

Women in Church governance

Images of old men gathering at the Vatican would give the world the false impression that women are totally excluded from governance in the Catholic Church. A contrasting picture arises from the governance of a group of Australian Church corporate entities where women are equal participants.

For the past two years, Australia's Ministerial Public Juridic Person (PJP)s have shared data on the participation of women in their governance. The results show that women are on average evenly represented.

	<i>Among Ministerial PJP Trustees</i>	<i>Among the Board of Directors sponsored by Ministerial PJPs</i>
Average percentage of women in Ministerial PJP governance	59% women in 2018 <i>(60% in 2017)</i>	49% women in 2018 <i>(52% in 2017)</i>

Eva Skira, Deputy Chair of the Council of the Association of Ministerial PJPs said:

“ASX listed companies have had a target of 30% women on their boards for some time but we have reached about 50% due in large part to the tradition many of us inherited from women Religious who have always governed their own Religious Institutes.”

Under canon law, Church property and ministries are usually entrusted to either: a Bishop; the leader of a Religious Institute/Order or to the trustees of a Ministerial PJP. The third of these three types of canonical stewards is fairly new with the average age of Australian Ministerial PJPs being twelve years.

Ministerial PJPs in Australia were established to steward the ministries previously in the care of Bishops or Religious Institutes. There are eleven Ministerial PJPs operating education, health, aged care and other ministries across Australia. Some of the larger Ministerial PJPs are: Mary Aikenhead Ministries, St John of God Australia; and Edmund Rice Education Australia.

It is very likely that the role of women within the Church will come forward in submissions to the Plenary Council 2020. The trustees of Ministerial PJPs look forward to participating in the resulting discussions.

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