

Potential for Women Deacons in the Australian Catholic Churches

Australian Catholics Exploring the Diaconate (ACED)

3 September 2025, Feast of St Phoebe

This document was prepared by ACED to further the public ecclesial conversation about women's access to the ordained diaconate. While the matter is currently being studied by an international Commission and Study Group, we would like to share with the Australian Catholic Churches some of our January submission and promote reflection about this potential for the Catholic community in this country. Thank you to everyone who has been part of this document, and may God's Spirit touch all those who read.

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Section 1: Stories from Lived Experience

Following are stories of women who have been part of our ACED group, or who have shared their experience on the *Liturgy on the Margins* blog. They give a sample of what Synod Study Group 5 (Some theological and canonical issues around specific ministerial forms) asked for during its recent consultation: "the experiences already underway that see women in charge of leading communities, for example in the Amazon, but also in Africa and Asia. Precisely in order to emphasise the importance of starting from reality..."¹ In our Submission to Study Group 5 in January 2025, a number of these stories were also enhanced by support letters from recipients of the women's ministry, priests and bishops.

¹ www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-10/fernandez-let-us-work-to-give-women-more-space-and-power.html

We encourage you to listen with your heart to the following stories:

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Uta and John France

Living Canon 517 §2, 25 May 2023

<https://liturgyonthemargins.org/2023/05/25/living-canon-517-%C2%A72/>

John and Uta France have been empowered by a Church prepared to be creative, in order to respond to the needs for ministry in the world. In the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese in 2014, Bishop Bill Wright commissioned them to be leaders, and they have received and grown in this responsibility. In fact, their unpaid ministry seems to be more than full-time. While we speak in their small window of free time (on a ‘clergy day off’ Monday), phones continue to buzz with requests for help.



Not everyone understands John and Uta’s passion for church ministry. To them, however, it makes perfect sense. What they do is a “blessing” and a “vocation”. They met in a youth group in a presbytery in the 1970s, and got married. Uta was born in Germany then grew up in Australia, and John in Australia, but they shared a desire to become more involved in their faith. Although they knew of the inspiring theology coming from Vatican II, they found it hard to “break in” to the church model of the times. Instead of being encouraged to “minister to others in encountering God”, they helped to resettle refugees from Vietnam and Central America.

At the same time, Uta and John had professional careers. John worked in engineering in the mining sector, which he explains in an apologetic manner. Uta was a bank officer, an integrative aid in the school system, a carer and then, finally, the parish secretary of St John Vianney in Morisset. They were also learning more and more about their faith; as John assures me, “you can never do too much formation.”

Their movement towards church ministry accelerated 30 years ago. Uta started working with their priest in preparing and leading funerals. After 10 years of “learning the ropes, acting as an assistant”, she found herself in a new position. The priest was sick and they could get no other priests to Morisset. Uta led the funeral and she has continued leading, being trained and training others in the ministry ever since. In the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese, there were good formation programs being offered. Both John and Uta completed the Christian Formation Course over several years.

About 10 years ago, the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese was facing their reality with courage. There was a shortage of priests and no new seminarians for some years. The area had been a hotspot of clergy sexual abuse, leading to much hurt and disenchantment with the Church. However, Bishop Bill Wright was “open to new ways of trying to do things.” The Diocesan Pastoral Plan named five foundations of diocesan life:

- Identity and community
- Worship and prayer
- Formation
- Mission and outreach
- Leadership and structure,

and the faithful were encouraged to ask, “What would best serve our parish and how can the people best fulfil that?”

In the St John Vianney Parish, seven people were commissioned by Bishop Bill to lead the parish in addressing these foundations. They were appointed under Canon 517 §2² to administer a parish without a resident priest. At the time, John was given ‘Leadership and structure’ and Uta ‘Worship and prayer’. However, due to various attritions, they are the last two still in these roles, and fulfil all the foundations between them. Uta and John have not only kept the parish going through the ups and downs of COVID, but have brought fresh

² Canon 517 §2. If, because of a lack of priests, the diocesan bishop has decided that participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest who, provided with the powers and faculties of a pastor, is to direct the pastoral care.

ideas and approaches. They feel privileged to work with a sacramental priest, who is very supportive of their initiatives.

In terms of liturgy, John and Uta seek to meet people where they are, and reach out to the margins around them. One of those margins is young families, and they have developed a sacramental process that includes family Masses, home work-books, flexible preparation for sacraments and parish accompaniment.

Another marginal area is people approaching the parish for funerals. Often in the local area, many families are uncertain about their participation in church, and opt for a funeral without Mass. Both Uta and John have faculties for performing funerals, and they try to reach out with compassion. Uta has led a number of Vigils, which are more flexible, yet still approved Catholic liturgy. Otherwise, she says, people will go to civil celebrants. “We are ministering to people who need help, who are at their most vulnerable. We are called to be the light of God, not forcing them into something they can’t handle.”

We conclude with a story from Uta’s native Germany. After the war, many refugees were starving as they left concentration camps. But when well-meaning people tried to give them food, their bodies weren’t ready and they died. Instead, very small increments were needed. John and Uta explain that there are many steps in the evangelising process before people are ready for full communion. So rather than “force-feeding”, they explore many other avenues for prayer and worship from our liturgical documents. Then, when people come together for Eucharist, it is “not me and God, but us together.” From there, we are commissioned to go out to use our gifts. Which is exactly what Uta and John are doing so well.

Dominique Galea



As well as being blessed with the vocations of wife, mother, grandmother and schoolteacher, I have always felt a very deep calling to be a part of The Church. This began at the age of 4 when at Mass, my mother pointed to the Eucharist and told me that it was Jesus – a fact which I have never stopped believing.

I have been involved in many ministries over the years which include the music ministry, children's liturgy, teaching in sacramental programs, family Mass group, special minister of the Eucharist, catechist in public schools, reader of the word, member of the liturgy committee, chairperson of the parish council and more recently, Acolyte.

In my teaching role at various low socioeconomic Catholic schools, I was invited to become a Religious Education Coordinator. In that capacity I presented at numerous staff professional development days on spirituality and have gone on to give similar presentations as professional development for spiritual directors and the wider public.

I found my studies for a Master of Arts in Theological studies to be very rewarding. It was truly a case of 'faith seeking understanding'. Whilst participating in these studies, which were fortuitously subsidised by my parish, I had the experience of feeling as though I was 'filling up' and I didn't even know that I was 'empty'! I truly felt at home in this environment and was told by the priests who lectured that I had a natural gift for theology (I was subsequently invited to lecture in Systematic Theology at Australian Catholic University). These studies led me to be able to be accepted to be trained as a spiritual director, a calling which has enabled me to become a member of retreat teams as presenter and spiritual director. The most recent of these was a wonderful six week sabbatical for religious.

I believe that women who have been gifted with the ability to serve the church in the capacities in which I have been able, should have these gifts from the Holy Spirit recognised in the ministry of Deacon. I am making this submission for future female leaders, as my age will preclude me from participating.

See also: <https://liturgyonthemargins.org/2024/08/01/1931/>

Gail Gill

For over 30 years, two gospel passages in particular have stayed with me. The first is Luke's story of the journey to Emmaus which continues to challenge me to stop and recognise where I am on this journey, to notice who is there with me and who is missing. This is not a constantly circular journey, but more of a spiralling through sometimes familiar points 'on the road' and visiting again as a more seasoned traveller. Moving as the two travellers on the way to Emmaus did, from disillusion to understanding, from blindness to 'seeing' with the eyes of my heart, from separation to community and celebration are not once only, or the same experiences. They become increasingly richer experiences of the paschal rhythm to all of life.

The second passage is the question that Jesus asks his disciples in Mark's Gospel – who do you say I am? I need to keep engaging with that question and to also know that there will be times when I will struggle to respond and will rely on the presence of Jesus in others to help me respond.

My Christian formation began in the pre-Vatican II Church. My final years in secondary school coincided with the final years of Vatican II. I remain forever grateful to the religious women who taught me, for keeping me informed of the exciting changes that were emerging from Rome.

At the age of thirty, following a career as a graphic artist in advertising, the birth of two children and a divorce, I began study at the then Catholic Teachers College. It was a time of absolutely joyful learning, of rediscovering my faith and encountering a church that was all refreshingly new to me. Lecturers spoke about spirituality and I came to understand that they were referring to something larger than the devotions I had known; spirituality had not been part of my pre- Vatican II vocabulary. Until then, for me, the bible had been the very large book that had pride of place on the family book-shelf. I was familiar with some of its stories from school and my missal but that was about it.

Having the world of the scriptures and theology opened up for me was an extraordinary experience that still fills me with gratitude. I changed my initial choice of psychology as a major study and have continued study and reading in scripture, spirituality and theology ever since.

I worked in Catholic education in Sydney and Broken Bay for over 30 years as a teacher and also in leadership positions. As a consultant to schools, I noticed that school principals were increasingly inviting me to work with them and their communities in areas of spirituality. This was way beyond the parameters of my role, but it was work that I loved and I somehow found the time to do it. This began a turning point that led to a change of direction.

Around 2006, the then Bishop of Broken Bay, David Walker, announced a new ministry for women that would “enable women to participate more fully in the life and leadership of the Diocese, supporting the Bishop in the pastoral care of the people.” Following formation and acceptance, in a liturgy of consecration, Bishop David asked me for promises to follow the statutes of the association of Mary Star of the Sea (MSSA) and to live a simple lifestyle of chastity and obedience to him as bishop.

In many ways, this ministry followed the permanent diaconate pattern of continuing in current employment and giving of your own time to a particular ministry. I did this by working with some parish priests to provide pastoral planning and formation for PPCs as well as continuing to accept invitations to provide formation/retreats for emerging school advisory boards.

All of that changed when I was invited to take up an appointment in a parish as a Coordinator of Parish Life according to canon 517.2 which enables a layperson to care for a parish, with a priest moderator. At the time, it was a huge decision to resign from Catholic Education and to let go of career ambitions. It was an interesting experience that highlighted the need for preparation of the community and adult formation and education that would assist people to appreciate new approaches to parish pastoral leadership.

Since then, I have continued to work in five parishes in various roles by appointment of the bishop. Following Bishop David’s retirement, and the eventual appointment of two different bishops, I became the last member of MSSA. I continue in part time pastoral ministry in one parish.

For the past 6 years I have been a member of the diocesan formation team for the permanent diaconate. It has been a personally enriching experience of learning while also being tinged with a longing for the inclusion of women in this formation for diaconal ordination. The restoration of the permanent diaconate was promised in the Vatican II document Lumen Gentium, now 60 years ago, and was restored after the Council closed. It may be time to review and renew how the ministry of permanent deacons is exercised. Currently, it most usually parallels the ministry of transitional deacons. This may also be

the time to discern ministry for permanent deacons that extends beyond a base parish community into a myriad of contemporary ministries.



Gail reading at Mass at the National Deacons' Conference in October 2022

Most of us are well aware of women, both lay and members of religious congregations, who engage in ministry that is similar to and sometimes goes beyond the ministry of permanent deacons. Diaconal ordination of women is not a closed question in church but it remains as a 30 year ongoing conversation. I am hopeful that this will eventually become a reality. Ministry for lay women and men is changing, for example the installation of lectors, acolytes and catechists that is waiting to be enacted. The possibility of diaconal ordination for women does not assume that all women who are currently engaged in ministry are automatically being called to the permanent diaconate, any more than it does for men who are currently engaged in ministry.

Having experienced consecration for the ministry of MSSA, I have tasted the grace of the Holy Spirit for ministry. I can only imagine the grace of diaconal ordination, not only for those being ordained but also as a grace for the Church. We are a sacramental Church. Pope Francis asks us to imagine new ways of being church. He has said that synodal is not an adjective – it is church. He is doing so much to fully implement Vatican II – especially the primacy of baptism that invites us all to become missionary disciples so that the identity of all ministers, lay and ordained, is as baptised believers. Order in Church need not imply hierarchy – all of us, the baptised, are called to participate with different gifts and responsibilities – some as ordained disciples, some as minister disciples.

A few years ago, as I was helping two families with preparation of their children for baptism, I encouraged them to put the date of their children's baptism, and their own, in the family diary and to celebrate these days. I then realised that I had never done that to celebrate my own baptism. I now celebrate my baptism each year by setting aside time to pray an Examen, to reflect on the previous year and to notice where God has been in my life.

Now in retirement, the Examen shows me the pattern of Holy Spirit calling me throughout my life to significant life changes, to various ministries and then to the diaconate. I still have a strong desire to serve as a deacon and seek ways to serve through my home parish with the charisms given to me in welcome and hospitality ministry and in adult formation.

Mary Anne Gordon

Working in God's Zone, 28 April 2022

<https://liturgyonthemargins.org/2022/04/28/working-in-gods-zone/>

“It was meant to be.” That is Mary Anne Gordon’s firm conviction about her current role as a remote rural pastoral worker. “I believe I got this job because the Holy Spirit wanted me to.” And it all started way out west in the back o’ Bourke...



Literally. Mary Anne grew up in a farming family outside of the NSW outback town of Bourke, which is far away from cities and full of country spirit. She was raised by a very faithful Catholic mother, who expected her children to have an active involvement in parish and community life. Her parents encouraged her to become the first in the family to get a university degree. Mary Anne also accumulated a wealth of life experience, raising two children as a single mother, caring for her father after her mother died and surviving the ups and downs of marginal farm life.

After teaching full-time in Bourke for 16 years, Mary Anne’s new direction came unexpectedly. A friend pulled her up in the street and threw a manila envelope on the passenger seat. “Fill this in,” she said, “It needs to be done by tomorrow.” Mary Anne promptly forgot about it, but found the application for a pastoral worker late that night. It was years since she had had to apply for a job, and was overwhelmed by all the criteria. So she rang her brother, declaring, “I can’t do this!” But he coached her through the application, encouraging her to find examples of her pastoral care experience.

Mary Anne again forgot about it, and weeks later was stunned to hear that she was offered an interview. She hadn't been looking for a new job, especially one with half the pay of her current one. So she met with the panel without any expectations or front. "They got the unabridged version," she laughs. An interviewer asked her what she would do if a farmer had lost their second crop in a row. At this stage, Bourke was in the thick of drought, and Mary Anne did not hesitate. "I'd buy a carton of beer and sit with him on the back step and have a good cry together."

This was the kind of attitude that the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes was looking for, and they employed her in 2017, to be based in Bourke but spread around the northern part of the diocese. She works directly for the bishop and there are two main aspects: pastoral care and connecting people with the parish.

In the pastoral care arena, Mary Anne says that it is about "just being there for people, meeting them where they are at." She is a port of call, and connects people with Vinnies for practical help as well as channelling drought funding in other ways. One time that meant organising funding for a field day for farming families during the worst of the rainless years, with the highlight being an imitation bucking bull, sponsored (and ridden) by the bishop himself! It also included a free evening meal for 300 families to encourage them to stay and socialise – to encourage and support their community.

It is also about visiting families, often in the little villages and stations all around, sharing the joys of good rain and happy moments as well as the sad times, the struggles and grief that come with loss and succession. This was particularly hard in the times of COVID restrictions and she didn't want to be the one to infect people who were so far away from healthcare. They were "totally isolated, and you can only ring so many times before you become a nuisance," she recalls. But instead she built up her role in the town with the elderly parishioners. The police had advised that she could exercise around town and perhaps "walk slowly". So she rang people up to say she would be coming past, then check in and chat with them on the other side of the fence.

The second aspect is connecting people with the parish. Mary Anne says that it isn't about "evangelising in a formal capacity", yet she acts as a bridge and provides a positive experience for those who, due to isolation or disinclination, have limited participation in the church community. In the little villages, people gather for Mass once a month, but this was an issue when COVID caused lockdowns and the drought broke and the water stopped them travelling for a time. So Mary Anne began to, and continues to, provide liturgy packs so people can keep in touch with their faith, each other and what is happening in the town. She also regularly visits the retirees in Rivergum Lodge, taking the Blessed Sacrament and

scones. “You really get a sense of what really matters when you worship with our faith elders. I sometimes think it is sad that the younger generations don’t get to see this wonderful example of faith,” she reflects.

Mary Anne has also conducted many communion services and funerals, especially at the times when no priest is available. She meets with the family, discusses the readings, prayers of the faithful and music. She tries to inspire them with enough confidence to ask their family members to take part and prepare what is needed. She makes the booklet or gives them a template to make their own. In all this, depending on the people’s connection with church, “you work out what has meaning” for them. Mary Anne has done this for many, including families of young people who committed suicide. When she conducts these funerals, Mary Anne finds ways to connect people with the religious aspect that may be hiding away inside them.

One day, she was invited to read a part during the ordination of a Deacon in our diocese. While reading out loud all of the criteria for the diaconal ministry, she realised, “I do that. All those things.” It is not only a job for Mary Anne, but truly a vocation.

Watch some of Mary Anne’s story: [In the Catholic Wild West](#) on the ABC in 2018.

Angela Gorman

If I'm really honest, I felt the call from God to the vocation of "service" when I was very young. I just wanted to be near to the altar, to serve at Mass, to read, to do anything - just to be close to Jesus. As a teenager, I felt 'different' to my peers - I felt a deep desire to serve others, to be fully involved in liturgy. As an adult I began my ministry business Shine Creations (music and liturgy consultancy) after offering my services and gifts at a local and diocesan level and not getting any openings for work there. With the encouragement of mentors such as Rev Dr Russell Hardiman (RIP) I began this ministry - offering faith formation to individuals, school staff and parish groups. I experienced many encounters with the Holy Spirit, where I felt his presence leading and guiding me in this work. It was whilst in this ministry business that I truly consolidated the 'call' on my heart to serve the Lord with the gifts I had been given. It was in this ministry role that I felt truly myself. I might also add that I have had this call discerned over many years with spiritual directors, priests, mentors and family members.



I currently have many responsibilities that are diaconal in nature, such as:

- I write and deliver faith formation courses, workshops and individual ministry meetings.
- I pray with people - individuals and groups upon request, or in ministry situations
- I lead music ministry groups, liturgical celebrations and rehearsals regularly
- I proclaim the Word regularly in Liturgy
- I am a link between the School and the Parish
- I assist, together with my family, those in need through donations, visits and prayer
- I assist the priests in the preparation of Sunday liturgy and other special liturgies

- I have been a member of the National Liturgical Council, and a member of the Australian Pastoral Musicians Network and the Australian Academy of Liturgy where I have facilitated workshops, led prayer and offered discernment.

See also: <https://liturgyonthemargins.org/2023/02/23/liturgy-gods-gift-and-call/>

Catherine (Cathy) Jones

God works in unexpected places and within unexpected people. Jesus embodied this when he came into humanity as a baby born to a young virgin from Nazareth in Galilee. He chose as his apostles poor fishermen from 'the wrong side of town' (Galilee) and tax collectors working for the Roman occupiers. He met with women, like the woman at the well, which broke with cultural and traditional laws. He healed on the Sabbath so it is no surprise he would still come into our time and place in the same way today - on the margins, where those chosen to lead are not priests or religious, but ordinary people in need of God's grace and anxious to be in a relationship with God who is Creator, Redeemer and Holy Spirit.

We have not had a resident priest for over thirty years. The Good Samaritan Sisters administered the Inland Parishes until 2019 when Sr Gerri announced that she would finish in our parish at the end of the year and the congregation were not going to replace her. I felt called to the work as Pastoral Leader in our parish. A time of both nervousness and excitement as I had to leave behind my work as Principal of Cue Primary School and trust that God would provide for me in taking the plunge to work as Pastoral Leader.



We had a retreat weekend for the parish facilitated by a Dominican Sister, Mary Ryan and attended by our diocesan bishop, Michael Morrissey. A time of listening, praying, discerning and sharing insights.

I felt overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit and as such knew in my heart, in the depth of my soul that I would be the one to replace Sr Gerri as Pastoral Leader of our Inland Parishes (Mt Magnet, Cue and Meekatharra).

I remained silent as we shared around the table because I believed that if this was a movement of the Spirit, I would have my belief ratified by others. Others did mention my name when they shared their thoughts and insights about who would be the next leader of our parish, and I knew for certain that I would be the next leader.

Our bishop was present, and he agreed that I should be Pastoral Leader. He was concerned about the low income the diocese could provide. We both agreed that I should apply for Chaplaincy at Mt Magnet District High School. It was a blessing when the local school had their chaplain resign and after application, interviews with YouthCare, psychological testing, participation in a Chaplaincy Course and an interview with the principal of the local school I won the position of chaplain. I now work at the school three days a week.



Commissioning of Cathy Jones by Bishop Michael Morrissey

I am the Pastoral Leader for the Inland Parishes of the Geraldton Diocese. As such I lead the Liturgy of the Word with Communion each Sunday. We usually have a priest come from Geraldton once in a month to celebrate Eucharist with us but sometimes it has been two or three months between visits from a priest.

Some parishioners also gather with me each Monday evening for Lectio Divina using the Gospel for the following Sunday. I have also celebrated the sacrament of Baptism and have others who are in the process of arranging Baptism of their children with me. Many times, I have been the celebrant at funerals for people from each of the three towns that are part of the Inland Parishes.

I also visit families in their homes, particularly when there is terminal illness in the family, or a time of tragedy, such as suicide or tragic or unexpected death. Suicide is common in our communities, especially amongst the Indigenous population.

As I live in a small town of approximately 400 people my work is not just with Catholics but also with the community in general. Our church congregation is both multi-denominational and multi-cultural. We were the only church in town for nearly two years. Those who follow Christ needed a community. We have been both welcoming of them and blessed by their joining us.

I work as chaplain in the local District High School: a school for students from four years of age through to seventeen/eighteen years of age. This gives me the opportunity to build relationships with the students and staff and parents. I have time for individual meetings with students, staff and parents/carers, as well as informal conversations with groups of staff and/or students. I also help in the classrooms and provide breakfast and morning tea for students.

I make a yearly retreat and have a supervisor, a Good Samaritan Sister based in Sydney. We meet via Zoom every six weeks.

See also:

<https://liturgyonthemargins.org/2023/03/16/its-already-here-its-alive-and-well/>

Sr Liz Morris RSJ

I am a Sister of St Joseph and when I was studying for my Theology Degree I was introduced to the writings of Dr Phyllis Zagano the American author who has written about re-opening the Diaconate to women. She was also part of an international committee under Pope Francis that studied the role.

I am very happy living my Josephite life and my ministries over the years have been varied and fulfilling. I didn't embark on discerning a call to the diaconate, but I believe strongly that the Church should allow it to happen. Neither our Plenary Council, nor the Synod on Synodality reflected a positive view on that call that some women have.



It was during the eight years that I was Pastoral Director in the Bordertown/Keith/ Kingston parish here in the Archdiocese of Adelaide, that I became very aware that my responsibilities were '**diaconal in nature**'. My appointment agreement included being able to Baptise, celebrate Funeral Services, and lead Liturgies of the Word with Holy Communion. I also trained the laity to lead these Liturgies.

Before this, I had been involved with the Ministry Formation Programme, started by Archbishop Len Faulkner's Diocesan Pastoral Team. It was for the laity, especially Pastoral Associates. It formed them at Catholic Theological College and, gradually, married men participated and several were ordained as permanent deacons. I was asked to develop a Rural Ministry Formation Programme, (RMFP) and after considerable research, began a four-year part-time course in the South-East of the state in 2008. 11 women and 2 men participated in the full programme, but the diaconate was not on the agenda. At its conclusion, all participants received Certificates acknowledging their achievements in the

various fields of Theology, Liturgy and Canon Law. However, their ministry training was not really recognised in the sense of being a pathway forward. It was the intention to prepare lay people for leadership in their parishes, but the Church was not ready to hand over that leadership, and no formal authorisation was given. As one woman said twelve months later: "I am not doing anything more than I already did before I began the Rural Ministry Programme".

There is a difference between ministering in a parish in ways similar to that of a deacon and being authorised to minister by the formal act of ordination. In my time as Pastoral Director, I was privileged to minister to the housebound, sick and dying. I did a lot of visiting, was with many people during their final hours and conducted many funerals. That kind of ministry helps build the community, lets people know that God cares, and the community cares. I believe that there is so much potential in the restoration of women deacons. It would enable recognition and sustainability for Church ministry into the future.

Joanna Thyer

30 years in ministry – in both Catholic, ecumenical and community contexts

I first felt called to become a deacon when I was a pastoral care chaplain at St Vincent's Hospital in the 1990s. I still feel this call which I believe has come from the Holy Spirit. It has been with me for the past 30 years of my ministry.



I worked primarily on the cancer ward when I was at St Vincent's, and also ministered to other hospital patients and those in palliative care. At those times, there were many occasions where my long pastoral relationship with a dying person was interrupted when I had to call a Priest to administer the last rites/Anointing of the Sick. It would have been a wonderful pastoral experience - something that many of my patients would have appreciated - for me to administer that sacrament.

Likewise, when I worked in Prince Of Wales Hospital complex from 2011 – 2015, I also conducted a few baptisms for sick babies. This would have been a wonderful sacrament to administer in a general church setting, for babies who just needed to be baptized.

Now in hospitals in Australia, there are still many occasions where the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has not occurred because no Priest has been available. I worked with the HIV/Aids community part time for 6 years (2016-2021) and in many ways this ministry was diaconal in nature. It would have been wonderful to be able to Anoint the Sick in this ministry, as many of this community have complex physical and mental health needs, and

some have died along the way. Again, the long pastoral relationship would have benefited from me having this sacramental relationship with this group, despite the collegial relationship with a good Priest at various liturgical events, and sometimes when individuals were dying. Whilst I no longer work officially in this sector, I still have a pastoral relationship with the community and engage with them when I can. Many of them would appreciate me having this greater sacramental capacity and to be on call for them now.

Ideally, I hope that the Church might review the ministry of Anointing of the Sick, which is not currently open to male deacons. Given its inaccessibility to many, it would be most helpful if this was to also become a ministry of ordained or extraordinary ministers. I believe the Holy Spirit is definitely calling the Church to broaden the role of the diaconate. It is both a practical need, and a direct response to a pastoral and sacramental call that so many women in ministry experience. It is in no way about clericalising the role of the diaconate, rather it is about being a bridge builder - a bridge between the Church and those we minister to in daily life.

Sr Stancea Vichie MSS

Liturgy, Word, Service and Funerals Close to the Heart,
2 March 2023

<https://liturgyonthemargins.org/2023/03/02/liturgy-word-service-and-funerals-close-to-the-heart/>

In 2016, Sr Stancea Vichie MSS was in Rome with the International Union of Superiors General, in a meeting with Pope Francis. It was there that the question arose: as women already function effectively as deacons, could they not be ordained like those women in the early Church? Since then, Stancea has been doing her own research into the role of a permanent deacon. She has seen that the Church summarises the role in the three elements of liturgy, word and service.³ And, as the Congregational Leader of the Missionary Sisters of Service, she has seen her Sisters in diaconal ministry for years!



The Missionary Sisters of Service were founded in Tasmania, in 1944, by a young country priest, Fr John Wallis. Fr John saw the need for religious education and spiritual/pastoral care in rural and outback areas. So, encouraged by him, six women gave their “yes to a deep call in their hearts to serve those on the margins.”⁴ They have since set their feet to the ‘highways and byways’ of the world, and in years gone by, often in places infrequently visited by the clergy.

³ See *Lumen Gentium* #29 and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1588.

⁴ <https://missionarysisters.org.au/about/>

Ministry of Liturgy

Stancea has witnessed many of her Sisters presiding at liturgies, after careful training. They accompanied and listened to their communities, and found out what was meaningful for them. Then, when possible, they trained and assisted local parishioners to lead their own liturgies in the absence of a priest.

From 1988-1990, Stancea was involved with a pastoral/theological reflection with the Missionary Sisters of Service. She travelled across Australia where MSS sisters were working, and accompanied her Sisters to reflect on the social, economic, cultural and religious contexts of the places in which they worked. It was a “fantastic time” in which she saw the MSS women continuing to perform the ministry of a deacon informally. In some places without a priest, they led liturgies with communion, baptisms, funerals and cared for the sick with what spiritual nourishment they could offer. The people were very ready for the ministry of women and it was greatly appreciated.

Ministry of the Word

Stancea also reflects on the diaconal ministry of the word that is open to permanent deacons. When asked about reflections at liturgical services, she says that her Sisters have done so for years. When presiding at prayer, including the Liturgy of the Hours, they have read the Gospel and broken open the scriptures many, many times. Rather than being “pious or dogmatic”, Stancea has observed that the Sisters’ preaching has been “very much related to the Gospels and people’s lives and their search for meaning”.

Not only that, the Sisters have encouraged and formed others to do these ministries too when possible. Stancea says, “It is about the people, not ourselves, it’s been about doing ourselves out of a job.” She sees that all the baptised are on mission in the world. Alongside this, lay people have the ability and capacity to take on liturgical and pastoral leadership roles. Local people, especially in rural and outback areas, are used to having only small gatherings of 5-10 people in their churches, and could obviously become leaders if they have support and supervision, including communities who gather in bigger numbers. Rather, following more disconnection with local churches during COVID, “In a country like Australia it is loud and clear that people are not always returning to participate in Eucharistic worship. We need a wider range of opportunities for people to participate in other prayerful moments”.

Ministry of Service

Stancea has herself had many years of involvement in pastoral ministry, both formally in parishes until the mid 1980s and informally with people who have sought asylum or been trafficked. She believes that the ministry of deacon must be imbued with a sense of mission. As she sees it, part of the role of a deacon is to be with people who are often on the edges. Especially in regard to women, they often have a capacity and a way into people's lives that could enhance the current religious leadership.

Stancea believes an important aspect of the permanent diaconate is the exercise of charity, as described in the role of the deacon. However, she says it is more than offering kindness and compassion. It is also about probing the underlying issues of people's circumstances – it is about justice. Her Sisters have long experience in not just 'giving food to the hungry', but asking why they are hungry in the first place. As leaders they have had many opportunities to support people in their cries for justice. So Stancea hopes that we can look to the early Church, the variety of ministries, and the examples of women leaders.

Funerals Close to the Heart

A few years ago, Stancea had a particularly significant experience of leading in a time of need. She had grown up in Bundaberg, within Queensland's Rockhampton Diocese. When her mother died there in 2004, the local priest was not going to be in town on the day of the funeral. He rang Stancea and asked her, "Why don't you do the funeral?", to which she immediately answered, "Yes". If she had not felt able to lead the funeral, the members of the local lay funeral team would have led the ceremony. Family members and local people were thrilled that Stancea took up this opportunity. Then, in 2007 her father died, and again, with no priest in town, Stancea was able to lead her father's funeral. She was "incredibly privileged" to preside again, in front of many mourners. Her parents' neighbour of many years, who was not a Catholic, came to her mother's funeral and sitting on the steps of the church afterwards, said, "That's the best bloody funeral I've ever been to!"

Thank you, Stancea and the Missionary Sisters of Service, for your leadership and for sharing your stories!

Sr Elizabeth Young RSM

I am a religious Sister of Mercy, professed for 15 years in Australia. I feel very blessed in my current ministries “of the liturgy, of the word and of charity.”

I was privileged to have good examples of religious leadership as a child, and felt called to ordained ministry from the age of 7. I was privileged to become a reader, altar server, sacristan and extraordinary minister of communion at school.

I was privileged to join the Sisters and complete a Bachelor and Masters of Theology. I was invited into our diocesan Ministry Formation Program, which formed men as deacons and women as other ecclesial leaders in the Archdiocese of Adelaide.

When I tried teaching, it was soon clear that my gifts and calling were not in that area. Instead, on the side, I had been invited into parish ministry, prison and refugee chaplaincy. There was so much need in these areas, which aligned with my joys and my gifts. Although my church roles brought in little to no income, with the security of being in a religious order, I have been privileged to serve professionally in variously-named ecclesial ministries. This has mostly been in remote dioceses, where I also continue to have many diocesan roles with various Councils and Catholic agencies.



Institution as a Catechist by Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green in 2023

Right now, I am extremely privileged to be a Parish Life Coordinator and instituted Catechist in Wilcannia, a remote outback town of mostly Aboriginal people, very much on the margins in terms of access to services. Due to its distance from the nearest parishes, my Bishop wanted to create a stronger connection as part of the Church's institutional desire to minister alongside Aboriginal people. Therefore, he became its parish priest and appointed me as his deputy. I am authorised to represent the Catholic Church here, and to preside and preach at Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion three Sundays of every four, the baptisms and funerals. I coordinate clergy visits and we have great working relationships. I have been encouraged to build what I hope is a parish community that is synodal, hospitable and empowers each person in their gifts and charisms.



A Baptism under the Rite for Lay Ministers, 2025

I have realised that this blessed ministry is possible only because of a unique combination of factors. Like ordained ministers, I have a recognised title (being one of the Sisters), religious authorising bodies, and certain liturgical faculties in this particular situation. People trust in the public lifelong representation of a larger institution, that the ministry they receive is legitimate. Finally, I absolutely love what I do and the people I work with, and I think that shows. I feel God affirms this, as using my strengths and gifts for God's work.

Lumen Gentium says that deacons are “strengthened by sacramental grace” in their service of the liturgy, of the word and of charity. For more than 4 years, I have interviewed and shared the stories of over 30 permanent deacons. Each one explained the importance and value of ordination for the communities they serve, themselves and for the Church itself. It is much more than their functions, but an identity and state of life that I can understand as a consecrated religious. However, I know that women like me have a call and gifts, many fulfil the functions, but most do not have the recognition, consecration, deputation, authorisation and security that would strengthen our ministries for those we serve. While I am blessed to serve as I do, I do not see many avenues for women to come after me in lifelong public commitment. We are all baptised as priest, prophet and royal person; as St Paul says, we have “clothed ourselves with Christ”. If our bodies are found to be unordainable, unable to be strengthened by sacramental grace in our current ministries, I feel this limits God’s power and impairs the Church’s outreach. I hope that together we can pave pathways for sharing the Good News of Jesus, especially on the margins, on into the future.

Anonymous

I have a deep deep desire to draw people to God, to help them experience the love of God. I feel frustrated that there are no significant ways for women to do this. Yes, I can speak one on one to those around me. And I have done that and continue to do this. But my desire seems bigger than this individual contact and it appears that the Church is more concerned about the gender of the person than the ability and desire of a person to make a difference in this area.

I have written articles on faith, initiated activities that help draw people together, speak often of faith, have encouraged colleagues to consider faith, initiated a mini-business that might highlight faith to people all in an attempt to give voice to that deep desire in me to evangelise on a large scale.

I believe having the ability to preach at Mass will give me considerable peace and somewhat appease this desire.

Not currently but over the past I have been an extra-ordinary and liturgy of the word minister, conducted roles related to a pastoral associate such as running baptismal programs, engaging with parishioners, running prayer meetings and parish meetings.

Section 2: The Potential in the Australian Catholic Churches

Australian Catholics Exploring the Diaconate (ACED) began in September 2021, as a monthly online meeting of people from all over Australia and from all walks of life. It has brought together deacons with a permanent vocation, lay ministers, Sisters, priests and many others interested in the conversation. The group operates in tandem with the [blogsite](#) *Liturgy on the Margins*. See [Appendix 1](#) for our aims, goals and activities.

The above stories are just some examples of women in Australia who have done or are doing diaconal ministry, or who feel called to such ministry. In almost four years of gathering qualitative data from such women, as well as lay and ordained men, there are also many who do not feel able to share publicly (<https://liturgyonthemargins.org/2024/12/19/the-stories-not-told/>).

What we do hope to show is that there are gifts ready for the Church to receive in the event of the universal Church authorising the re-inclusion of women in the diaconate. There are many women, we have found, who share similar stories of ministry and call to the male deacons that we have likewise interviewed and celebrated. These women are also diverse, with different ages, gifts, professions, cultural backgrounds and ecclesial jurisdictions (Roman Catholic Dioceses, Eastern Catholic Eparchies and Ordinariates).

In our Submission to Study Group 5, our key proposal was for the Commission on Women Deacons or Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith to host dialogue sessions with scholars with relevant expertise, and women in deacon-like ministries, to mature the call for women's access to the diaconate. These would be held between 2025-2027 in various countries, co-branded with hosting bodies, and would be prayerful, transparent and dialogical.

We also brought some questions to this discernment:

- How can we complete the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent vocation since Vatican II without including women for its full flourishing as an order?
- How can the Church ask women to do all the functions of deacons in conditional circumstances, yet not recognise this as a lifelong ordinary vocation giving stability to the Church in its ordained college of ministers?
- How can girls believe that they are full equal baptised members of the Church, made in the image and likeness of God, when their bodies are experienced as unordainable and therefore lesser/flawed?

Our main points were:

Current Situation:

- There are many women and men in ministry roles in parishes, Catholic agencies and the community who feel called by the Holy Spirit to be ordained as a deacon. This call is clearly distinguished from the ordained priesthood, as per recent changes to the Catechism (#1569) and Canon Law (Can. 1009 §3).
- The need to ordain women and men who feel called to the ministry of the diaconate, and are adequately prepared and authorised, is both pastoral and spiritual.
- Our Church needs to be more synodal as per the final document of the World Synod 2024 - that is, more reciprocal and community-focussed for those in all forms of ministry so that they can better witness to and serve the people of God.

Proposals for the Diaconate ministry:

- Ordain women and men to the diaconate as a whole-of-life sacramental and public ecclesial commitment, which includes faculties for ordinary ministry of specific sacraments - baptisms, marriages, exposition/benediction and the capacity to preside at funerals and Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion in the church.
- Give bishops in dioceses the authority to ordain women and men deacons if they choose.
- Promote spiritual leadership in the community by women, as well as by men, who are trained in ministry and thereby create a more community-focussed church that is less clericalised, yet in no way minimises or diffuses the role of the ordained priest.
- Ideally, review the ministry of Anointing of the Sick, which is not currently open to male deacons. Given its inaccessibility to many, this may become a ministry of ordained or extraordinary ministers.

Matters for Study Relevant to the Reinstitution of Women Deacons

What follows is some of the material that we gathered as 'Matters for Study' in our Study Group 5 submission, to give some context to imagining the potential for women deacons in the Australian Catholic Churches.

Relationship of Sacramental Power and Ecclesial Ministry

The ‘sacred power’ that is invested in ordained members of the Catholic faithful is more than a delegation for specific tasks within a community.⁵ It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, in the Tradition and power of Christ and the Church. The ordained members’ share of sacramental grace is for the service of the People of God.

Therefore, although other forms of ecclesial ministries are recognised today – instituted or commissioned – only the ordained ministries endow permanent sacramental grace within the structure of the Church quite apart from any particular liturgical faculties or leadership responsibilities.

Ad Gentes explained the re-institution of the diaconate as a permanent vocation in 1965, as at that time men were carrying “out the functions of the deacon’s office, either preaching the word of God as catechists, or presiding over scattered Christian communities in the name of the pastor and the bishop, or practicing charity in social or relief work.” It was declared “only right” that they be strengthened by sacramental grace for effective ministry and “to bind them more closely to the altar.”⁶ Therefore, the same reasons for incorporating men into the order of the diaconate today also apply to women.

The Church continues to need collegial service, proclamation of the gospel and liturgical/sacramental nourishment. It is apparent that the Holy Spirit has also placed such a call upon women, who yearn to respond through traditional authorisation – ordination – in order to better serve the People of God; bound to the altar, empowered by the Holy Spirit, as a witness to the Good News within the structures of the Church.

The Grassroots Situation of Those Called to Diaconal Ministry

Our group has conducted a qualitative exploration into the diaconate for almost 4 years, which has included publishing over 30 deacons' stories, listening to many women in deacon-like situations and hosting talks/articles on the theology, spirituality, organisation, formation and reality of the diaconate as it has been experienced as a permanent vocation in Australia. From this study, we have discovered a number of things. Firstly, that the diaconal call is very specific, flourishing alongside many other lay and ordained ministries. However, in critical ways the permanent diaconate enhances the faith life of Catholics in Australia, as well as the wider community. For example:

⁵ Code of Canon Law #1008-1009 §1 and Catechism of the Catholic Church #1537-1538.

⁶ *Ad Gentes*, 1965, #16.

- Proper authorisation of people in diaconal ministry situations is extremely important. For those receiving the ministry, it gives reassurance of qualification, training, supervision and lifelong commitment to God's work. For those performing the ministry, it gives spiritual foundations, ethical responsibilities, standards of operating, lines of accountability and lifelong recognition of vocation. Such people are genuine and not 'filling in' or ministering contingent on various circumstances. Historically in our Catholic Church, authorisation for ordinary sacramental and liturgical ministry is called ordination. No other lay ministries (such as pastoral associate or catechist) have the same traditional, affective or operational qualities.
- In situations of liturgical need, bishops and parishes already seek creative solutions. Often, they call upon someone who is close by, faithful, spiritually mature, valued by the community and willing to learn. For some, this is a temporary and part-time responsibility. However, for others, it is a deeper calling that they are willing to pursue further.
- Female members of our group have great experience of every kind of ministerial opportunity for women that is currently available in canon law. For example: Acolyte, Catechist, Chaplain, Liturgical Leader, Parish Leader, Pastoral Associate and Parish Life Coordinator. However, none are recognised by many Catholics or the broader (non-Catholic) community as representing the Church as ordained ministers do. These contingent roles do not capture the public authorised lifelong identity of the minister for the Church, the individual or the wider community.
- Those 'on the margins' exist everywhere, in short-term or enduring situations. Even the most privileged may lack access to sacraments and liturgy. When ministers are prepared to reach out, there is a great yearning for, and appreciation of, such ministry. Deacons build bridges between the marginal or non-attendant people of God and the institutional Church.

Leadership, Ministerial and Management Roles

The Final Document of the 2025 Synod on Synodality states, "There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped. The question of women's access to diaconal service remains open." (#60) However, in practice the Church distinguishes between roles that are managerial and ministerial.

For example, *Praedicate evangelium* (2022) makes provision for lay women and men in "roles of government and responsibility" in the Roman Curia (#10). Women also hold leadership roles, including in religious orders, Catholic education facilities, Catholic theological institutions, Catholic medical and social services and diocesan curias.

However, leadership in ministerial roles within a parish or pastoral unit is reserved to those men ordained as priests (*The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church*, 2020, #66). Deacons “are collaborators of the Bishop and the priests in a singular mission of evangelisation and with the specific task, by virtue of the Sacrament received, to ‘serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word and charity’” (*Ibid*, #79).

Furthermore, deacons perform their ministerial functions in an ordinary, rather than extraordinary capacity; they belong to the “special character of the ministry entrusted to them” (*Sacrum Diconatus Ordinem*, 1967, #30). **Therefore, the ordination of women to the diaconate would increase their opportunities to participate in the Church’s ministry, while not taking away from the leadership ministry of the priest.**

Relevance of the Historical Ordination of Women to the Diaconate

There has been extensive documentation of women being ordained as deacons in the Eastern and Western Catholic Churches until the 12th Century (see, for example, “Women Deacons: History” by Gary Macy in *Women Deacons: Past, Present and Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), pg. 9-36).⁷ They are attested to in scripture passages (Romans 16:1, 1 Timothy 3:11), documents such as the 3rd century *Didascalia Apostolorum*, laws such as from the Council of Chalcedon, letters, tombstones and ordination rites (see [Were women ordained deacons? – Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research](#)).

Such ordination rites were at times identical to those of their male counterparts and at other times were distinguished by their references to female saints. Such rites were held within the sanctuary, presided over by the Bishop, included the laying on of hands, the presentation of the stole, the self-communication from the chalice, and the ordained women were recognised as members of the clergy (“Catholic Women Deacons: The State of the Question Part I: Learning from Scripture and History” by Phyllis Zagano, *Doctrine & Life* 72:9 (November 2022), 2-12).

While the functions of women deacons varied at different times and places, they would not be determinative of the functions of women deacons today. In regards to men, “the Council wanted to restore the principle of the permanent ministry of deacon and not any particular form that the diaconate had taken in a particular historical epoch.” (Anthony Gooley, *Deacons Today*, Bayswater: Coventry Press, 2019, pg. 253) Therefore, it is only relevant whether women were ordained, and not their functions or faculties.

⁷ See also Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church, a Documentary History* (The John Hopkins University Press: USA, 2011).

Deacon Anthony Gooley, a member of ACED, also expresses concern about a functionalist theology of Holy Orders or a potential non-sacramental diaconate for women:

If this is so [a non-sacramental diaconate for women] it would mark a genuine innovation and departure from the Tradition. It would be a genuine innovation to have an ordained ministry of deacon, for men, alongside of a nonordained diaconate of women. We have never had a situation in which we had a parallel of an ordained order with a non-ordained. This is hugely problematic. Does it open the way for a non-ordained and ordained presbyterate and episcopate? Why could we have two forms of diaconate without two forms of the other orders? How would this be justified theologically? The doctrinal implications for understanding Holy Orders are profound. (Anthony Gooley in “Women Deacons Revisited”, *The Diaconate*, the National Association of Deacons of Australia Newsletter (June 2024, Issue 12), pg. 20).

Concluding Remarks

Not all women are called to the diaconate, just as not all men are called to the diaconate or the priesthood. Those women who do experience a vocational call to the diaconate have a deep desire to serve people in very challenging circumstances, frequently on the margins of society. In many instances they are already doing so without the strengthening of sacramental grace that is available to male deacons.

Section 3: Proposals and Conclusion

We would like to conclude this document with proposals for the Australian Catholic Churches and a prayer.

Therefore, we would like to propose:

- Should the Commission on Women Deacons or Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith conduct consultation, dialogue or study on the access of women to the ordained diaconate, the Australian Catholic Churches cooperate fully and offer such expertise and life experience as is available in this country.
- That the Australian Bishops proactively animate Decree 4 of our 2022 Plenary Council, which states: ‘That, should the universal law of the Church be modified to authorize the diaconate for women, the Plenary Council recommends that the Australian Bishops examine how best to implement it in the context of the Church in Australia.’
- That the Australian Catholic Churches examine models that have already been exercised to form women in ecclesial leadership (including in seminaries, institutes of theology, alongside diaconal programs, by religious orders, for women in church

leadership) as well as existing programs for diaconal formation (some of which have been or would be open to women) to find opportunities for best practice in diaconal formation for the future.

- That, should the access of women to the ordained diaconate be authorised, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference allow individual Ordinaries to open the diaconate to women in their jurisdictions (as has been the case for male deacons with a permanent vocation).
- That the Australian Catholic Bishops begin to imagine where pilot programs for women in authorised ministries might be held, building on the creative pastoral solutions to ministerial needs that they have already implemented.

We would like to conclude with the prayer that is prayed in our ACED Prayer Network:

God of mission and wisdom,
we open ourselves to your movement in the world today.
Reach out through us in your mission
to minister with those on the margins of our society,
those who are suffering, and our wounded Earth.
Inspire our Church community with wise leadership
and the grace to recognise our various gifts, ministries and charisms.
Call us to your service, and strengthen
all the faithful who share in diaconal ministry.
May we recognise, affirm and support
this ministry into the future.
In Jesus' name, through the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

St Stephen and St Phoebe, pray for us.

Appendix 1

ACED is a place of conversation around diaconal ministry in the Australian Catholic Church, with these two main aims:

- PRESENT: To recognise, celebrate and promote diaconal ministry in Australia, especially as it is experienced through liturgy in marginal spaces and communities.
- FUTURE: To identify people and situations that yearn for such ministry, and potential leaders to carry out this ministry through formal Church endorsement.

We further these aims by:

- Sharing stories of communities who experience liturgy on the margins or who yearn for such diaconal ministry. This includes individuals who lead or feel called to lead such ministry.
- Offering resources for discernment around the diaconate, particularly for those who are precluded by their gender from current discernment, formation and ordination programs.
- Highlighting supports and endorsements for people engaged in this discernment.

We keep some parameters around this conversation. We seek to:

- Keep a missionary and compassionate outlook, in line with *Evangelii Gaudium* and the agenda of the Australian Plenary Council.
- Promote the Church of the poor and for the poor.

GOALS

- Highlight the significance of the ordained diaconate and identify those with a capacity to respond to this call.
- Build bridges among people, especially between marginal communities and the institutional Church.
- Form relationships with communities of ministry, from which liturgy arises and to which liturgy leads.
- Appreciate the Church and its mission, given by Jesus Christ, to promote the reign of God, nourished by its liturgical and sacramental tradition.
- Endorse the ability and responsibility of Church governance structures to provide for the liturgical needs of their people, by enabling willing ministers.
- Listen to all voices with respect and in a spirit of gospel love.

- Be open to creative and imaginative paths forward, led by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, we try to avoid:

- Limiting the conversation to pastoral ministries that are currently encouraged for baptised Catholics.
- Broadening this conversation to other worthy topics, such as other governance roles, or other ministries that are ordained, installed or commissioned.
- Seeking positions or roles for the sake of power over others.

We seek God's guidance in this journey together and invite St Phoebe and St Stephen to pray for us.

Since their inception, ACED and *Liturgy on the Margins* have:

- Been a source of hope, care and inspiration through listening, shared conversation, prayer, lament and resourcing.
- Learnt from and dialogued with Australian bishops, the chair of the National Association of Deacons, Plenary Council members, Synod on Synodality members, diaconal formators and other guest speakers.
- Published the stories of over 90 people including deacons, lay women and men in diaconal-type roles, priests, Sisters and bishops. Each person has responded to the questions:
 - Tell me a bit about your own ministry journey.
 - Tell me about an experience of celebrating liturgy that was very meaningful with a community 'on the margins'. What happened in it? How did the liturgy touch people's lives? How did the liturgy flow from your relationship with this community?
 - What do you think is made possible by the ordained diaconal ministry? **or**
 - Tell me about a marginal community that was/is missing out on liturgical ministry due to the lack of people able to celebrate such liturgy. Why are they missing out? What could help them?
- Held four public [webinars](#) for the Feast of St Phoebe that sought to educate about St Phoebe, the theology of the diaconate, the history of women's ministries and who might be her successors today.
- Held an in-person retreat with members who are deacons, wives of deacons, priests and interested in the ministry of the diaconate to explore the spirituality of the diaconate and its intersection with our lives and sense of call.
- Contributed to other events, publications and activities, such as:
 - *Alive in the Spirit* Conference

- *Women and the Australian Church*
- *Catalyst for Renewal*
- The consultation for the *Synod on Synodality*
- Australian Catholic University *Centre for Liturgy*
- *Discerning Deacons* events and prayer sessions
- CEAMA forum
- *Amerindia* forum
- *Eureka Street* magazine
- *Australasian Catholic Record*
- Various Australian Catholic media outlets