

Perspectives on and Hopes for Lay Governance in a Missionary Synodal Church: An Australian Perspective

Gabrielle McMullen AM¹



¹ Gabrielle McMullen was previously Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at Australian Catholic University and a Trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries. She is currently a Trustee Director of Mercy Ministry Companions and a member of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Synod of Bishops Working Group. She was a member of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Future Governance Working Party referred to in this paper.

Perspectives on and Hopes for Lay Governance in a Missionary Synodal Church: An Australian Perspective

Gabrielle McMullen AM¹

The Second Vatican Council brought forth new understandings of the laity's role in the Church. Its decree *Lumen Gentium* calls all the baptised to "carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world".² The emergence of the ministerial public juridic persons (MPJPs) is one creative and significant response to bringing the gifts or charisms of the laity to the mission of the Church in the modern world.

In Australia there are fourteen MPJPs established across the period 1991 to 2023 and the only national umbrella body internationally, the Australian Association of Ministerial PJPs. This paper considers the establishment and conduct of these new Church agencies and offers an Australian perspective on lay governance contributing to a "missionary synodal Church".

Ministerial Public Juridic Persons

In Canon Law, a juridic person is a legal entity established by the Church for one or more specific purposes, analogously to a corporation in civil law. When its purpose, as approved by the competent ecclesial authority, serves the public good, it is designated a public juridic person [Canon 116]. Traditional PJPs include dioceses, parishes and religious institutes. In the case of the so-called ministerial PJPs, their purpose is the stewardship or sponsorship of Church ministries. MPJPs' perpetual status offers stable governance to education, health and aged care, and community service ministries which are critical to the mission of the Church.

In the last fifty years religious institutes have increasingly placed their ministries under new civil and canonical governance arrangements. Progressions in civil governance have been required to meet regulatory requirements but have also fostered collaborative arrangements between religious institutes and/or other Church agencies. New canonical governance arrangements reflect not only declining numbers of religious actively involved in their former ministries but also the commitment of many religious institutes to fostering the laity's role in the mission of the Church. The ecclesial status of the MPJPs has enabled ministries transferred by religious institutes to these new Church agencies to continue to relate directly to the Church, comparably to when they were sponsored by the religious institute/s which instigated the MPJP.

The First MPJP

Significantly, the emergence of the first MPJP was a 'grass-roots' deliberative development in the Catholic healthcare sector of the United States of America. Eight American religious institutes had merged their hospitals in 1980 to create a new civil entity entitled Catholic Health Corporation. Five years later with a "track record" of working together, the sponsoring religious institutes took the decision to petition for the establishment of a new juridic person, whereby the

¹ Gabrielle McMullen was previously Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at Australian Catholic University and a Trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries. She is currently a Trustee Director of Mercy Ministry Companions and a member of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Synod of Bishops Working Group. She was a member of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Future Governance Working Party referred to in this paper.

² Vatican II (1964) Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n.31; <https://www.vatican.va/>.

sisters' collaborative arrangement would be replaced with a single sponsor. Importantly, PJP status offered the means “to continue Christ’s healing mission ... to be formally ‘in the Church’ ... to perpetuate the ministry beyond the sponsors’ own lives”. There was no precedent for the requested sponsorship arrangement and a lack of clarity concerning the most appropriate Church authority to establish the new juridic person.³

The sisters’ initial approach was to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) which directed the petitioners to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. When the latter did not act on the petition, the sisters contemplated a rather complex option of establishing a PJP in each diocese where they conducted a ministry but resolved instead to petition for a single PJP in the Archdiocese of Omaha. Following the Archbishop of Omaha’s subsequent conferral with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and, through the apostolic nuncio, with CICLSAL, the sisters were advised to re-petition CICLSAL. Catholic Health Care Federation was duly established by CICLSAL in June 1991 as the canonical sponsor for Catholic Health Corporation.⁴

In less than 50 years we have seen the development of a significant new led-lay sector in the Church. Particularly in Anglophone countries, many religious institutes have transferred their education, health and aged care, and community service ministries to an MPJP. Australian canon lawyer Dr Mary Wright IBVM, who worked at CICLSAL, stated in an address to the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand: “the generally smooth transition of these ministry systems into new governance structures is remarkable, as is the significant growth that has been achieved since this innovation was introduced”.⁵ Significantly, MPJP structures and governance arrangements are often unique, reflecting not only an MPJP’s heritage and the nature of its ministries and resources but also requirements of the local jurisdiction.

Dr Charles Bouchard OP formerly of the Catholic Health Association of the United States of America has described the emergence of the MPJPs as “an ecclesial earthquake. It is radically reshaping the way we understand and govern our institutional commitments”. Their canonical stewards:

*are not just caretakers, holding these ministries in trust until some future day when vowed religious emerge to reclaim their historical role. Lay people are now in this for the long haul, and it will require a new understanding of their baptisms ... and a commitment to the personal formation required by this new vocation.*⁶

The MPJP Canonical Stewards

Each juridic person functions through designated physical persons who serve as its representative according to its approved statutes. In the case of dioceses, parishes and religious

³ Jordan Hite and Jane E. Poe (1992) ‘An Innovative Way to Continue the Ministry’, *Health Progress*, 73(7), 56-58; <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/archive/article/september-1992/an-innovative-way-to-continue-the-ministry>.

⁴ Ibid.; Charles E. Bouchard (2023) ‘The Evolution of Sponsorship Models: A Progress Report – We are Called to Heal. To Unite. To Justice’; <https://www.chausa.org/cha-we-are-called/stories/detail/the-evolution-of-sponsorship-models-a-progress-report>.

⁵ Mary Wright (2018) ‘The Development of the Ministerial Public Juridic Persons: Questions and Challenges’, *Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand Proceedings*, 14-23; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CLSANZ-Proceedings-2018-Development-of-Ministerial-PJPs.pdf>.

⁶ Charles E. Bouchard (2019) ‘100th Anniversary – Sponsors are Called to be Prophets and Reformers’, *Health Progress*; <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/archive/article/may-june-2019/100th-anniversary---sponsors-are-called-to-be-prophets-and-reformers>.

institutes, the representative is the bishop, parish priest or religious institute's leader, respectively. At this point in time, the terminology for those undertaking the canonical governance role in MPJPs varies across jurisdictions. Titles in usage for these canonical stewards include 'trustees', 'councillors', 'members' and 'sponsors'. In Australia, the designation is generally 'trustee'. Similarly, founding religious institutes are variously referred to 'sponsors', 'members', 'religious sponsors', 'founding religious institutes' and 'participating entity'. In this instance, the customary usage in Australia is 'member'.⁷ The Australian terminology is utilised in the remainder of this paper.

Importantly, MPJP trustees exercise their stewardship collegially as a council of canonical stewards. Collectively, their responsibility is to ensure that the MPJP and the temporal assets transferred to the MPJP from the instigating religious institute/s, which are ecclesiastical goods, serve the purpose for which the MPJP was established. The trustees' stewardship encompasses progressing the mission and charism entrusted to the MPJP and fostering its ministries as works of the Catholic Church. They also play a key role in fostering collaborative relations with the wider Church and community and, in particular, the bishops in whose dioceses the MPJP's ministries are located.⁸

A Calling to Trusteeship

A critical lens to bring to the role of trustee is trusteeship as a calling. The role of trustee is a ministry of (canonical) leadership in the Church. It is critical that those called to this role understand the nature of the ministry and have the disposition, and are able to make the time commitment, required to serve as a trustee.

A 'heart for mission' is critical to the role and trustees should actively seek to integrate formation and reflective practice into their activities. As noted above, a fundamental characteristic of the MPJPs is collegial decision-making and relational practices. This is the manner in which trustees should work together and requires them intentionally to cultivate collegial discernment and develop relational practices. The latter are also critical for the trustees' involvements with those who govern, lead and serve in their ministries and those served by the ministries.

Pope Francis' invitation to newly ordained bishops concerning discernment might also have been addressed to MPJP trustees:

*... I invite you to cultivate an attitude of listening, growing in the freedom of relinquishing one's own point of view (when it is shown to be partial and insufficient), to assume that of God. Without letting oneself be conditioned by the eyes of others, make efforts to get to know, with your own eyes, the places and the people, the spiritual and cultural 'tradition' ... entrusted to you ... and to interpret its concrete present in the light of the Gospel, outside of which there is no future for the Church.*⁹

In reflecting on this address, Austin wrote: "... the pope is saying something quite astonishing. He is saying that, through discernment, we can shed our prejudices and limited viewpoints, and take

⁷ Sharon Holland (2011) 'Vatican Expert Unpacks Canonical PJP Process', *Health Progress*; <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/archive/article/september-october-2011/vatican-expert-unpacks-canonical-pjp-process>.

⁸ Association of Ministerial PJPs (2025); <https://ampjp.org.au/about-mpjps/>.

⁹ Pope Francis (2017) *Address to the Bishops Ordained over the Past Year*; https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/september/documents/papa-francesco_20170914_nuovi-vescovi.html.

on a new perspective, God's perspective ... From our side, a lively curiosity about how things look to God prepares the ground for discernment".¹⁰

Exercising collegial leadership and decision-making and fostering relational practices require active listening and dialogue, an intentional commitment to 'journeying together'. In these aspects, an MPJP's council of trustees offers a model of 'missionary, synodal' ministry in this sector. Below I will present the Association of Ministerial PJPs as a second example.

The Australian MPJPs

Contemporaneously with the developments in the United States of America and the establishment of the first MPJP of pontifical right, a canonical proclamation established Notre Dame Australia in 1991 as a public collegial juridic person of diocesan right tasked with setting up the University of Notre Dame Australia, initially in the Archdiocese of Perth and "within a context of Catholic faith and values". Its representatives were to be "natural persons who, being members of the Catholic Church, hold the office of Trustee of the University of Notre Dame Australia".¹¹

The first Australian MPJP, Catholic Healthcare, was established in 1994 by the Bishops of the Province of Sydney. Like its recently-established American counterpart, Catholic Healthcare brought together healthcare ministries, in this case of six New South Wales-based religious institutes, namely the Religious Sisters of Charity of Australia, NSW Province of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, Sisters of Mercy (Singleton), Province of the Holy Spirit of the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary, Province of St Therese of the Sisters of St John of God, and Province of the Holy Family of the Hospitaller Order of St John of God. The Decree establishing Catholic Healthcare stated:

*The Church has ever developed and adopted new structures to carry on more effectively its mission ... Anticipating the new millennium and motivated by the desire to ensure the continuation of Christ's healing presence in the world through a healthcare service that is authentically Christian, the meeting of the Bishops of the Province of Sydney was asked to establish a new Catholic organisation which will share in the mission of the Church through the ministry of Catholic healthcare ... as a public juridic person.*¹²

Since 1994, Australian religious institutes have instigated the creation of a further twelve MPJPs as the new model of sponsorship and lay leadership for their ministries, to ensure their continuation as works of the Catholic Church. Most are of pontifical right but two are of diocesan right and, for another two, the establishing authority was the Bishops of the Province. Table 1 provides details of the Australian MPJPs. I now consider the establishment of one of these MPJPs, Mercy Ministry Companions, which has had a deliberative focus on synodality.

¹⁰ Nicholas Austin (2018) 'Francis, the Discerning Pope', *Thinking Faith*; https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/francis-discerning-pope#_edn4.

¹¹ University of Notre Dame Australia (1991) Canonical Proclamation; https://www.notredame.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2071/canonical-proclamation.pdf; and (2024), Statutes; https://www.notredame.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/2077/university-statutes.pdf.

¹² Catholic Healthcare (1994) Province of Sydney's Decree Establishing Catholic Healthcare, kindly provided by Catholic Healthcare Ltd; see www.catholichealthcare.com.au/.

Table 1: Members of the Association of Ministerial PJPs¹³

MPJPs	Year Est.	Current Ministries and Presence (Establishing Church Authority)
Catholic Healthcare	1994	Aged care and community services in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Queensland (Bishops of the Province of Sydney)
MercyCare	2002	Community, aged care and early learning services in Western Australia (Archbishop of Perth)
St John of God Australia	2004	Health, disability and community services in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia (Bishops of the Province of Perth)
Mercy Partners	2008	Education and health and aged care services in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria (Pontifical)
Mary Aikenhead Ministries	2009	Education, health and aged care, and community services in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria (Pontifical)
Calvary Ministries	2011	Health and aged care services nationally (Pontifical)
Good Samaritan Education	2012	Education in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria (Archbishop of Sydney)
Edmund Rice Education Australia	2013	Education nationally (Pontifical)
Kildare Ministries	2014	Education and community services in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria (Pontifical)
Dominican Education Australia	2016	Education in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria (Pontifical)
Sophia Education Ministries	2019	Education in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria (Pontifical)
Mercy Ministry Companions	2021	Education, health and aged care and community services nationally (Pontifical)
Loreto Ministries	2023	Education in New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia (Pontifical)
Whānau Mercy Ministries	2023	Education, health and aged care and community services in New Zealand (Pontifical)

A Synodal Journey: The Establishment of Mercy Ministry Companions

Mercy Ministry Companions (MMC) was established in 2021 at the instigation of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG). However, its ‘journey’ commenced four years earlier at ISMAPNG’s 2017 Chapter, which envisaged a new era to ensure the Institute’s ministries “could flourish into the future”. The extended timeline and relational but exacting processes leading to MMC’s establishment are indicative of what it means to proceed in a synodal way.

Firstly, in 2018 the Institute Leadership Team (ILT) appointed the Future Governance Working Party (FGWP) to explore potential new governance options for ISMAPNG’s incorporated ministries. The FGWP recommended the establishment of a new MPJP.¹⁴ The subsequent Institute PJP Transition Group advanced the recommendation. In early 2021, the Institute petitioned the

¹³ Further details of the Australian MPJPs, including their members and governance structures, are available on the Association of Ministerial PJPs website; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Members-of-AMPJP-2023-07-26.pdf>. The University of Notre Dame Australia is the only Australian MPJP that is not an AMPJP member.

¹⁴ Gabrielle McMullen and Martin Laverty (2020) ‘Learnings from the Development of New Lay-Led Church Entities in Australia’, *Australasian Catholic Record* 97(2), 131-143; https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ACR-April-2020_1-McMullen.pdf 1.

Holy See for the establishment a new MPJP to be called Mercy Ministry Companions which CICLSAL approved later that year on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, 24 September.

Throughout these processes, the Sisters, ministry board directors and staff, and other stakeholders were involved in providing input and guiding the MPJP's development as well as accompanying the journey in prayer. With MMC's establishment, ISMAPNG transferred stewardship of its incorporated education, health and aged care, and community service ministries to the MMC canonical stewards who are titled Trustee Directors. Another aspect of MMC's synodal journey was two other religious institutes, the Christian Brothers Oceania Province and Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, entrusting a shared ministry, MacKillop Family Services, to MMC.

For MMC, the name chosen by the Institute is providential – companions, by definition, are 'journeying together'. The name is a constant 'cue': Trustee Directors, those in MMC ministry governance and leadership roles, staff and volunteers across the ministries are all integral to MMC's development and called to nurture the new Church agency. In journeying together, the whole is greater than the parts – each member of MMC has been invited to participate in 'shaping' the mission going forward.

Thus, for example, the MMC conferences in 2022, 2023 and 2024 were planned by cross-ministry working parties and each brought together over 100 stakeholders from across the ministries. With a focus on being companions, they have sought to deepen participants' understanding of co-responsibility for MMC's mission. One activity is illustrative – in 2022, participants were invited to contribute to developing MMC's mission and vision statements and values. Shared values emerged definitively during the conference. Subsequently, the MMC Formation Committee extracted draft mission and vision statements from the conference input and invited the ministries to consider and refine the draft statements in an iterative process to arrive at the Identity Statements launched at the 2023 conference.¹⁵

MMC's Trustee Directors see the work of the Spirit in the naming of Mercy Ministry Companions by the Institute. They also value the relational and collaborative focus in support of their ministry which the Association of Ministerial PJPs offers to them and the sector.

The Association of Ministerial PJPs

With several MPJPs established in Australia, in 2012 discussions commenced with trustee representatives in relation to potential means of collaboration in support of one another and, in particular, of trustees in their new and evolving ministry of stewardship. Forums held in 2013, 2014 and 2015 enabled trustees to come together and get to know one another and to explore the purposes of, and options for, an 'umbrella' body. Following the first forum, each MPJP nominated a representative to an implementation committee, which organised the subsequent forums and drafted, circulated and refined a discussion paper defining potential purposes of the proposed association of PJPs and outlining possible structures. The interest in, and support for, the initiative initially varied considerably across the MPJPs.

The 2015 forum highlighted the growing significance of MPJPs for the Australian Church and resolved to establish an incorporated association (a company limited by guarantee) as the means for MPJPs to interact formally with one another, support their canonical stewards in their ministry, and, in a corporate sense, relate to the Australian Bishops, religious institutes and other

¹⁵ Mercy Ministry Companions (2025) 'Mission, Vision and Values'; <https://www.mercyministrycompanions.org.au/who-we-are/vision-mission-and-values/>.

Church agencies.¹⁶ In the following months, the implementation committee finalised arrangements for the establishment on 5 May 2016 of the Association of Ministerial PJPs Ltd (AMPJP). Nine Australian MPJPs elected to become founding members: Calvary Ministries, Catholic Healthcare, Dominican Education Australia, Edmund Rice Education Australia, Good Samaritan Education, Kildare Ministries, Mary Aikenhead Ministries, Mercy Partners and St John of God Australia, and all but one of the Australian MPJPs are now members of AMPJP.¹⁷ Together they make a major contribution to Catholic education, health and aged care, and community services across Australia (Table 1).

The establishment of the Association of Ministerial PJPs Ltd marked an historic development for the Australian Church in relation to lay ecclesial leadership. The Association is the peak body for the Australian entities and the only such national peak body for MPJPs internationally. Given this unique status of AMPJP, Table 2 provides details of its objects from the Association's constitution, which are reflective of AMPJP's aspiration to contribute to building a synodal Church.

Table 2: AMPJP's Objects¹⁸

The objects of the Association identified in its constitution are:	
a.	offering a contemporary, encouraging example of Christ's mission at work in the world – "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (<i>John</i> 10:10)
b.	actively enabling the co-responsibility of laity and clergy for the life of the Church and its ministries
c.	facilitating collegial interaction between canonical stewards of the member PJPs
d.	providing the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia, their respective members and other Catholic entities with a point of liaison with member PJPs and their canonical stewards
e.	supporting canonical stewards in their ministry of governance by - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fostering the capability of current and future canonical stewards, including through facilitating formation activities and qualifications to support canonical stewards and their staff • facilitating access to canonical governance and related advice • communicating to the member PJPs relevant matters of significance
f.	promoting and proclaiming Catholic identity as an integral part of the PJPs ministries.

Throughout the three and a half years of exploration and then planning for the establishment of AMPJP, MPJP representatives regularly updated not only Catholic Religious Australia but also the President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) on developments. The Australian Bishops welcomed the proposed 'umbrella' body and advised, following their May 2014 plenary meeting, that the Bishops Conference would "establish a formal relationship with

¹⁶ Consideration was given to seeking canonical as well as civil status for AMPJP. However, it was not seen as essential at the commencement stage and would have considerably delayed the Association's establishment. It should be given further consideration as a potential goal for the longer-term future of AMPJP.

¹⁷ Of a somewhat different nature to the MPJPs, the University of Notre Dame Australia has not joined AMPJP. The Marist Association, which is not an MPJP, is an associate member of AMPJP.

¹⁸ AMPJP (2025) 'About us'; <https://ampjp.org.au/about-us/>.

a group representing the newly established Public Juridic Persons”.¹⁹ Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) generously provided administrative support to the implementation committee.²⁰

Following the establishment in 2023 of the first New Zealand-based MPJP, Whānau Mercy Ministries,²¹ it sought, and in 2024 was admitted to, AMPJP membership. Thus, there are now thirteen lay-led MPJPs in Australia and, as well in our region, Whānau Mercy Ministries in New Zealand and Catholic Health Care Asia in Singapore and Malaysia which was established in 2019.²²

A Model of Synodality

In keeping with AMPJP’s objects highlighted above, its mission, vision and values²³ seek to foster an approach to being Church in Australia that is synodal:

Mission

In fostering the ministry of canonical governance, the Association of Ministerial PJPs, supports its members, as an umbrella organisation, to flourish individually and together in communion with the Catholic Church.

Vision

Our Vision is for flourishing, vibrant Catholic ministries governed by well-formed Canonical Stewards, continuing Jesus’ mission in Australia and beyond in the 21st century.

Values

inclusive, relational, collaborative and prophetic.

In the context of AMPJP’s commitment to inclusivity, Australia’s MPJP sector has consistently had between 55-60 per cent of its trustee positions being held by women.²⁴

Comparably to each MPJP having a council of trustees who govern it collegially, AMPJP has a Council to which each of its members appoints a representative. Thus, all MPJP members participate in the Council’s decision-making. AMPJP offers seminars and other formation opportunities and conducts an annual forum of trustees from across the sector. It has established two key committees which facilitate collaboration:

¹⁹ Personal communication from ACBC General Secretary re minutes of ACBC May 2014 plenary meeting.

²⁰ For further details on the establishment of AMPJP, see Gabrielle McMullen and Paul Oakley (2020) ‘Ministerial PJPs Advancing Lay Leadership in the Australian Church’, *Australasian Catholic Record*, 97(4), 450-459; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ministerial-PJPs-advancing-lay-leadership-in-the-Australian-Church.pdf>.

²¹ Sisters of Mercy New Zealand (2023) ‘Whānau Mercy Ministries Launched’; <https://www.sistersofmercy.org.nz/whanau-mercy-ministries-launched/>. The Australian MPJPs, St John of God Australia Ltd and Sophia Education Ministries, also have sponsorship of New Zealand ministries.

²² Catholic Health Care Asia (2025); <https://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/celebrating-48-years-of-catholic-healthcare/75105/1>; <https://fmdminternational.co.uk/news/celebrating-catholic-health-care-asia/>.

²³ AMPJP (2025) ‘About us’; <https://ampjp.org.au/about-us/>.

²⁴ Lawrie Hallinan (2023) ‘Canonical Stewards in Ministerial PJPs in Australia’: AMPJP Working Paper; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2-Canonical-Stewards-in-Ministerial-PJPs-in-Australia.pdf>.

- in formation for trustees and their staff (Formation Committee), and
- across the national network of religious institute and MPJP school systems (Committee of Religious Institute and Ministerial Public Juridic Person School Authorities Australia, CORMSAA).

Catholic Health Australia and Catholic Social Services Australia provide comparable peak bodies for the health care and community service ministries of the MPJPs. The Association seeks to cooperate with these and other Catholic peak bodies where there are shared agendas.

AMPJP's Formation Committee

In support of Australian MPJP trustees, the AMPJP Council approved a *Formation Framework for Canonical Stewards* in 2021. Subsequently the Formation Committee developed the related *AMPJP Formation Plan for MPJP Canonical Stewards 2022-2024* and an extensive palette of associated resources relevant to formation for current and future trustees, individually or as a group, *Resources Supporting the AMPJP Formation Framework for Canonical Stewards*.²⁵

The Formation Committee arranges formation activities for trustees, including an interactive online induction session for new canonical stewards, Wisdom Circle gatherings held each year in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and online for the sharing of current and former MPJP trustees' wisdom, and the formation-based content for the annual AMPJP Forum. In 2024 the Formation Committee commissioned a paper on 'Ecclesiology, Synodality and MPJPs', intended for publication in 2025 and informed by discussions at the 2024 Wisdom Circles.²⁶

CORMSAA

In 2020, AMPJP established the Committee of Religious Institute and Ministerial Public Juridic Person School Authorities Australia (CORMSAA). It promotes the mission of Catholic education in Australia with a focus on communication with, and collaboration across, the more than 30 religious institute and MPJP school systems in Australia, which represent some 19 per cent of Catholic school enrolments nationally.²⁷ CORMSAA also plays the key role across this sector in terms of engagement with the National Catholic Education Commission and State and Territory Catholic education authorities. AMPJP "sees CORMSAA as a means of living the shared mission and fellowship that exists between Religious Institutes and Ministerial Public Juridic Persons".²⁸

Strategic Intent

In its *Strategic Plan 2024- 2027*, AMPJP has identified as a priority "Lay Leadership to Become Established as an Influential Voice in a Synodal Church". The related vision for 2027 is "Demonstrated Leadership and a Voice in the Church" and the goals set are the following:

- *Australia is recognised as a leader internationally in lay Church governance, as a demonstration of Synodality in the contemporary Church.*

²⁵ AMPJP (2021) *AMPJP Formation Framework for Canonical Stewards*; https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AMPJP-Framework-for-Canonical-Stewards_June1_Web.pdf; (2023) *Resources Supporting the AMPJP Formation Framework for Canonical Stewards*; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/AMPJP-Formation-Framework-for-Canonical-Stewards-resource-list-2023-05-11.pdf>.

²⁶ AMPJP (2024) *AMPJP Annual Report 2023-2024*; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/AMPJP-Annual-Report-2024-final.pdf>.

²⁷ AMPJP (2022) 'Summary of Data on RI and MPJP School Sector'; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/RI-and-MPJP-School-data-2022.pdf>.

²⁸ AMPJP (2025) 'CORMSAA'; <https://ampjp.org.au/cormsaa/>.

- *AMPJP sits at the table with the ACBC, CRA and other leading Church bodies to discuss matters of common concern.*
- *AMPJP Council has a role in representing AMPJP members in the Church space.*
- *MPJPs have a visible presence and participation in a Synodal Church in Australia.*
- *The presence and ministries of MPJPs are better known and understood by Australian Catholics.*²⁹

Relationship with ACBC and CRA

AMPJP brings together the MPJPs of some of Australia's major Catholic education, health and aged care, and community services. The umbrella body allows the trustees of these MPJPs to interact formally with key agencies in the Australian Church and, in particular, with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and Catholic Religious Australia (CRA).

AMPJP values the relationship which it has developed with ACBC and CRA. The three entities represent three major groupings of Church authorities in Australia. In mid-2022, AMPJP finalised an Accord with ACBC³⁰ and a Covenant with CRA,³¹ and has worked over the past two years "to implement these frameworks to enhance our mutual understanding, respect and cooperation". A major shared endeavour has been addressing three strategies from Australia's 2021-2022 Plenary Council for which ACBC, AMPJP and CRA have co-responsibility. The development of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards and national Code of Conduct have been other collaborative undertakings. AMPJP has participated in joint meetings of representatives of the three peak bodies and held meetings with its two counterparts individually. In seeking ways of working together, members of the three peak bodies have also participated in one another's formation and professional learning opportunities.³²

Conclusion

Bouchard has described the evolution of the MPJPs as "an expression of the Church's prophetic charism. The new models came not from the Vatican or the bishops, but from the periphery".³³ The ministries of education, health and aged care, and community services are fundamental to the mission of the Church. MPJP trustees are called to be the faithful stewardship of these ministries in a new era for the Church, with the role of trustee a new vocation, answering God's call to ministry. This understanding of the role "places God's invitation and God's mission at the heart of the 'what, why and how' of being a canonical steward".³⁴

Challenges in moving forward include ongoing formation of the laity for future trustee roles in MPJPs and amendments to Canon Law to advance the roles of the laity in the mission of the Church. By way of example, AMPJP was 'entitled' to only one formal representative at the two

²⁹ AMPJP (2024) *AMPJP Strategic Plan 2024- 2027*; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/AMPJP-Strategic-Plan-final-version.pdf>.

³⁰ ACBC and AMPJP (2022), *An Accord between ACBC and AMPJP*; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/accord-between-ACBC-and-AMPJP-2022-05-11-Signatures.pdf>.

³¹ CRA and AMPJP (2022), *Covenant between CRA and AMPJP*; https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/AMPJP-CRA-Covenant_signed-July-2022.pdf.

³² AMPJP (2024) *AMPJP Annual Report 2023-2024*; <https://ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/AMPJP-Annual-Report-2024-final.pdf>.

³³ Bouchard (2019).

³⁴ Lawrie Hallinan (2022) 'Canonical Stewards in Ministerial PJs in Australia': Paper in prepared in consultation with AMPJP Council, p. 8; <file:///C:/Users/Gabrielle/Downloads/Canonical%20Stewards%20in%20MPJPs%20in%20Australia%2010%20May%202022.pdf>.

sessions of Australia's Plenary Council in 2021-2022. Some other MPJP trustees participated in the Plenary Council in other capacities.

Significantly, the existence and theological significance of MPJPs is not well known even in Catholic circles in Australia and increasing awareness of this new sector is critical for its further development and succession planning. Pontifical MPJPs report each year to the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (DICLSAL) and, given the role that the MPJP sector is playing in contributing to a "missionary synodal Church", this annual report might include an account of such developments, potentially enabling DICLSAL to inform the mandate of the General Secretariat of the Synod as it seeks to implement aspects of the Synod on Synodality's report, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission Final Document*.