

The Southern Cross constellation is depicted in the top left corner of the blue header. It consists of five white stars of varying sizes arranged in a cross-like pattern.

The Light from the Southern Cross

A Reading Guide

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*“All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost.
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.”*

These words of J.R.R. Tolkien are perhaps a strange place to start this reading guide, but they have their point. What follows is provided in sympathetic response to the report provided by the Catholic Church’s Implementation Advisory Group, through its Governance Review Project Team (GRPT). The GRPT report seeks to assist as the Church attends to the perennial task of responding to the signs of the times.

Faith holds out the hope that the need to pay attention to where we are going is not an indication of being lost. The Church always seeks to incorporate those legitimate changes required as it grows ever more authentically in the image and likeness of the one to whom it owes its life. “The old that is strong” will continue, as long as the roots are deep.

Purpose

The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia (LSC) is a lengthy report, and the temptation is to focus on its recommendations without considering the context within which those recommendations have emerged. The purpose of this reading guide is to engage the reader with LSC, by valuing its contribution, reflecting on its implications and proposing **questions**¹ intended to assist readers as they formulate their response.

It begins by reorganising the essential content of LSC’s 86 recommendations into connected groupings, in the attempt to provide a supplementary perspective on what they contain and to progress the discussion on what might be involved in their implementation.

¹ Throughout the guide, topics are in **bold** to indicate that a question for thought and discussion will follow.

Principles and Impact

LSC calls on some foundational principles as it formulates its recommendations and provides advice on the way forward. These principles are collegiality, synodality, stewardship, dialogue, discernment, participation and good leadership (R3). Recommendations 4 and 5 further develop '**good leadership**', indicating that it involves integrity, accountability, transparency, inclusivity, sound risk management practices, active engagement and communication. Arguably, recommendations 3-5 are the heart of LSC, with everything else serving to explicate what is found there.



Is the list of elements of **good leadership** within the Church context complete?

What might be missing?

LSC addresses the various aspects of Church governance upon which these principles would impact. These include:

- finances (R6);
- *ad limina* visits and reports (R7);
- the appointment of bishops and diocesan administrators (R8-11);
- the governance provided by bishops (R12-13);
- senior diocesan leadership (R14-15);
- communication regarding the governance structure of each diocese (R16);
- the role of women (R17-18);
- discerning suitability for ordination and decisions regarding the placement of clergy (R18-19, 83);
- awareness training and diversity inclusion (R20-21);
- the safety of children (R22-26).

Auditing

In response to LSC's recommendations, different levels of auditing would be undertaken both nationally and locally. Attending to this would allow the Church in Australia to understand what is required as it implements the increased synodality and participation for which the Church and LSC are calling. LSC recommends an **audit** of the following:

- Catholic agencies (both diocesan and independent) to assess whether clerics are unnecessarily employed in senior positions that could just as appropriately be filled by lay women and men (R14 and 15.1);
- Terms of reference of Catholic agencies (both diocesan and independent) to ensure inclusiveness (R15.2);
- Diocesan leadership teams (Episcopal and Pastoral Councils etc.) for inclusivity (R15.3);
- Dioceses, Religious Institutes and Public Juridic Persons to assess the implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (R23-24, 86);

- Associations of Christ's faithful in operation in each diocese, and the degree to which they have adopted the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (R67).



Auditing can be simple in theory.

What might the complexities be?

How can those complexities be addressed?

LSC considers Catholic leadership to be in significant need of ongoing attention. This will require:

- A comprehensive leadership training program accessed by all leaders and prospective leaders (R35);
- Attention to the best of civil and ecclesial governance principles as leaders develop and implement governance and management systems (R36);
- Ongoing professional development for leadership (R37-38, 41, 59);
- The establishment of a national centre for Catholic leadership and governance (R39, 71);
- Improved induction and formation of bishops (R40);
- Attendance of lay advisors at councils of priests and colleges of consultors with the right to participate fully in discussions (R46);
- The legislating of particular law requiring all dioceses to establish a **pastoral council** or equivalent, as well as mandating the role, development, constitution, support and review of those councils (R50-55, 65);
- Bishops and priests to be *ex officio* members, but not the chair, of finance councils (R58, 78);
- The provision of formation programs for those involved in ministry and leadership within dioceses and parishes, and the establishment of pathways and ministry opportunities (R72, 79, 84-85);
- Bishops to mandate parish pastoral councils within their dioceses adapted to circumstances, with that to be regularly reviewed (R74-76).



Some dioceses and many parishes do not have **pastoral councils**.

Why might that be the case?

Concerning governance structures within parishes, particularly as they relate to dioceses, LSC recommends:

- Real consultation between the bishop and parish leadership on significant issues affecting the pastoral life of the parish (R47);
- Transparency in the appeal process between parish and diocese (R49);

- Regular diocesan and parish synods (R56-57, 68);
- That the renewal, adaptation and reconfiguration of parishes be truly consultative (R69-70).

In pursuit of public accountability, transparency and effective communication, LSC recommends:

- Diocesan and parish financial reports to be publically available and fiduciary concepts and governance principles to be included in professional development for all in leadership (R60-62, 81-82);
- The further development and support of Catholic media (R63);
- Transparency in Church organisational structures (R64);
- The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons find ways to speak “with one voice” (R66);
- Parish finance councils to meet at least four times annually (R80).

There are some recommendations directed towards the Bishops Conference:

- The effective implementation of the Australian Catholic Ministry Register card (R27.1);
- The development of a national register (R27.2);
- The provision of a national protocol on seminary selection, training and ongoing formation – with a particular emphasis on addressing **clericalism** amongst clergy and laity (R28-34);
- Increased transparency and consistency in its consultations, operations, decisions and reporting (R42-44);
- The investigation of the canonical and civil requirements for a tribunal to be able to review administrative decisions made by priests, Church agencies and bishops (R 48);
- Production of a consolidated list of dioceses and their legal structure as an accurate reference for those who wish to get in contact (R64);
- The commissioning of a study concerning parish councils to establish effective practice (R 77).



Clericalism comes up several times in this document.

Why is it considered to be such an important issue?

How can it be addressed while continuing to value the vocation of the priest?

Recourse to Rome

Acknowledging that it is not within the power of the Bishops Conference to implement some of LSC’s recommendations, LSC asks that the Bishops Conference petition Rome on the following:

- Modifications to Canon 391 on matters to do with governance (R45); and
- Amendments to Canon 513 concerning diocesan pastoral councils (R53).

Key reference points and issues arising

There are a variety of reference points that require acknowledgement and some agreement if the recommendations drawn from them are to be accepted. We begin with “the signs of the times”.

The Signs of the Times

While referenced explicitly only once [p. 120], the injunction that we are to pay attention to the **signs of the times** underscores the report. As a pilgrim people, the Church is to be ever attentive to the journey it seeks to navigate in response to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is often considered to mean that we are to pay attention not only to what the world is asking of us but also to the deeper needs that this asking represents. It is an act of pastoral openness, as the Church attends to its mission on terms that are meaningful to the world even if they cause the Church to move outside its usual way of doing things.



Read *Gaudium et Spes* n. 4, which references the need to pay attention to the **signs of the times**.

Is LSC’s use of the term equivalent to that found in *Gaudium et Spes* n.4?

Synodality

Synodality brings together the “imperatives” of co-responsibility, collaboration and genuine consultation between Church leaders and the lay faithful (p. 11). It involves the active participation of all members of the Church as the Church consults, discerns and cooperates “at every level of decision making and mission” (p. 43). While not intended to undermine the hierarchical structure of the Church, it is considered to be the antidote to clericalism (p. 43), in turn allowing a more authentic response to the action of the Holy Spirit.



Synodality is an essential aspect of Church life today. Pope Francis is firm on it as the way forward.

How might synodality be misunderstood by people brought up in democratic societies?

Power, Governance, Transparency and Abuse

The identification of cultural practices within the Church that have nurtured the abuse of power is one of the terms of reference given to the GRPT by the Bishops Conference (p. 9). LSC attempts to walk a fine line that respects clerical leadership while finding ways to include others in governance, partly as an attempt to hold leaders accountable. It would

be difficult to know how else LSC could proceed, given the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission and persistent calls from groups and individuals within the Catholic community. In light of Church teaching, which connects leadership with service and insists on a halt to clericalism (section 6.4, p. 64), there is plenty to justify calls for a review of the exercise of power in the Church in Australia.

A commitment to transparency, as bishops and other leaders communicate with the Church and the community at large, is central to the report. Rightly or wrongly, there is a suspicion of decisions made *in camera*, particularly when the reporting of the discussions surrounding those decisions, let alone the decisions themselves, is limited or even non-existent.

The practice of clergy being accountable only to other clergy is identified as problematic (section 7.5, p. 125). LSC looks to governance principles and practices as developed and implemented in both Catholic and secular agencies to assist. The recommendation is that these principles and practices be applied to the Church context as far as is reasonably possible.

Clericalism is identified as the reason why the Church needs to change, and the reason why the Church resists change. LSC links clericalism with a sustained lack of transparency. Standard practices of reporting and accountability that feature in the best of our Catholic agencies, and the secular world today, are thought to be inadequately attended to in the Church. The claim is that clericalism undermines the Church's spiritual will and distorts its ability to respond to what is being asked of it, in anything more than a haphazard and superficial fashion.

A central concern of LSC is to address aspects of **Church culture** that have contributed to the abuse of children and other vulnerable people, and the morally and legally inadequate response to this perversion within Church ranks over decades.



LSC considers that attention to **Church culture** would come in the form of increased lay participation in the formation of seminarians, and increased lay involvement in the appointment of clergy, as the way forward.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of both these ideas?

Leadership

A failure in **leadership** inevitably affects the quality of governance. It is a sensitive issue, but it cannot be any surprise that LSC exists, in large part, in response to a perceived failure in Church leadership over a sustained period. Whether Church leaders consistently lead with courage, conviction and compassion, while making decisions in keeping with an understanding of humanity and the human condition (p. 45) is, in the eyes of some, in doubt. Any thought that bishops are accountable only to God, the Pope or themselves is questioned by the report (p. 64).

LSC recommends an alteration in approach to leadership that involves increased “transparency, accountability, inclusion, participation and diversity” (p. 40). In light of a Church commitment to co-responsibility, dialogue and synodality, there can be no problem with advancing on this particular path. These come with two correlatives: inclusivity and co-responsibility. These ground an ecclesiology that may not have been implemented to the degree intended by Vatican

II. LSC turns to Benedict XVI to suggest the path back to the intention of the Council's reforms. In 2012, the then Pope observed that:

"Co-responsibility demands a change in mindset especially concerning the role of lay people in the Church. They should not be regarded as 'collaborators' of the clergy, but, rather, as people who are really 'co-responsible' for the Church's being and acting...It is therefore important that a mature and committed laity be consolidated, which can make its own specific contribution to the ecclesial mission with respect for the ministries and tasks that each one has in the life of the Church and always in cordial communion with the bishops."²

LSC offers the inherent dignity of each person as the basis for the participation of all. This is in keeping with canons 204 and 208, which affirm the dignity and responsibility of all the baptised. The report considers that only a conversion of heart, and the openness to others that this entails, will lead to real inclusion and co-responsibility in the Church in Australia. Only then can the Church bring people of diverse backgrounds and experience together to provide "the wisdom, talent and professional expertise and commitment to the Gospel needed to animate the mission of the Church in the 21st century" (p. 73).



Much of LSC is premised on a particular understanding of the clerical vocation, the lay vocation and what **leadership** means in the Church context.

Leadership practices to be found in the secular world, and in many Catholic agencies, are promoted as the way forward for the Church in Australia.

What might the Church legitimately learn from these sources?

What would it be best to avoid?

Who, in fact, is the model for leadership in the Church context?

Conclusion

There is gold to be found in LSC, although it requires patient mining. While at times cumbersome and repetitive as it reiterates its central points, its fundamental premise is sound. LSC holds that the Church in Australia is being provided an opportunity to learn from its mistakes, and could well learn from contemporary leadership, governance and reporting practices as it seeks to re-establish not only its credibility with the Australian public but, more importantly, a renewal of its mission at the service of the people of this land. Responding to this challenge will require a creative fidelity on the part of the Catholics of Australia, as the Church seeks to hold on to what it knows to be true while utilising its faith tradition to point the way forward on the path that must be taken. Debates will continue on the degree to which the perception of dysfunction and inauthenticity within the Church, which underscores LSC, is entirely justified. LSC acknowledges these complexities and understands that it is unhelpful to apply the failure of some to all. There is less concern with raking over the past than with suggesting elements of the way forward. In this, the primary question becomes: Can the Church in Australia allow itself to relate to this challenge to our authenticity, justified or not, as an invitation to embrace even more deeply the life and mission for which it exists?

2 P. 73 See http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120810_fiac.html

The work of the Governance Review Project Team that gave birth to LSC deserves a more thorough representation than this reading guide can provide. As a document, it does not stand alone. At the very least, it has a role to play in bringing together a number of other reports and documents, including:

- teachings and recommendations from Pope Francis and other Popes;
- relevant sections from the *Code of Canon Law*;
- recent Australian legislation;
- the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse;
- the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia August 2018 response to the Royal Commission;
- the final report of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council;
- relevant reports produced by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and others in recent decades;
- safeguarding standards provided by Catholic Professional Standards Ltd;
- developments in governance and management modelled by both ecclesial and secular agencies, both local and international.

It should be borne in mind that LSC is part of a process that goes back over many years – perhaps even to Vatican II. LSC contributes to the Church’s ongoing desire to undertake the reforms required of it as it seeks to respond to contemporary circumstances and, more importantly, with urgency to any harm caused to the vulnerable by some in its ranks. Ensuring that any harm inflicted is acknowledged and appropriate compensation paid must remain the Church’s highest priority. Promoting a review of structures and processes within the Church that have contributed to this appalling dysfunction is at the heart of LSC.

The Light from the Southern Cross identifies the restoration of “trust in the Church based on measurable, visible outcomes” as its goal (p. 6). Whether what it offers is the best means to achieve that goal is for others to decide. However, its central guiding principles are undoubtedly worthy of attention.

The next chapter of the Church's response to these pressing issues will be the forthcoming assemblies of the Plenary Council, the decisions made there and their implementation in the future.

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