



Karanga Atawhai

A newsletter for Sisters of Mercy and partners in mission

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Ministerial PJPs - a growing role for Catholic laity as they help to govern our Mercy ministries

By DENNIS HORTON

What is a public juridic person? In its simplest terms, a PJP is the church's equivalent of a corporation in civil law - a legal entity set up according to approved statutes for a specific purpose. The PJPs we are already familiar with are entities like a parish, a diocese or a religious congregation; although we have not known them as PJPs, that is what they are in church law. They are usually clustered around a specific amalgamation of people or property and are legally constituted to continue even when those responsible for them change or die.

These entities are called public because the work they undertake is formally approved by a church authority like a bishop, a parish priest or the leader of a religious congregation and is carried out publicly in the church's name.

Governance role for lay people

Ministerial PJPs emerged from the revised Code of Canon Law, authorised by Pope John Paul II in 1983 as part of the reforms called for by the Second Vatican Council. They were developed as a new form of PJP to allow lay men and women to join religious and clergy in the governance of the church's ministries.

In the past two decades especially, religious congregations have looked for ways to ensure that their institutional ministries, such as Catholic hospitals, schools and social service enterprises can continue to serve even when there are no sisters or brothers to sustain or oversee them. At the very time when fewer Catholics have felt called to religious life, the vision of Vatican II has recognised a much wider vocation for lay people. Modern conditions demand that the apostolate of lay people be broadened and intensified, said Vatican II's decree on the vocation of the laity. The document described this expanding role as "the unmistakable work of the Holy Spirit, in encouraging the laity to serve Christ and the church in all circumstances."

Ministerial PJPs are established by church authority, either by a Vatican department on behalf of the pope, or by the local bishop. Details of just how this is done vary, but the goal is to ensure that ministries began

by religious congregations continue. A ministerial PJP enables this to happen through a governing body with both canonical (church) and civil (state) responsibilities for the ministries entrusted to it.

Initially, these governing bodies consist of religious men or women serving alongside lay trustees; all being well, there is a gradual succession that anticipates entities governed solely by lay people at some point in the future.

Once established, each ministerial PJP reports annually to the authority which established it, usually the bishop or the Vatican department. The report includes a profile of new governing members, the programmes in place for their formation, leadership decisions, financial status, external audit, apostolic activities and relations with the local church. In our case, this would include an insight into how the mission of Whānau Mercy is expanding through the governance provided by our ministerial PJP.



Commissioned: On behalf of the PJP Sponsorship Committee, Raylene Dwyer rsm (left), one of Ngā Whāeā Atawhai o Aotearoa leadership team, anoints the hands of Kathleen Rushton rsm as she is commissioned to the Mission Working Party of our PJP process. Behind them, Judith Moroney rsm anoints the forehead of Peter Buckland, CEO of Mercy Healthcare, who is also a member of the Mission Working Party. The commissioning ritual followed the inaugural meeting of the working parties on January 24 this year.

Lay leadership of PJPs a 'new thing' in the Catholic story

Lay leaders of Public Juridic Persons are part of a new face of church, says Sister of Mercy Berneice Loch, a former leader of the largest group of Mercy Sisters in Australia who has been closely involved in the development of these new Catholic entities over recent decades.

In an address to a forum hosted by an association of PJPs, she prefaced her comments with a quote from the prophet Isaiah who hears God saying 'I am about to do a new thing... I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.' Formed last year as a world-first 'umbrella' body of ministerial PJPs, the association seeks to promote lay leadership of these ecclesial bodies.

"You are the stewards and custodians of these PJPs, and as such you are named and authorised leaders in the Catholic Church," Berneice told forum participants. She noted that until recently, authority in Catholic ministry had been firmly vested in bishops and leaders of religious congregations.

"The move to having a Catholic Church in which lay people could hold genuine authority was an extraordinary shift. It was indeed 'a new thing,'" Berneice said. In the minds of some it had to happen because the church was running out of religious and if it wanted ministries to continue, it needed new leaders.



Berneice Loch rsm..... there is much more to lay governance of our ministries than 'just plugging holes'.

WORKING PARTY SNAPSHOT



Lorraine McArthur chairs the Mission Working Party, which is currently developing a mission and vision statement for our proposed PJP, as well as a name for the new body. The mission party is also developing a formation programme for the PJP. The first lay principal to be appointed to St Catherine's College in Kilbirnie, Lorraine has served on the board of Tiaki Manatū Trust since 2008.

But "an explanation which sees people like yourselves as just plugging holes does no justice at all to what has occurred among us. In particular it ignores completely the teachings of Vatican II about the role of laity in the church. The Vatican Council emphasised anew that every baptised person is called to ministry and has a right and duty to bring their giftedness to the service of God's people through ministry."

As well as authority, those involved in overseeing PJPs also exercise responsibility, Berneice noted, especially for the maintenance of mission in the ministries entrusted to them. "Your organisations are themselves part of the hope that calls us to a better future," she said. "We are being called by the pope to responsibility for what he has so simply called 'our common home'. He has given us all a new 'work of mercy'. Are you taking responsibility for ensuring that these life-giving messages are being heard?"

She also cautioned against the thought that PJPs are only a way of carrying on the work of a particular religious congregation. "You are not the continuation of anything, as you are indeed 'a new thing'; but you can and should treasure the gifts given as you work from your starting point into the future."

The full text of Berneice Loch's address is available on request by emailing dhorton@somauck.org.nz