further transparency and inclusiveness in preparations for the Plenary Council, including a woman co-chair or deputy chair and gender balance and transparency in the preparation of the working document. These are decisions which could be taken collectively by the bishops at their next plenary meeting from 23-27 November.

But there is so much that diocesan bishops can undertake individually. ACCCR has been calling for many months for the urgent establishment by each bishop of diocesan pastoral councils and diocesan synods, or both, as essential components of diocesan discernment about the PC.

These calls are going largely unheeded. Time is running out.

Some bishops say that they are waiting till after the PC to move in this direction, effectively to see how the wind blows. Like the better Sydney to Hobart skippers they should actively seek out the wind by taking the steps at their disposal rather than sitting back. If they do not, the PC fleet risks becoming becalmed.

Originally published in [Eureka Street](#), republished with permission.

John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University, the Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn and a delegate to the Plenary Council.

DRAFT MISSION STATEMENT

Background

Women and the Australian Church (WATAC) commenced in 1984 as a national project of the Religious women and men of Australia. WATAC became an incorporated association in November 1993. WATAC is Catholic in origin, ecumenical by membership and committed to working with other faiths.

Vision

To be a church based on a discipleship of equals.

Mission

Women and the Australian Church (WATAC) Inc

- *Practices collaborative organization and governance*
- *Works for greater opportunities for women's ministry, leadership and decision making*
- *Promotes dialogue where the voices of feminist and women theologians can be heard*
- *Provides community to those longing for an inclusive church*
- *Acts for social and environmental justice in local and global issues*
- *Honours and celebrates women's faith seeking understanding of the divine*

The previous version is [on the website](#).

The committee is looking for an appropriate way to speak about gender identity in a non-binary way and to be inclusive and respectful. Your suggestions on this matter will also be helpful. (Please email your suggestions to chair@watac.net.au)

ON BEHALF OF VICTIM-SURVIVORS: THE CHURCH HAS TO OWN THIS WORLDWIDE SCANDAL

Chris Geraghty

Some of Jesus' men have turned from fishing to lives of crime.

Yet silence reigns in the corridors of power. Reputations have been shattered – bishops compromised under a cover of secrecy and denial. Those entrusted with the delicate care of Jesus' little ones have facilitated the dreadful activities of depraved clerics. The victims who dared to raise their voice were disbelieved – punished for speaking up. Offenders have been allowed to grow old in crime and in death they have escaped justice.

The very existence of the majestic institution on the hill is threatened by hurricanes of scandals and recriminations. This is a crisis that the church as a whole has to own. Numberless faceless people, in the grip of depression and shame, have died by suicide, leaving their loved ones to grieve, and to wonder why so little has been done; why the institution can continue to teach, to preach, to speak with authority, to advise, to bind consciences and hope to be heard, not mocked; why their bishops and priests are not held accountable; why they remain apparently impervious, strangely silent and unassailed – and their property, their churches and schools untouched, their institution still functioning as usual, still endowed with significant tax concessions.

In the face of tragedy and crimes of diabolical proportions, the routine of daily church life continues. The cogs and wheels of the institution are still turning. Priests put on their seasonal vestments to celebrate the liturgy of ordinary time – but the times are far from ordinary. The Gospel continues to be announced – whatever the Good News might be today – but the words seem strangely empty. The daily seasonal routine grinds on. Meetings in the parish hall; masses in the church; money is collected; the dead are buried; the Pope speaks to us from Rome; the bishops make statements to be published in the diocesan rag; religious classes in the local school; a sermon preached; a candle lit in a dark corner of the local church; rosary beads blessed. But in the face of such horror is it possible to pretend that the times are still ordinary, and that Christmas should be celebrated as usual?

The old institution is tumbling headlong into a dark hole. Any bishop or experienced parish priest who thinks the situation will repair itself and we will all return to normal, that the repercussions of clerical sexual abuse and of the protection of offenders have not penetrated deeply into the fabric of their institution, is living in cloud-cuckoo land.

The officers of this institution have to become proactive – and soon. Drastic measures are called for. Deep reputational damage has been sustained, largely caused, though not exclusively, by men already dead – men resting peacefully in their graves. The rollcall of offenders and their protectors is long, but the litany of victims (most of them faceless and nameless) is breathtaking.

The ghosts of predators, protectors and victims (living and dead) continue to haunt the crypts and belfries of our ancient institution. But there is no pleasure in listing the offenders and describing the sins of the clergy. God help us, the harvest is vast. What might it take to cure the paralysis? May I make a few suggestions to assist those in charge? Pope Francis seems to get most of the important issues confronting our world. He has such a warm, self-effacing style. His wonderful encyclical letters, addressed to the world, to bishops and clergy, to the faithful and the infidel, spell out the deplorable condition of the natural world and our human society. He continues to challenge all of us to a concert of action – now. He understands. He gets it. His latest letter, Fratelli Tutti (Brothers All),

is another bottler.

But there are two important issues he does not seem to get – misogynistic attitudes and practices in his church; and the open wound of clerical child sex abuse, clerical immorality and criminality, and his bishops' and his predecessors' diabolical policy of cover-up and protection. Both are affecting his organization while the world looks on in amazement.

Francis has to look inside his institution and draft one of his stunning letters about clerical paedophilia, the cover-up and inside protection racket, the papal and local secrecy, the policy of preferring the soiled ministries of his ordained men over the welfare of Jesus' children and of sacrificing innocent lambs on the altar of ecclesiastical reputation.

The world is not convinced that our Pope gets the extent of the devastation caused. I hope that somewhere in the a back passage of the Vatican a cleric is pounding away on his typewriter to produce a papal letter explaining the Pope's position, expressing his abhorrence of the filthy mess, reformulating his position on the sexual urge and ecclesiastical power, and making practical suggestions to heal the wound, provide pastoral care for the victims, root out the offenders and return to the Gospel message.

May I make a number of other suggestions which might give Francis and his local bishops some bones to chew on as they plan their attack on the enemy within? They might think of establishing a special feast of Jesus the Victim, of Jesus the Avenger, of appointing a patron saint for sexual victims of church officers (and suggestions?) and of promoting devotion to Mary Mother of Victims. They might cancel all triumphant and byzantine-renaissance-style celebrations in the Vatican and in the dioceses throughout the world for a period of, say, 12 months or maybe five years.

Do away with extravagant papal masses incorporating Baroque choirs and heavy, gay, colourful vestments; construct a toned-down Easter celebration that focuses for three days on redemption, suffering and service; cancel Christmas and Santa Claus; no canonizations for some significant period; no meetings of cardinals in all their regalia. You get the drift.

They might consider an addition to the colours of liturgical vestments and a special monthly feast day to commemorate the Martyrs and Innocent Victims who down the ages have suffered from persecution and sexual assaults. The new liturgical colour would be a dirty ash grey as a sign of Lenten repentance. Humble prostrations in sack cloth, with public weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. A wailing wall constructed in Vatican City and those dioceses where criminal offences have been committed by clergy and religious. A memorial sculpture designed by a gifted local artist to be erected on parish land where children have been abused – in the parishes where Mgr. John Day served, or Gerard Ridsdale, or Peter Searson, or Jim Fletcher, or Denis McAlinden, or at the school where Brennan and Denham taught, or Rex Brown at the cathedral in Armidale, Vince Kiss in Wagga Wagga – wherever.

Commission a poet of renown to write a series of lamentations, a musician to compose a series of dirges to be proclaimed in churches and spiritual gatherings, addressing the pain, the destruction, the horror, the confusion, the scandal experienced by the faithful, the families and the victims. A special series of cleansing rituals available for use in the parishes, schools, the cathedral churches and at church central.

The bishops could arrange for the drafting of a modern rite of exorcism addressing evil powers and spirits in our midst, with readings, prayers and blessings to bring comfort to suffering victims and their families. Perhaps a victims' chapel in a silent corner of every church where victims and members

of their families could go to reflect and pray.

Victims should be at the centre of the institutional response. And the welfare of victims and their families should receive regular mention in the Prayers of the Faithful at Sunday masses. Remember the 3 Hail Marys we used to recite at the end of Mass – for the conversion of Mother Russia. The so-called traditionalists among us might like to re-install this practice and offer the Hail Marys for the gift of clerical chastity, for our broken priests and brothers, for peace and the gift of forgetfulness for victims of clerical abuse, and the gift of integrity and transparency for our misguided leaders. Remember also the *Nine First Fridays* and devotion to the suffering *Sacred Heart*. There's a lot to think about.

A dedicated website should be set up to disseminate information on the topic of sexual abuse, on the obligation to report assaults to secular authorities and how to do it, on how to seek help (pastoral and emotional), how to make a claim for compensation, who to approach to obtain assistance in crafting a detailed statement etc. Each diocese should appoint an episcopal vicar to accompany victims and their families on their journey.

The Vatican and diocesan archives should be opened so that victims and members of their families can discover for themselves what the authorities knew of paedophilic practices in the organization and when they knew. Moves should already be afoot to identify by name and demote those who have been involved in cover-ups and protection, and to sack offenders. There must be some heads to roll somewhere in the world.

A revamped theology of priesthood might allow a simple ceremony of de-ordination and de-commissioning to emerge. Honorific titles should be removed posthumously from the archived records of dead offenders. The institution should be prepared to name and shame offenders in its midst and not leave that task to the press or websites such as Broken Rites. I presume that behind the scenes, many questions are being asked and maximum efforts being made, involving social scientists, PR experts, ethicists and moral theologians to rework the official church line on human sexuality, celibacy, transgender issues, on power structures within the church, on clericalism, the selection and training of candidates for the priesthood, the seal of the confessional and many other issues.

A secular society and a Royal Commission should not be left to do all the heavy lifting – to ask all the awkward questions, to prescribe the medications and recommend the surgical procedures. The institution has been missing in action, paralysed by a lack of imagination, by incompetence at the top and a mad belief that if they keep their heads down, the whole mess will eventually go away.

The church has to own this worldwide scandal.

Originally published on [Pearls and Irritations](#), reprinted with permission.

*Dr Chris Geraghty is a former priest of the archdiocese of Sydney, a retired judge of the District Court of NSW, and the author of a recent publication, *Virgins and Jezebels – the Origins of Christian Misogyny*.*

FRATELLI TUTTI

Kate McElwee

Pope Francis' encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, is a profound manifesto, calling for kindness, detachment from market capitalism and solidarity in action as we reckon and recover from a global pandemic. However, the controversial title, which is a quote from St. Francis of Assisi, (All Brothers, but also in modern Italian, All Siblings) and the touchstone framework of "fraternity" cast an unfortunate androcentric shadow over the mostly radical text.

The English translation refers repeatedly to *Brothers and Sisters*, perhaps in response to the legitimate criticisms of the title, but linguistics aside, no women theologians or thinkers were quoted in the text — not even St. Clare, a partner in ministry with St. Francis. While there is a nod to intersectionality and the double oppressions experienced by women, the irony of these words coming from the head of a patriarchal institution is not lost on me.

Similarly, the organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story. Indeed, “doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights”. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 23)

Nor is equality achieved by an abstract proclamation that “all men and women are equal”. Instead, it is the result of the conscious and careful cultivation of fraternity. Those capable only of being “associates” create closed worlds. Within that framework, what place is there for those who are not part of one’s group of associates, yet long for a better life for themselves and their families? (*Fratelli Tutti*, 104)

The proposed solution of "fraternity" as an antidote to inequality simply does not get to the root of gender injustice that keeps women out of the footnotes of the encyclical, outside of the halls of decision-making power, and excluded from ordained ministries. We can celebrate and pray on beautiful words, but we must work until "abstract proclamations" are rights and rites realized and enjoyed by all people.

Pope Francis calls for genuine encounter in order to deeply understand and transform our relationships in the world. We ask the same of him: walk alongside those women and non-binary people who long for a voice in their Church, honour their vocations, and transform the structures that harm our human family.

As Anna Rowlands said in a recent article, “We live in a world that is still structured by gender inequality, and the church has to wrestle with that as much as the world has to wrestle with it.”

Kate McElwee is the Executive Director of the Women's Ordination Conference.

OPENING

Judith Lynch

This week as Melbourne began easing its way out of lockdown, the agapanthus lining one side of our driveway began their yearly budding. Long-legged stems are appearing, each one holding high a promise of summer in their little almond-shaped, green embrace. When they were planted a few years ago, neighbours warned us that agapanthus are frowned upon as an environmental weed. Apart from gum trees, most of the plants that sprinkle seasonal colour across the thin, rocky dirt in our valley are classified as weeds. What to do? My dream of a summer of deep blue flowers pre-programmed to keep on flowering despite heat and intermittent watering won the day. I've had months of shutdown time to think about the personal and spiritual implications of weeds, facing unrealistic expectations that life should be consistently graced with good things and instead living in the unwanted, weedy stranglehold of Covid-19. These Christmassy flowers are a sign of hope in a struggling world. Perhaps that's why they are also known as Star of Bethlehem.

Have you ever felt like this – that you are standing in two different places? That's how I feel as I watch the evening news, read the weekend papers and some evenings dip in and out of *The Drum*. They help me keep abreast of what's happening in this Covid world. That's one place. The other place is my God space, faith, religion, spirituality – whatever you call it. Right now it seems quite empty. Once I would have looked for it in a church building, but they're closed, in lockdown, and any way it's not the building I miss, but something more subtle. I don't want, or even need a Sunday church, but a capital C Church, one that feels more at home in shopping mall, a drop-in centre, a community house where it doesn't feel uncomfortable to talk about the God stuff in our lives. I want a Church that is integrated with the everyday spaces of our lives as they unfold.

Judith Scully is an Australian woman with a background in things religious. She writes about the God dimension and depths in everyday issues, relationships and experiences – without the church-speak.



A NEW WAY OF THINKING FOR WOMEN AND MEN

Joan Chittister

It is necessary for all of us, at all times, to understand that female and feminist are not the same things. Feminists are people who believe that the notion of gendering, of defining the sexes by traits and limiting them in life on physical grounds to separate roles, should be replaced by the notion of universal personhood. Surely God did not make one sex simply for the sake of waiting on the other.

It is necessary to realize that feminists come in two genders—female sometimes, but not always, and male, often, though too rarely recognized either by women or the men themselves.

In fact, it is only my feminist brothers who are any proof to me whatsoever that humanity and creation as God made it is really possible. To those brothers, I owe my love. Each of them, male and female, reflects a different experience, yes, but each is searching for the same thing— a heart of flesh and a soul that's soft.

Feminism is a new worldview. Feminism is a spirituality that the world and the church ignore to the peril of us all. Feminism is about another way of looking at life, about another set of values designed to nurture a dying globe and rescue any people too long ground under foot, too long ignored, unseen, invisible.

Feminism is about a new way of thinking for both women and men who are tired of the carnage, sickened by the exploitation of the globe, disillusioned by the power struggles and searching—as Ezekiel promises—for a heart of flesh in a world of stone. Feminism is, in other words, not a women's question: It is the human question of the century. It is the spiritual question of all time. It's not about getting what men already have. Not on your life. What men have is not nearly enough. Feminism is about getting a better world, for everybody.

Feminism, a different cluster of values, a distinct worldview, comes to correct patriarchy's skewed concepts of who should be rulers and who are ruled, of who are weak and who are strong, of what is right and what is wrong, of what is a man and what is a woman. Feminism does not come to destroy men. If anything, it comes to save men from imprisonment by a system that cramps the human development of men all the while it purports to give them power. Feminists are not asking men to be less than manly. Feminists are asking women and men not to buy into patriarchal systems that destroy them both. Feminism comes to bring both men and women to the fullness of life, and wholeness of soul for which we feminists—both women and men—call us to the Christianity of a Jesus who preceded the patriarchal church, the corporate world, and the nuclearized government. They call us to listen to the Canaanites in our midst, to include women in our groups, to do away with rigid roles, to open synods and seminaries and chanceries everywhere, to see ourselves as part of the whole rather than its potentates, to go through life as partners rather than as power mongers, to devote ourselves to more than ourselves.

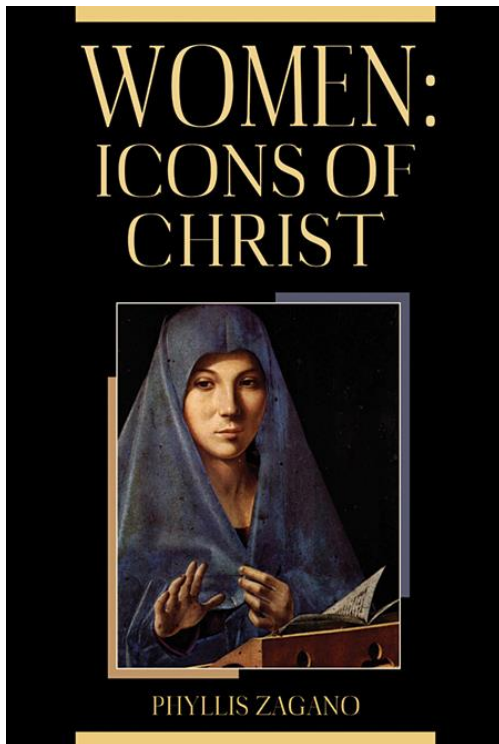
An extract from [Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men](#),

Sister Joan D. Chittister, O.S.B. is an American [Benedictine](#) nun, theologian, author, and speaker. She has served as Benedictine prioress and Benedictine federation president, president of the [Leadership Conference of Women Religious](#), and co-chair of the [Global Peace Initiative of Women](#).

INCLUDING WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Marilyn Hatton

Phyllis Zagano's latest book *Women: Icons of Christ* is a must read for all who desire equality for women in our world and an inclusive practice of Catholic faith. The critical issue Zagano presents in this book is that ordaining women to the diaconate is not a new or forbidden act in Catholic history but rather a return to a practice that endured for hundreds of years.



Zagano is Senior Research Associate in Residence and Adjunct Professor of Religion at Hofstra University, New York. Her scholarship on women and the diaconate is well-known and she is a respected contributor to international forums.

From the *New Testament* onwards Zagano shows that women were active members of the evolving Christian community, consistent with the culture and custom of the time, they were ordained in the same way as their male counterparts by the laying on of hands and calling the Holy Spirit. They ministered to people through baptism, teaching catechism, providing altar service, spiritual direction, confession, and anointing the sick until the twelfth century.

With her usual rigorous scholarship Zagano cites literary, historical and epigraphical evidence that indicate the presence of women in the diaconate. She identifies how the clerical culture of the Catholic church developed from

Christ's time on, revealing how the appalling vilification of women increased to the extent that the clerical culture had snuffed out women's voices and leadership in sacramental ministry by the twelfth century. Women deacons in western Christianity were barred from even entering the sanctuary and handling sacred vessels.

This clerical culture, which Pope Francis calls 'a cancer in our midst', continues to destroy our church's ability to bring Christ's message of love and justice to our world. It impacts destructively on all women but particularly on women and children in countries whose governments have poor human rights records that do not recognise women's equality.

Zagano's opening question is 'Who can be an icon of Christ?' She states that 'Beneath every objection to restoring women to the ordained diaconate is the suggestion that women cannot image Christ. Of course, women do not, cannot "image" the human male Jesus exactly. But the extraordinary fact of the Incarnation is that Jesus, God, became human. Women are human. And all humans are made in the image and likeness of God.'

The question haunts her. She notes that 'documents of the Second Vatican Council teach that all good people who are part of the Church, all good people caught within the net the world calls Christianity, all these good people relying on the exquisite promise of Christ's resurrection are the Body of **Christ**'.

It would stand to reason, then, that "all good people" means precisely that. "All good people" means all good men and women.'

Our church leaders' refusal to acknowledge women's equality and share ministry with women is transparently misogynistic and not Christ like. To the world it looks like misogyny and hypocrisy that obstructs the Church's message and mission for good in the world. Even when initiatives for reform arise and commissions are established their recommendations are rejected. A pattern of rejection and resistance to change has developed.

In the 1960's, Pope Paul VI rejected the first Commission's report and presented *Humanae Vitae* in 1968; in April 1976 the Pontifical Biblical Commission consulted on the possibility of women's priesthood stated that 'scripture alone does not exclude women from ordination'. This was disregarded and in 1994 Pope John Paul II issued *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* banning the discussion of the issue on church premises.

Then in 2016 the first commission on the role of women deacons in the early church, on which Zagano represented the USA, was disregarded. Let's hope and pray the new commission has more success. Last year at the Amazonian Synod, the issue of married priests and deacons was rejected despite a two thirds majority vote in its favour. Even in the last weeks, misogyny has raised its ugly head in the title of the Pope's most recent exhortation *Fratelli Tutti* (Brothers all). First thought to be a mistake, when concerns were expressed and suggestions made to add '*sorelli*' or sisters to the title. The request was refused. All these actions reflect our leadership's fear of losing the support of their colleagues who wish to maintain power and distrust and dislike women. This all impacts negatively on women's lives.

Fr. Frank Brennan SJ in his homily when *Fratelli Tutti* was released, which coincided with the delivery of Australia's national budget, pointed to the fact that the ABC's panel to comment on the social justice aspects of the national budget, happened to choose all prominent women who offered rigorous and competent critiques on national television. In contrast to the Catholic Church that was not prepared to acknowledge women, who represent more than half the church, in the title of its last exhortation.

Women: Icons of Christ is a compact, though sometimes dense, resource that offers a wealth of excellent information and knowledge to all working in Church reform. While Zagano writes of the experience of Catholicism in US, there is so much in this book that is relevant to us in Australia. Following the horror of child abuse and the recommendations of the National Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse of Children which emphasised the issue of women's participation, the Catholic community is preparing for a Plenary Council, due to be held in Adelaide in October 2021. This Plenary Council is the first such Council since 1937 in Australia. It seeks to look at reforms that will make our church relevant to our times. Preparatory consultations have indicated that women's participation in decision making and ministry is the governance issue most reflected in the consultations and thousands of submissions.

Restoring ordination of women to the diaconate would immediately start to change this clerical culture and move towards full equality for women and all.

Zagano states that restoring women to the diaconate 'is a legal not doctrinal issue and that minor

changes to appropriate canons will allow the Church to provide for its pastoral needs. Without doubt, the needs of the Church universal must be addressed, but in a manner so that individual local churches are able make their own decisions based on their own needs.’

Committed Catholics in Australia would agree. Zagano notes that Pope Benedict XVI modified five canons of the 1983 Code of Canon Law including two regarding ordination Canons 1008 and 1009 to make clear that the diaconate and priesthood are separate and distinct orders. The point she makes here is that if canon law has been changed before it can be changed again. In the case of the diaconate it can happen very simply by adding ‘women’ to Canon 1024. So many women and men yearn for and would welcome being ministered to by women. Our world rejects pious religiosity and is crying out for a Catholic ecclesiology to guide us to live life in Christ’s message of social justice and love.

Zagano’s new book *Women: Icons of Christ* presents new hope for an inclusive church. Importantly, if the church is unable to treat people equally, the church will not realise its enormous potential for our world. Restoring women to ordination in the diaconate would be a substantial step towards equality for all in our church.

Originally published in [Eureka Street](#), reprinted with permission.

Marilyn Hatton is a member of Catholics Speak Out, Concerned Catholics and convener of the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform. She has represented Australia at international forums concerned with full equality for all and an inclusive Catholic church. Marilyn has held professional public sector positions concerned with national policy and programs to improve the status of women.

WATAC HISTORY PROJECT

When and how did you first become involved in WATAC?

What influenced you?

For you, what were the most beneficial aspects of WATAC?

What were the highlights?

What do you think were the main achievements of WATAC?

Anything further you would like to share?

Your reflections / responses can be as brief or long as you desire. If you know of anyone else who you think would like to respond to these questions, I would certainly like to hear from them also.

Responses can be sent to Dr Patricia Madigan OP at pmadigan@opeast.org.au by 20 December 2020.

HAND WASHING OR SOCIAL DISTANCING IN THE TIME OF PELL

Gail Freyne

The parish priest, Jorge Bergoglio could afford the luxury of welcoming with open arms an old colleague whom he believed to have been falsely accused of sexual abuse. Even as Pope Francis he could have indulged himself with warm greetings in private. But the public display in photographs and videos of unqualified acceptance – most headlines have called it vindication – has profoundly dismayed thousands of survivors and their families around the world.

We all know that each of us is in need of forgiveness. Just a few short years after Fr. Bergoglio was a student in Ireland, Gordon Wilson of Enniskillen forgave the IRA members who planted the bomb that killed his daughter, Marie. He condemned the violence even as he forgave the men just as Jesus of Nazareth forgave the thief without condoning theft. We cannot wash our hands of people we find dangerous or venal. We have been shown how to deal with compassion for the sinner even as we condemn the sin.

There are only two people who know with total certainty whether or not George Pell sexually abused his accuser – one of them is not Pope Francis. That being the case, in choosing how to deploy himself in relation George Pell the Pope should have made his public response a pastoral one. The heart of the problem is that Francis, in order to make a proper pastoral response to Australian Catholics, needed to place a much wider frame around Pell's multi-layered and ongoing relationship with the sexual abuse scandal in this country. Francis must know by now that the cardinal is an extremely divisive figure in Australia. Many in this country believe witness J, many more believe that Pell has covered up sexual abuse by clerics for decades. Unfortunately, this is the wider context in which Pope Francis has chosen to rehabilitate Pell. In Australia, although the criminal justice aspect of this case is concluded the problems of the less than robust response of the Church is a running sore.

It would appear that, once again, Pope Francis has failed to understand the height, the length, the breadth and the depth of the problem of sexual abuse within the Church. First and foremost, are the thousands upon thousands of survivors, their parents, spouses, children, even mourners. Secondly, are the disillusioned, those who have walked away from the church with the words of George Pell ringing in their ears: we made “enormous mistakes” in relation to clerical sexual abuse. Dr. Cathy Kezelman, president of the Blue Knot Foundation, testified to the breadth of pain of survivors. Referring to the large increase in phone calls after the High Court decision she said, “And not just the number. There was a depth of hopelessness and despair that they had not experienced before”. Photographs of the leaders of the Australian Church, Pope Francis and Cardinal George Pell, smiling, shoulder to shoulder, in the Vatican, the one fully affirming the other, Santo Subito!, can only exacerbate these feelings of hopelessness and despair.

Francis, pastoral leader of all the world's Catholics, would have been much wiser to have publicly socially distanced himself from Pell. He could have chosen the path of the Archbishop of Adelaide, Patrick O'Regan, who advised that Pell should “gracefully retire” from holding any formal roles in the Church. Unfortunately, Francis took the other road, full throttle, stating that Pell was ‘hounded’, using the Italian *accanimento*, and was unjustly accused. “Someone had it in for him” (the translator's

phrase) he prayed during morning Mass at Santa Marta, the day the judgement was released.

Even more unfortunately, Francis rushed to this judgement before he had the opportunity to read the un-redacted, one hundred odd pages of the Royal Commission's report into institutional sexual abuse dealing with the involvement of Pell in this national tragedy. The report is scathing in its comments on Pell's role in the "catastrophic failure of leadership" in the Ballarat Diocese. There has now been such a deluge of claims against the church that the Supreme Court of Victoria has established a specialised Institutional Liability List to administer the lawsuits.

I would suggest that if we paraphrase the written words of the High Court judgement we can say that the Royal Commission's Report 'ought to have caused Francis, acting rationally, to entertain the likelihood', or at least the possibility, that his Cardinal has not come to the court of public opinion with clean hands. There is just too much evidence pointing to the fact that the victims were never Pell's first concern either.

The Pope has failed to take into account these probabilities. He has also failed to weigh that other fact – that he is the spiritual leader of all Catholics. He has known, full well, as priest, bishop, cardinal and now Pope, that the Catholic Church has been notorious for decades for doing everything in its power to silence victims. Then, if they can't do that, to play the justice system against them. We know that the Church has "had it in" for victims, that they have been "hounded" from chanceries for making accusations, have had statutes of limitations used to delegitimise them, have been forced to sign secrecy agreements, the whole book of evasive stratagems thrown at them.

Maybe Francis never heard Pell defend the church with the allegory involving a haulage company which couldn't be held responsible for the predatory behaviour of one of its truck drivers. But Francis does know about responsibility, both legal as well as moral. So well organised, so widespread and so despised was the Church's absolute determination to shield itself by whatever means that it ironically produced the result it feared about all others: a change in the law of responsibility. A new formulation of the law of institutional liability has arisen and it is a form of liability that persists – even for actions long past, even when the perpetrator is dead, the victim still has a defendant to sue. Looking ahead, the damage, and the damages, are going to be serious.

What position can Pope Francis take in relation to Pell's involvement in upcoming civil litigation should his legal defence be found wanting? Will his rush to judgement mean that again he will have to offer a Chilean-style retraction? Would not this have been an opportunity to call again for Zero tolerance, certainly for felonies if not for misdemeanours? The Pope could have stated that if a single substantiated act of sexual abuse of a minor is enough to justify permanent removal from the priesthood, would the policy not also apply to a single act of cover-up by the episcopacy? We have had so many talking-shops: symposia in 2012 and 2019, the Pontifical Council for the Protection of Minors, a Synod of Youth, a Letter to the People of God following the damning report from the Pennsylvania Grand Jury investigation. Isn't it time for the Pope to insist that the world's bishops take some concrete, cohesive, accountable action? We have known all this for decades, there is no justification for further delay or the lame repetition of 'we didn't do the right thing'. Enough.

For these reasons it was incumbent upon Francis to socially distance himself from Pell in order to avoid giving scandal. There is more than a courtroom text to consider in a case like this to assess the

repercussions of Francis' loudly proclaimed loyalty via a staged-managed, not so private audience with video and photo ops. When the bishop of Rome, the bishop of all bishops, continues the long history within the Catholic Church, of disbelieving the survivors of sexual abuse we have an expanded scandal on our hands.

Nearly three years ago, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, in an act of Franciscan care trumping Jesuitical legalism, attempted to heal a parallel scandal in Chile. When Francis spoke of 'calumny' and 'scandal', he rebuked his pontiff, stating that "It is understandable that Pope Francis's statements Were a source of great pain to survivors ... Words that convey the message 'if you cannot prove your claims then you will not be believed' abandon those who have suffered reprehensible criminal violations of their human dignity and relegate survivors to discredited exile."

Pope Francis would have been right to privately refuse to wash his hands of his friend. But he failed to be friend to all of us, and he caused further torment to many, while further damaging the reputation of the institutional church, by not socially distancing himself in public from George Pell.

Originally published on [Pearls and Irritations](#), reprinted with permission.

Gail Grossman Freyne is a family therapist, mediator and author. Her most recent book is The Curious Case of Inequality: A Journey for Justice with Dorothy L. Sayers.

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'FRATELLI TUTTI': PAPAL DREAMS OR VATICAN DIVERSION?

Ilia Delio

On Oct. 3, the feast of the [transitus](#) of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis signed his new encyclical, [Fratelli Tutti](#), on social order and universal brotherhood. As in his previous encyclical, "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)," the pope calls attention to the world's problems, the radical disparity between rich and poor, the bloated consumer culture that is enhancing global warming, and the rampant individualism associated with excess wealth. The encyclical aims to promote a universal movement toward fraternity and social friendship grounded in compassionate love, following the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37).

Who could argue against the valiant efforts of a world leader trying to restore a sense of moral goodness and rightness in the world? Indeed, my purpose is not to belie the pope, whose heart seems to be in the right place; however, it is to call attention to the deeper problem underlying the world's problems, namely, the evaporation of religion.

On this note, the pope's encyclical is alarming. Jesus of Nazareth admonished his disciples not to take the splinter out of their brother's eye without first removing the plank from their own eye (Matthew 7:3-5). This admonition bears reflection in light of the pope's advice to the world.

St. Clare of Assisi, who was the spiritual partner of Francis of Assisi and known as the strongest stone of the whole Franciscan movement, wrote to her sisters: "We must be mirrors and examples to one another so that we may be mirrors and examples to the world."

If we preach the Gospel ideals of Jesus, then we must first be willing to put them into practice. After all, if we want the world to overcome its addiction to power, money and progress, then we must be willing to disengage ourselves from these things, for where else shall the world find its image?

Francis of Assisi was aware that to live a God-filled life he would have to undergo conversion of heart. All the great world religions promote some type of self-discipline in order to reflect divinity. Each religion, in its own way, realizes that we do not change the world, we change ourselves and the way we see the world. A changed life changes the world. This is the essence of Francis of Assisi.

The pope advocates grand ideas that stop short of mandating public policies: justice, community, compassion and, best of all, brotherhood and sisterhood. The irony of his message is that the Roman Catholic Church is the most homophobic institution in the world today. With a plea for human solidarity and fraternity, the pope seeks to establish equity in the world, describing a vision of universal brotherhood where "all people are my brothers and sisters, and ... the world truly belongs to everyone."

How do we make sense of this in a church that does not regard women as equal? A church that will not allow the ordination of women or even the ability of women to preach? A church that insists on mandating the rights of a woman's body? A church that excludes LGBTQ persons from full acceptance and does not allow divorced and remarried persons to participate in the liturgy?

How does the pope tell the world what it needs to do when he spearheads an institution grounded in

patriarchy, hierarchy and ontological differences?

Some of the best critical scholarship on racism today points to the Catholic Church as the very source of the problem of racism, early Christians distinguishing themselves from the Jews as the pure and saved ones. How does the pope seek to establish a world of equity when theological doctrine is rooted in a metaphysics of substance, where maleness is ontologically superior to femaleness and whiteness is salvific?

According to a recent Forbes [article](#), the Vatican is hardly a model of fraternity; rather it is ensnared in power struggles, including ideological differences, financial abuse and an unresolved clerical paedophilia crisis that has redefined justice as reprimand or loss of job without criminal prosecution.

The Vatican is [steeped](#) in secrecy and clericalism and there seems to be no real efforts to clean out the cobwebs stifling the institution. While Francis laments the problems of the world, he does not acknowledge that, in many areas, including health care and education, global life has been [improving](#). The overall poverty rate has [decreased](#) in the last 10 years and, while there is a long way to go to equilibrate a global standard of living, the efforts to do so are not entirely absent.

The fact is, technology has sped up the rate of evolution in the last 30 years, and countries where technology has grown significantly have also seen a reduction in poverty, and improvements in education and health care. China is a case in point; so too is [India](#).

The fact that computer technology has changed the global landscape so quickly begs consideration. [Margaret Wertheim](#) notes that cyberspace began to fill a void in the mid-20th century. We began to study matter, learn about quantum physics, and invented ways to extend human intelligence.

It is interesting to note that Vatican II and the birth of the cyborg are cotemporaneous events; yet Vatican II was never implemented sufficiently to effect real change in the church. Cyborgs on the other hand, spawned a new philosophy of [transhumanism](#) and a new culture of human transcendence. For all practical purposes, technology supplanted religion in the 20th century.

We are on a technological speed-dial but we do not know where we are going, if we are going together, or whether we should advance at all. The rate of technological evolution is outpacing the capacity for human reflection and critical choices, and the speed of progress is breathless. The pope wants universal brotherhood, but the human community wants new life.

Novelty and creativity mark human transcendence. Following the thesis of the late Canadian historian David Noble, creativity is the mark of divinization. To become like God is to transcend ourselves, to invent, create, go beyond what we are to become what we are not. This is as true in North America as it is in Cochabamba or the Sudan.

Unfortunately, the West has stamped its giant footprint over the face of the globe and it wants the world to follow its maxim: God is in the machine and no longer in the churches. The rest of the world follows because the God of institutional religion is too white, male, old and practically dead.

Technology drives the markets today and to slow down neoliberal economics is to reframe technology along religious and ethical lines. To do so requires much more than proposing a common good ethic or rearranging the ideas of Thomas Aquinas to meet the needs of the world.

We need a metaphysics that adequately engages a world of process and change. We need a theology

that is at home in evolution, as Teilhard de Chardin [asked](#): "Who will give evolution its own God?"

Without significant theological revisioning and without dismantling the patriarchy of the institutional church, the pope is speaking to a few close friends while the rest of the world lines up for the newest iPhone. The pandemic is a mirror of global dysfunction, as the pope recognizes, but it also shows a world bereft of a credible God and a vitalizing faith, one as innovative and creative as the latest technology.

I suspect Francis is speaking to the world because no one is listening to him at home, or perhaps because he is afraid to speak to his own brothers, afraid to dismantle the cult of a patriarchal priesthood and open the doors of the church to real community, one in which women are granted full rights and full freedom.

The world is begging for some type of direction, for a credible God, for a vitality of faith that does not stifle growth and progress. The world will change when human persons change, when the human is empowered by the spark of love within, when religion becomes not stifling but the source of novelty and creativity. We need a new religion of the Earth, Teilhard de Chardin wrote, a religion of evolution, a God who is at home with incompleteness, chaos and complexity. I am waiting for the pope to address this concern.

Originally published in [The Global Sisters Report](#), reprinted with permission.

Ilia Delio, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Washington, D.C., is the Josephine C. Connelly Endowed Chair in Theology at Villanova University. She is the author of 22 books, including Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology and Consciousness (Orbis Books 2015), and the general editor of the series Catholicity in an Evolving Universe.

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS

As the current wave of the pandemic is abating it is possible that more of our members will resume their group meetings. We recommend that all group leaders follow the guidelines issued by the health departments in their respective states regarding meetings.

We also ask that, until further notice, each group leader maintains a record of each WATAC meeting with the date and time of the meeting and the names and contact telephone/mobile numbers of each attendee. Normal precautions, e.g. handwashing, physical distancing, etc. are recommended at meetings until the pandemic has abated and a vaccine is available.

INTO THE SILENCE

Danielle Lynch

Until recently, I wouldn't have called myself a songwriter. I talked myself out of song writing in a crisis of confidence in my last year of school. Before that, I had played in a couple of small bands and I had quite a collection of original songs. I threw my songs away and have no record of them! Music was still important to me – I did a music degree and explored the theological meaning of music in my PhD – but I didn't feel that I had anything original to contribute as a composer. I was lucky to get a few nudges of encouragement to think about starting to write some songs again. I honestly don't know why I write songs now, apart from having a musical idea I want to explore and see where it goes or feeling drawn to express something in music. Sometimes it turns into a full song and sometimes I abandon it. I'm not particularly patient with the process, so if I don't make progress with an idea, I shelve it.

The first song I wrote in over 10 years was 'Sophia.' I was running a professional development session in 2017 for the RE staff at St Augustine's on recontextualising scripture with students. I was encouraging them to allow students to be creative in drawing out what a piece of scripture means for them and wanted to demonstrate the process. I meditated on Wisdom 7:22-30 and wrote Sophia. I think I had just attended a lecture with Laurie Brink talking about 'friends of God.' Not long after, I wrote 'Unanswered Questions' for a theology conference to convey something of my faith experience. In some ways, it is a modern-day psalm. Afterwards, one of the people attending hung back to say to me: "You have a voice in music. Use it." Small moments like that have had an impact on me – I slowly came to realise that a song doesn't have to be a masterpiece to speak to others. I have recently presented at the Women as Church conference with 'Who I Am' recontextualising the concept of the image of God, and 'Broke the Frame' was used as the theme song for the conference.

My recording journey started last year, when I was working on a paper on gendered language for and about God with Maeve Louise Heaney. We each wrote a song and we presented at a conference. When we finished singing each song, there was an unplanned moment of profound and prayerful silence and stillness: I realised I was witnessing the power of song as theology. We recorded both songs at The Song Store in Melbourne, where Maeve was recording her fifth album *Strange Life: The Music of Doubtful Faith* (soon to be released!). 'Into Silence,' which is a recontextualization of the Lord's Prayer, was my song, and became the title track. The album was begun...

When I moved to Melbourne at the start of 2020, I thought it was a great opportunity to continue recording some of my songs. I didn't consciously plan an album concept for *Into Silence*, though undoubtedly you will hear some themes: trying to make sense of faith and doubt; sound and silence; interconnection and relationship; affirming the dignity and beauty of each person just as they are; struggling to stay within a faith community despite its failings. However, I hope each person hears more that resonates with their own experience. I chose to start the album with 'Into Silence' and finish with 'Unanswered Questions' so it begins and ends in prayer, though I realise that many people will use shuffle when streaming! I actually had to rethink the album a couple of times, thanks to lockdowns, so there's also an element of serendipity in its final form.

I do have a few favourites on the album, but they are personal to me, and the whole point of songs is that they take on a life of their own, so I hope they come to take on new meanings to the people who



listen to them. The tongue-in-cheek ‘Human Too’ always makes me think of my grandad, who taught me how to swim, ride a bike, change a tyre, do DIY, build a computer, travel, never stop learning, and to chase my dreams. I hope there is something in the album for everyone: in the range of styles from pop-punk to country, or the range of themes from growing up to thinking about God. Already, within a couple of weeks of releasing the album, people from all over the world have been in touch with me to say they found meaning in one song or another, that they danced with a song, cried with a song, or prayed with a song. It baffles me to think that people are listening to my inner thoughts all over the

world, but, more than that, are finding deeper meaning in them. To paraphrase something Tina Beattie said at the Women as Church conference about childbirth, I feel like in releasing the album *Into Silence*, ‘my private parts are now my public parts.’

You can stream *Into Silence* on Spotify, iTunes, and YouTube. You can purchase an electronic album on Amazon. CDs are in production and will be ready at the end of November. Email danielleannelynch@gmail.com to pre-order a CD.

Links to music

[Spotify](#)

[Itunes](#)

[Youtube](#)

[Amazon](#)

Originally published in the Marist Association Newsletter, reprinted with permission.

Danielle works in theology and the arts. She is currently teaching in Melbourne. Danielle is a member of the Australian Catholic Theological Association. Her doctorate on a theology of music was awarded by the University of Leeds in 2015.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

9 December	WATAC Presents: Celebrating and Planning with WATAC via Zoom
31 December	Closing date for nominations for Life Membership
10 February 2021	WATAC Presents: Music and Theology
6 March 2021	AGM and Luncheon

THE LETTER

Tracey Edstein

This piece was written in response to an episode of Compass (What Now for Catholics? Series 33, ABC TV) in which Geraldine Doogue, addressing a Melbourne gathering with Francis Sullivan, said, 'I'm trying to imagine institutions that are set up completely separately and invite the bishops to join us where, in a way, the bishops come to see what very good custodians we will be.'

Bishop Bruce sighed with relief and said a silent prayer of thanks as he held the letter in his hand.

He was sure it was the letter he had been waiting to receive, hoping to receive, for months, but he had never felt confident enough to voice his hope to anyone, not even his closest friends or family. Nor had he confided in any of his fellow bishops.

Ever since the schism, he himself had been torn inside. He fought a daily battle between his lifelong commitment to The Church, which had led to his accepting what he discerned as a call to priesthood, and his ever-deepening conviction that The Church which had nurtured and eventually ordained him, not only priest, but bishop, was no longer the Church of Jesus.

He still presided at Mass, he still visited the faithful – sometimes in preference to the endless paperwork and meetings that consumed his days – and he still read everything he could find that kept him linked to the people who believed fiercely that a different way was beckoning....

Those who came to Mass were older and greyer – nothing new there – but there was more. They didn't present as people of hope and joy. It seemed a long time since they had read John 10:10: 'I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.' They were pleasant, respectful – not one of them ever called him Bruce, despite his saying repeatedly, 'Call me Bruce – it's my name.' They were faith-filled but he detected an almost visible fear.

These were men and women (now mostly women) who had been faithful to the Mass their whole lives, had scrimped and saved to send their children to Catholic schools and mourned when those children married on a beach or worse, just 'lived in sin'. Yet they loved their children deeply and saw them as children of Go(o)d, concerned for justice and resistant to the consumerist culture in which they lived.

Those who had a gay son or daughter suffered because they believed in a church that was at best ambivalent about the child their love had brought into being.

Underlying it all was fear – of the future, of not measuring up, despite a life of fidelity, and of what followed this life. They might voice lingering doubts in foxholes – in the homes of trusted friends and family members – but outwardly, they were loyal. Too many questions just leave people questioning, and these good people were at a stage when they needed certainty.

In the end the schism came quickly. He wondered how the story would be told by future historians. Would it be seen as inevitable, bold, foolish or the most authentic response to the gospel in a long time?

However, that was not his concern now.

He opened the letter, with a mixture of nervousness and excitement.

Dear Bruce,

We write to you because we see you as a man of Jesus, a man we believe to be committed to the gospel above The Church, a man we find pastoral, approachable and genuine.

As you know, we are shaping a new way of being disciples of Jesus together. Far from rejecting our shared Catholic heritage – the prayer tradition, the example of the saints (while roundly rejecting hagiography and the worship of relics), music, art, wisdom writings, and deep deep faith – we are working hard to weave a new cloth to replace the shroud in which we found ourselves.

We reject all that we see as inimical to the gospel and to a healthy church –

- a culture that continues to resist the changes demanded by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse;
- misogyny (let's call it for what it is);
- clericalism and its frequent corollary, careerism;
- an increasingly corporate culture;
- clergy who still cling to titles, privileges and forms of dress (including dresses) that set them apart;
- the paucity of leaders who emerge from, and are endorsed by, the People of God;
- minimal accountability on the part of the ordained to those they were ordained to serve;
- a predilection for ordaining men who will 'toe the party line' and who are innately conservative;
- a pattern of, at best, 'jumping on the bandwagon' (or not) when a prophetic church would be leading the way;
- a resistance in many quarters to embracing the way of Pope Francis.

We invite you to be one of us. We invite you to listen to our stories and to share yours, to pray with us, to gather around a table with us, to work towards replacing fear and shame with the hope and joy of the gospel.

We have crafted a simple form of gathering and groups of the People of God are following the same form in solidarity all over Australia. For now, we have convenors whom we trust to bring us together and to help us move forward. In time, we believe that authentic, Spirit-led leaders will emerge as they did in the early church – women and men of all backgrounds and orientations – and we will anoint those leaders. We will continue to call everyone by his or her baptismal name and we resist forms of dress that set individuals apart.

Where we were going as The Church was not healthy or life-giving. The Royal Commission was, of course, a wake-up call, and for many, the last straw. We are grateful that the Commission was held but disappointed that for parishioners who stayed in the pews, little has changed.

It highlighted cracks that have been widening for many years, and while governance issues are, we believe, being addressed, we see little evidence of cultural change.

Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6) and so we choose to focus on Jesus above all else.

We hope you will join us.

Yours in Jesus,

The People of God: Old Wine in New Wineskins

PS You won't be needing your mitre.

An original article by Tracey Edstein. Tracey is a former teacher and magazine editor in the Hunter Valley, NSW. She is now a freelance writer with an abiding interest in opportunities for women in the Catholic Church.

A MEDITATION ON HOPE

Elizabeth Lee

(inspired by the Field Hospital Spiritual Exercises developed by Michael Hansen SJ)

People are asked to bring an object that symbolises hope for them.

Advent often is a time to reflect upon Hope. This meditation invites you to connect with your stories of hope, to desire hope, choose hope, to breathe and live the Spirit of hope.

Touch: Connecting with Hope in my life

I invite you to sit comfortably in your seat, feet on the floor, become grounded....

Become aware of your breath, your in-breath and your out-breath....

Sit for a moment holding your symbol of hope...

Recall a small story of someone who gave you hope in challenging, dark or despairing times. Hold that memory.... Allow yourself to connect with the Spirit of Hope... Recognise the importance of hope in your life.... Give thanks for the gift of Hope.

Desire: Desire the gift of greater Hope

Do not cling to events of the past or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already – you can see it now! Is 43:18

Where is hope increasing in your life?...

Where is hope decreasing in your life?...

What diminishes hope in you? ...

Choice: Choosing Hope

What is the invitation as you notice your responses to these questions?

Is there an invitation to move towards greater hope?

Is there an invitation to name, claim and tame those places where hope is absent?

Is there an invitation to explore hope?

Breathe: Breathing in the Spirit of Hope

Once again become aware of your breath, your in-breath and your out-breath....

Breathe in the Spirit of Hope... Breathe it in deeply, wait...

Breathe out this Spirit of Hope into your relationships, your life and all the places where hope is whittled away...

Breathe in, wait, breathe out the Spirit of Hope. Breathing, hopeful, renewed....

Hopeful: Live the Spirit of Hope

As we conclude consider two questions:

Firstly, if possible, how might you make contact and reconnect with the one who made you feel hopeful? ...

Secondly, to whom and how could you offer this Spirit of Hope to someone you know who needs greater hope now?...

Elizabeth Lee is drawn to spiritual direction among the fringes and is exploring creative ways of offering spiritual accompaniment in non-traditional settings. Liz is a member of the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction as well as an active member of The Grail, an international women's spirituality movement.

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

ONLINE BOOK GROUP

Meets monthly via Zoom. Contact *Tracy McEwan* events@watac.net.au

STAMPS

The Sisters of St Joseph collect used stamps as a fundraising activity to support their work in Peru. Please send used stamps directly to

Sr Helen Saunders, Locked Box 3031, Burwood NSW 1805

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

9 December	WATAC Presents: Celebrating and Planning with WATAC via Zoom
31 December	Closing date for nominations for Life Membership
10 February	WATAC Presents: Music and Theology
6 March 2021	AGM, Guest Speaker, Luncheon, Life Membership Awards.