

Addressing Disparity: listening to the leadership experience of ordained women in Canberra and Goulburn Diocese

A report by the Women in Leadership Working Group

July 2024

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Executive summary

Over the course of its history the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn has been at the forefront of the extension of women's ministry to the three orders of ordained ministry. The fruit of women's ministry has been clearly evidenced in the Diocese. Moreover and not surprisingly, our Diocese has been a sending Diocese. Many women who gained experience in ministerial leadership in this Diocese have gone on to serve in other Dioceses. This is our heritage and we believe it has been a blessing to the wider church. And on the eve of this report we are about to welcome back to our Diocese one such woman as our Assistant Bishop. All this is a cause for great thanksgiving.

However, not all is as it should be or might have been expected. The evidence gathered in this report indicates that the capacity of the Diocese to build partnerships with women for ministerial leadership appears to have regressed rather than advanced, despite the decision to ordain women as priests more than thirty years ago. **This report examines why levels of leadership among women in parish ministry have gone backwards despite this long-term commitment to their access and involvement in ministry as deacons, priests and bishops.** The report outlines the pattern of disparity that has emerged by listening to the experiences of women from all levels of leadership based on interviews and focus groups. It contends that the Diocese has lost women from leadership because of cultural, theological and organisational barriers. **It argues that an organisational culture that values the full participation of women in leadership can be built but only if a coordinated approach to constructive change is adopted and implemented.** The report outlines a way forward to enable the strengthening of, and indeed flourishing, of women in the threefold orders of God's church for the sake of the gospel.

Underlying this report is the conviction that the participation of women in all the ministries and orders of the church is something that arises from the gospel itself. The building up of the people of God and the mission of God in the world is a work for all.

Recommendations

That this Synod supports the establishment of a Women in Leadership Commission, for a term of at least five years with an option to renew.

The Commission should be established under episcopal oversight and leadership, to ensure that its findings and recommendations are given due weight and lead to lasting change. Women with ministry leadership experience should fill the majority of the Commission's appointed positions.

The Commission should develop and lead the implementation of a systematic and strategic approach to reduce the disparity between men and women in full-time stipendiary roles. The goals of the diocesan strategy are to:

- to address cultural barriers that have caused the decline in women offering for ordained ministry, including attitudes that are patronising and hostile to women's leadership in the Church of God
- to provide safe and attractive workplaces for clergy, with adequate supports, conditions and realistic expectations
- to ensure the processes and procedures by which those in stipendiary ministry engage with the Diocese are procedurally fair, psychologically safe, well coordinated and competently managed
- to establish and invest in approaches that nurture the ministry and leadership of ordained women, through vocational discernment opportunities, networks, mentoring and role models.

1. A Gospel imperative

The ministry of women is a Gospel imperative. The Great Commission of Jesus (Matt 28:19-20) is for the whole church. The witness of the New Testament points to women and men involved in the mission of God in the world in full partnership with each other. Our Diocese is rightly proud of its history of early and wholehearted support for ordaining women, properly valuing women's contributions to our church, and recognising their gifting by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17-18). As Bishop Mark Short wrote:

Our Diocese has been a leader of inclusion of women at all levels of church life and in the movements which have enabled women's ordained ministry. This is richly embedded in our culture. (Anglican Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn, 2018)

By listening to the experience of women, the Working Group found a pattern of growing disparity between the Diocese's long-standing and fundamental commitment to the full ministry of women, and the lived reality of partnership between men and women in leadership. Put simply, on the one hand, the Diocese officially and in its decision making over many decades supports women's full participation in leadership. On the other hand, the experience of women indicates that the Diocesan practice often unknowingly defaults to values, behaviours and processes that run counter to its own commitments. Indeed, it would appear that few women were aware of how far our system had regressed with many feeling despair seeing hard won gains now lost.

This regression can be seen in the growth of a culture that is unsupportive of full partnership with women, in persistent unexamined gendered assumptions about clergy life, in an unsupportive work environment, and in organisational processes that make church leadership unattractive to women relative to other vocational opportunities. These issues emerged as we listened to the voices of women.

The challenges we outline are not unique to our Diocese. From our research, it appeared that the rapid numerical decline of women in paid ministry roles and women's reported feelings of betrayal and exclusion are more pronounced here than in other places.

Jesus taught us that 'the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest' (Matt 9:37-38). Our capacity for mission is put at risk by a Diocesan system that talks much about the full partnership of women but does little to promote a culture of inclusion and has been slow about addressing the many barriers encountered by women as they strive to take up their place of partnership as leaders in our church. Our hope is that by prayer and concerted action – that is, by a commitment to recruiting, training, resourcing and promoting the full partnership of women in leadership – the Lord will send many more women into his harvest for our region.

We give thanks that thirty years ago, after much prayer and debate, the Synod of this Diocese chose, together with other parts of the worldwide Anglican Communion, to ordain women to the order of priest. In subsequent years the decision was made at our General Synod to admit women to the order of bishop. As a result in this diocese, in company with the majority of dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia women take their place in the threefold order of ministry. This report begins from that platform whose foundation was laid over three decades ago.

2. Terms of reference for the Synod Working Group

In September 2023 Synod passed the following Motion:

Mindful of this Diocese's history of encouraging women to enter ordained ministry, and to serve at every level of church leadership, and noting the growing disparity in numbers between men and women clergy in full-time stipendiary roles, this Synod requests Bishop in Council to establish a working group to:

- 1. investigate, across theological traditions, the causes of this disparity*
- 2. consult with women concerning their experience concerning study; selection, student placement and competitiveness in current clergy appointment processes;*
- 3. develop appropriate strategies to ameliorate the disparity in numbers between men and women stipendiary clergy in full time roles in the Diocese of Canberra Goulburn; and*
- 4. report to Synod in 2024.*

Membership

In December 2023, Bishop in Council appointed the Working Group comprising eleven members: six ordained persons from across theological traditions in the Diocese, and four lay people.

The members are:

Rev Dr Wayne Brighton
Rev Anna Boxwell
Dr Sally Burt
Ms Amy Clausen
Rev Margaret Emil

Rev Dr Jane Foulcher
Ms Lynette Glendinning
Rev Lynda McMinn (Chair)
Right Rev Prof Stephen Pickard
Dr Laura Rademaker

3. Methodology

The Working Group adopted a three pronged approach to exploring the growing disparity of women in leadership in the Diocese.

First, it took a comparative approach by surveying the literature about the experience of women in ministry, looking particularly at those serving across the Anglican Communion in Australia, the UK, USA and Ireland (Appendix 1).

Second, it took a qualitative research approach by listening to women's experience of leadership across the Diocese. It identified a statistically significant cohort of 40 women with both recent and earlier experience of the Diocese, located in rural and suburban settings and from across theological traditions. They have been or are in leadership roles as senior chaplains, rectors and archdeacons in Canberra and Goulburn and in other Dioceses. It conducted one-to-one interviews with 24 women who are currently or were in former full-time leadership roles in this Diocese or had transferred to other dioceses (Appendix 2). Women in current or former part-time stipendiary roles who have sought or wish to obtain a full-time role were also included. Collectively, their experience spanned three decades of women's leadership.

Third, it took a quantitative approach by looking closely at the statistical patterns of women in leadership since the Diocese began to ordain women as priests in 1992 (Appendix 3). While the Bishop's Office supplied the Working Group with its database of clergy licensing history, compiling these patterns proved extremely difficult due to several record-keeping deficiencies.¹ Patterns were

¹ The database proved unsearchable for statistical generation for several reasons. It lacked information about gender and any information about when people left the diocese, retired or died. Formatting was inconsistent with text, numbers and date formatting often combined in a single column. Considerable variation regarding licensing for ministry was also found. If a person was licenced primarily to a chaplaincy position (eg. a school) they could also be recorded as attached to a parish. Authority To Officiate (ATO) designations are also used widely but held by retired clergy often without any further information about the place or nature of the ministry associated with them.

identified by using data sourced from the Australian Anglican Directory and Diocesan Directories.

Consulting Women

One-to-one interviews were conducted between March and April 2024 with participating women asked about:

- the nurturing and constraining factors with respect to discerning a vocation;
- being selected for ordination,
- the process of formation,
- being appointed to stipendiary roles,
- exercising an ordained ministry and
- undertaking senior leadership roles.

In May 2024, two focus groups were conducted to clarify the results and focus on suggestions for improvement. Participants included both ordained and lay women who have relatively recent experience of serving on Diocesan selection panels, Clergy Appointment Boards (CABs) and formation processes.

The Working Group was aware that interviewing women about their experiences would be painful for some. Counselling options were established for those who might need it, but in the end, the overriding response from women when asked how they were feeling was that they were glad to finally have a voice to share their experiences. Indeed, many commented that this was the first opportunity to be asked about and to discuss their ministry experiences.

Approach to the task

The Working Group focussed on listening to women's experiences of barriers to entry and growth in ordained leadership. Although men experience barriers too, the obstacles encountered by women function systemically and covertly, with each element compounding their under-representation.

In all likelihood, removing these barriers to leadership will improve the experience of entering and sustaining ministry for everyone and consequently enhance the church's capacity to fulfill its mission. Afterall, how can the church reach the whole world with the good news of Christ if half its leadership pool is not only disengaged but discouraged and obstructed by poor organisational practices and/or implicit bias?

The voice of Scripture is sometimes presented as in conflict with the experience of women. Similarly, concerns about addressing the under-representation of women in ordained leadership have been dismissed simply as a 'social justice matter.' While such views may continue to circulate in the church, the reality is

that they were responded to in a definitive manner when our Diocese ordained women to the priesthood over three decades ago.

While some will wish to see detailed Scriptural arguments for women's ordination, the Working Group judged that reviewing the complex theological conversation about gender in Scripture exceeded its operational and reporting constraints. Moreover, as this Diocese ordains women to all levels of ordained leadership, relitigating such arguments would detract attention from fixing a system that discourages women from full partnership in ministry. Those interested in exploring the biblical foundations for women's ministry further might consult recent material (Stackhouse 2015; Bartlett 2019; Erikson 2023).

'Transforming unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation' form part of the mission of the world-wide Anglican Fellowship of Churches. This mission of the church is integral to and flows from the task of 'proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom' (Anglican Consultative Council, 2024). The failure of God's people to address injustice within their life together is deeply woven throughout Scripture's prophetic tradition. Refusing to listen to the needs of people is often a sign of judgement, not faithfulness. Listening to women's experience is a vital step in sound reflective theological practice, in the development of diocesan policies and strategic action for the sake of the Gospel.

4. Summary of the literature

Our Diocese is not alone in noting stagnation and even decline over the last decade in the number of women ordinands and of women in leadership roles (such as rectors, archdeacons and church-planters). In both Australian churches and internationally, women are over-represented in subordinate, part-time positions and are less likely to serve as bishops, professors in theological institutions or as leaders of churches (Phelps, 2023; Sullins, 2000). Research from the Episcopal church in the USA, the Church of Ireland, and Church of England has noted a stubborn persistence in the discrepancy between men and women clergy in paid, full-time appointments, rectorships and leadership positions (Church of England Research & Statistics, 2021; Graveling, 2015; Price et al, 2009; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Closer to home in the Diocese of Melbourne, the ratio of ordained women to men has been 'stagnating or going backwards' (Blackwell et al., 2021).

Researchers attribute these gender discrepancies to:

- unsatisfactory work conditions, particularly for those with caring responsibilities (Greene, 2015; Phelps, 2023; Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Thomson, 2014);
- a gender pay-gap (Schleifer & Miller, 2017);

- hostile workplace cultures including harassment, bullying and misogyny (Greene, 2015; McDuff, 2008; Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Robbins & Greene 2018; Thomson, 2014);
- a lack of female role-models and networking opportunities (Thomson 2014; Woodlock 2018);
- discrimination against women in formation, discernment, appointment and promotion processes (Bouma, 2014; Purser & O'Brien, 2021); and
- theological prohibitions on women's leadership in ministry (Bouma 2014; Purser & O'Brien 2021).

To address these barriers to women, researchers have variously recommended:

- providing women with mentoring and networking opportunities (Newkirk & Cooper, 2013; Woodlock, 2018);
- appointing both a male and female director of ordinands and reforming appointment processes (Purser & O'Brien, 2021);
- improving parental leave allowances (Purser & O'Brien, 2021);
- developing strategies to make female role models more visible (Woodlock, 2018);
- providing theological resources and training in support of women's full ministries (Woodlock, 2018).

Many of these strategies were raised by participants in our own research.

5. Diocesan patterns of disparity

The Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn has a long and proud history of supporting the full breadth of ministries of women, including in senior leadership roles. We were early and committed advocates for the ordination of women to the priesthood and among the first Dioceses to do so (Lindsay & Scarfe 2012; Piggitt & Linder 2019). The Anglican Church of Australia permitted women to enter the diaconate in 1985, the priesthood in 1992 and the episcopate in 2004.

After women were first ordained as priests in late 1992, we saw two decades marked by increased visibility of women's contributions, with women called to the priesthood, diaconate, and finally the episcopacy, fully exercising their ministries to the benefit of many. Following the successes of the 1990s for women, many expected that the upwards trajectory of women's ministries would naturally continue. It did not.

Diocesan Trends

Comparing the patterns of ordination and appointment of men and women to leadership roles in the Diocese since the early 1990s indicates the following trends:

- leadership of parishes and of diocesan entities are dominated by men;
- the Diocese had a solid record of women's ordination as priests, ordaining three women for every four men, a ratio that declined recently;
- with fewer local ordinations transfers from other dioceses are being appointed to leadership roles rather than locally formed clergy; overwhelmingly, clergy who transfer here from other dioceses are male;
- female priests are far more likely to serve in an honorary (volunteer) capacity than men;
- women's leadership of parishes in the role of rector peaked in 2014 at 25% of ministry units led by a woman. It is now the lowest it has been since 1994, with only four women rectors.

Gender disparity at ordination

Among home-grown ordinands, the Diocese slowly approached gender-parity through the 1990s and 2000s. Since 2011, the gender gap has widened and the number of female ordinands declined considerably since 2021 (see Figure 1).

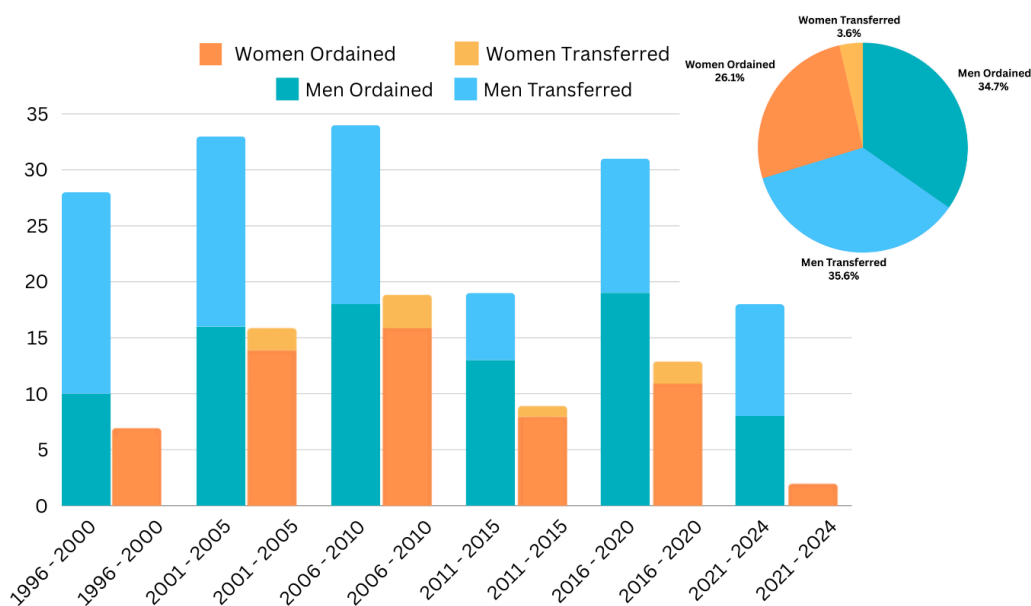


Figure 1 Male and female ordinations and transfers

Gender disparity and appointments

The gender imbalance among clergy has grown as ministry positions have been taken up by transfers from other dioceses. This reliance on transfers is often attributed to a lack of locally trained and formed clergy. The overwhelming majority have been male (see Figure 1). Whereas the Diocese ordained 80 men, a further 77 men transferred here. For every 10 men who transfer, only one woman transfers to this Diocese. While there has been a decrease in ordinations in recent years, the number of men coming from elsewhere has remained consistent. Continuing reliance on recruitment from other dioceses is likely to further increase the ratio of men to women clergy in the Diocese.

Gender disparity in leadership

Female clergy in the Diocese are far more likely to serve in honorary or voluntary capacities than male clergy (see Figure 2).

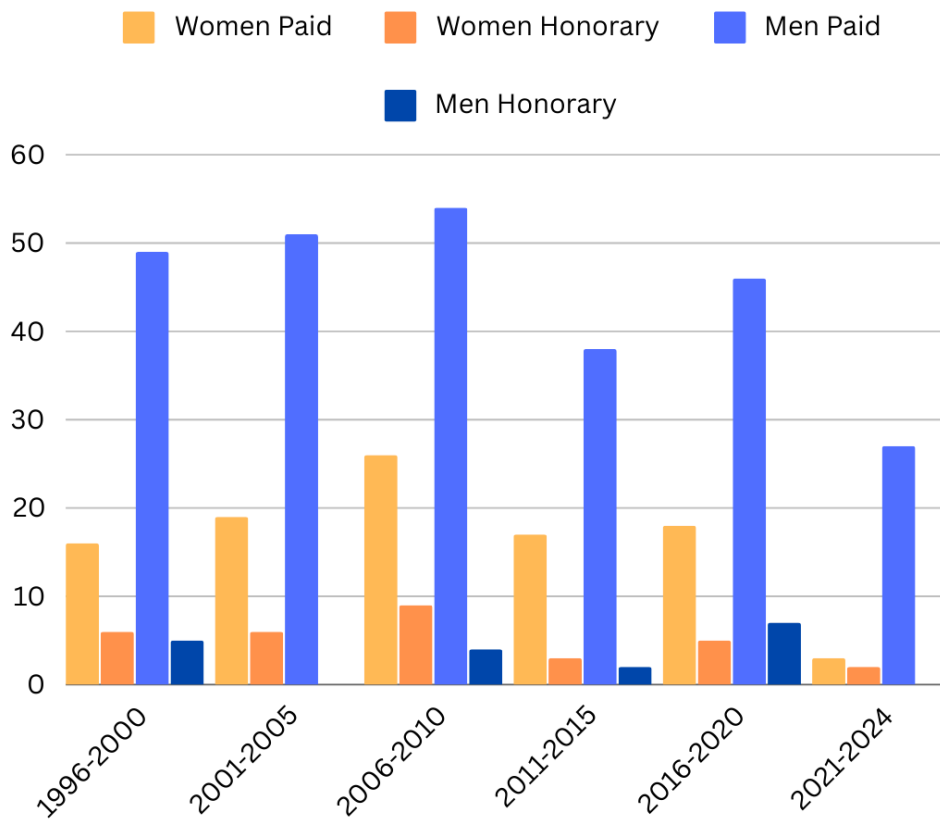


Figure 2 Male and female priests in honorary and paid roles

In 1994, four women were leading ministry units, some two years after their entry to the priesthood. Today, we again have just four. The number of women leading ministry units peaked in 2014 at 25%. This has decreased to only 10%. See Figure 3.

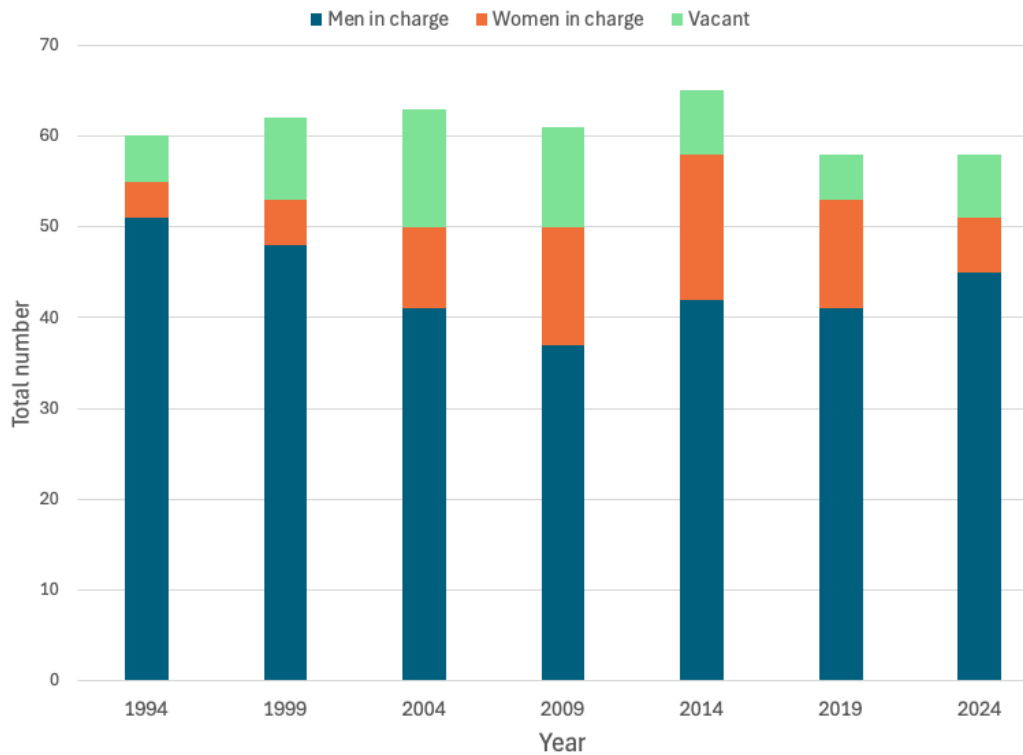


Figure 3 Men and women leading ministry units

Gender disparity in other entities

Gender disparities in leadership are also pronounced across most diocesan entities (see Figure 4). A more detailed analysis of these patterns of gender disparity can be found in Appendix 2.

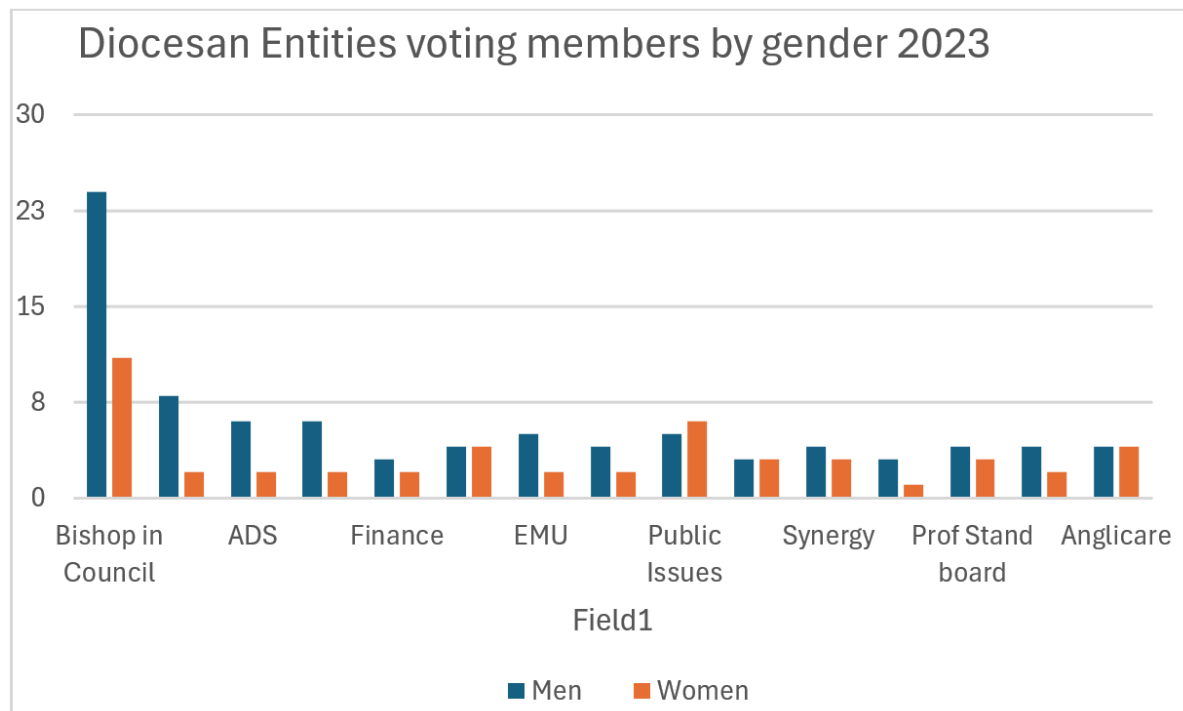


Figure 4 Diocesan Entities by gender

Bishop in Council, the Ministry Executive and ADS Board each have more than two men per woman (see figure 4). The number of female archdeacons peaked at six in 2014 but has now reduced to two. Meanwhile, the permanent diaconate has become increasingly feminised. We have ordained 31 female deacons to 17 male. Nearly all the male permanent deacons were ordained before 2017 (see Appendix 3).

6. Voices of women

Despite diversity among participants (including their background, age, geography, terminology and theology), several clear and common themes emerged from the 24 one-on-one interviews with women about their experience of leadership within the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

The following themes were consistently identified by women in both their experience and their explanation of the reasons for the current disparity in ordained leadership between men and women. The first three themes reflect the attitudinal and cultural issue that women named as fundamental. The common themes were:

- a diocesan culture that no longer actively supports women
- a male model of ordained ministry- gendered assumptions and bias
- negative views of women in leadership
- deteriorating conditions of service
- the importance of institutional and episcopal support.

Direct quotes from the women are in italics.

The growth of an unsupportive culture

All women interviewed, including those relatively new to the Diocese and those from all theological perspectives, observed how its culture had changed and its once balanced, inclusive and respectful culture had been seriously diminished if not lost. Interviewed women observed:

How can the overt sexism and hostile comments made to me at Clergy Conference go unchecked?

Bullying is a critical issue – both women being bullied in parishes, and women being accused of bullying when they are just providing leadership.

It does have an impact when you know that there are some parishes that wouldn't even think of having a female rector.

The inflexible 'rightness' of those who hold the view that women should not lead is intimidating and a form of bullying.

When bishops privilege men, the Diocese loses women in their 40s and 50s who might now be in senior roles. The cumulative result is we are bereft of many women in leadership.

Our strength is our diversity; if we lose that we will lose women in leadership roles.

Many women interviewed now experienced the Diocesan culture as marked by distinct and sometimes 'hostile tribalism', with a consequent decline in trust across theological and ecclesial lines. Many attributed the changing culture to the influx of men from outside the Diocese who, in some cases, hold a theology that limits women leadership in ministry. In their experience, such constrained views about women have become more commonplace. The position that 'headship' (understood to mean 'leadership') is an exclusive masculine role, once unusual in this Diocese, is now increasingly common.

Interviewed women were alert to how the undercurrent of opposition to women exercising the full range of ministry had strengthened. Women clergy recounted being told by male clergy that their ordination was not valid, and their authority was illegitimate. Women recounted experiences where bishops and other diocesan leaders have failed to understand or take seriously the prevalence of bias and harassment for female clergy in their parish and Diocesan workplaces. Unchecked bullying at Diocesan events was reported with some clergy conference events experienced as unsafe and hostile by most ordained women.

The experience of prejudice

Hostility to ordained women in leadership roles was a common experience for the women interviewed. Interviewed women experienced a range of 'microaggressions' that although seemingly isolated nevertheless had an cumulative effect that was hurtful, insensitive and frustrating. Typical comments regarding this experience included:

At its centre the Diocese is a boys' club.'

We have a major cultural problem - our Diocese has gone backward - where once women's leadership was valued and supported, outspoken women are now marginalised. We don't prioritise growing female leaders.

Authority is an issue: women can be accepted to be a senior minister – but when they lead, even some women reject their authority.

As a senior Diocesan leader, I found in many meetings such as BiC, Committees etc, I was talked over, not

listened to and decisions had already been made within 'the boys club'.

Asking for help would be seen as being weak; toughing it out seen as aggressive.

With so few women in leadership roles, as rectors in parishes or as archdeacons, the Diocese was felt by most women to have become 'very blokey'. This dynamic was noted by all women consulted. While they were willing and felt able to provide leadership, women noted the different experience of male colleagues who were deferred to as more authoritative and influential. Of the women interviewed who held senior diocesan leadership roles, most experienced their voice and authority was often undermined. At times, even well-intentioned men were patronising and dismissive of women.

A third of the women interviewed had experience of leadership roles in other dioceses. They commented that when bias at the local or parish level was experienced, senior leaders in these places often signaled their strong support for women publicly which made functioning in leadership tolerable.

The 'ideal' minister

A predominantly male model of full-time stipendiary ministry was universally noted as an implicit ideal, with women observing:

Where positions are vacant, a midcareer male with family is still seen by parishes, CABs and diocesan leaders as preferable to a single, young married or late vocation woman.

You're too young and may get pregnant. You're too old and past it. You're single - who will support you? You're married - what will the male spouse do?

Despite opposition, I felt a really strong call from God to be ordained. For most ordained women I know, their ordination story involves God calling them, often decades earlier and not answering that call because of children, husbands, careers, finances; not feeling that there was a space for them.

Most younger ordained women in the Diocese are single. We only seem to be attracting single women into ministry; marriage seems to be a barrier for women. We sort of have reverse celibacy in this Diocese.

The model of the mid-career man with domestic support (the 'ministry wife') was experienced by women as the clear reference point, whether in Diocesan

decision processes or in the configuration of the role of rectors. It is marked by limited awareness or capacity for Diocesan approaches and processes to accommodate difference - whether in life stage, skills, or personal circumstance.

The women interviewed felt a strong call to ministry and persisted with a vocation to ordained ministry in the face of overt opposition or lack of encouragement. Many mentioned the importance of family, mentors and friends in sustaining them through opposition or the difficulties of navigating the process.

Women experience their gender as seemingly problematic to other men and to the institutional processes of the Diocese. Women have received strong signals about their age and marital status such that it seemed to many that there was no ideal life stage for a woman to pursue a call into ministry, being either too young or too old. While young men with families were seen positively, young women with families were seen as posing unacceptable risk.

Younger women who felt called by God, struggled to either imagine or navigate a viable pathway given the relatively limited opportunities for stipendiary ministry.

Women frequently experienced a disrupted career path, finding themselves in part-time roles, not necessarily through choice. Balancing financial and/or family responsibilities resulted for some in delaying the pursuit of their vocation. The assumption that their ministry was discretionary or a hobby, and their husband had the primary role, was experienced as profoundly patronising and discriminatory.

Starting the vocational journey

The women interviewed universally emphasised the importance of supportive encouragement to start the journey when encountering negative culture and attitudes. This experience of support has changed over time.

There was no support or advice from anyone in the Diocese as I was dealing with my sense of call, I had to struggle with it alone and find my own path to ordination.

I was in the “golden” period of St Mark’s when there were larger cohorts of ordinands and balanced gender intakes.

Canberra [and] Goulburn has lost the safe places to nurture vocations and help women navigate, including a vibrant St Mark’s and Cursillo retreats.

Cursillo played a leading role in calling out and nurturing women's vocations. Since Cursillo folded in the Diocese, there has been nowhere for women to go.

The training was Canberra centred, which made it hard for a woman from [a regional area] who had three children and a job.

In discerning a vocation, many women relied on a mentor or other influential person to help them navigate their vocational journey. Being known in particular networks and specifically being 'tapped on the shoulder' by a diocesan leader or person in authority in a parish, helped many pursue ordination or full-time ministry in the face of opposition. Many noted the critical importance of institutional and episcopal support to address the structural disadvantage experienced by women.

Discouraging or dismissive comments from key people can prevent or significantly delay a woman from being active in lay ministry and pursuing theological education and ordination. To pursue ministry and leadership in a culture that privileges male modes of life and leadership, a network of peers, such as the cohort of those ordained together, is important.

St Mark's was referenced positively as a place that offered a sense of collegiality and support, particularly among faculty members. However, the experience had changed in recent years and some women felt vulnerable with more incoming male students appearing to hold and express negative views about women in leadership. Such views were not necessarily checked as women expected.

Selection and appointment processes

The Diocesan processes that mark the journey from discerning a vocation to appointment to a stipendiary role are experienced as inconsistent, opaque and difficult to navigate. Typical comments included:

I had been a business-woman and manager of numbers of people, but I was knocked back due to 'lack of experience!'

I was asked, parish life is really busy, how are you going to manage it and also look after your children and do the housework?

Women should be judged on their competence and experience, not their personal circumstances and attributes.

This Diocese is not investing in its pipeline of ministry talent as it used to.

Make sure the processes are clear, courteous and competent.

Many remarked about how difficult it was to move through selection, formation, ordination and appointment as the process for each step was subject to frequent changes in approach and personnel. Many women spoke of how the stages in the vocational journey were experienced as disconnected, with little apparent training or professional development given to those charged with selection, few clear selection criteria, and almost no support or pastoral care throughout the process.

Going before selection panels and clergy appointment boards was frequently experienced as not only distressing, but at times psychologically unsafe. Gendered questioning and stereotyping, as well as a power dynamic in the structure of interviews made the selection experience very negative. A number of women experienced the process as aggressive and bullying. Assertive women were given feedback that they were 'aggressive' while quiet women were told that they were not strong enough.

Issues of child-bearing, spousal arrangements and assumptions that female candidates should rely on a husband's income were overly emphasised at the expense of their professional experience, godly character and capacity for ministry. This experience may have been prevalent in earlier processes, although some women more recently ordained have experienced this sexism also.

With few clear criteria to determine what constitutes competence in stipendiary roles, women often felt judged by inappropriate and unspoken criteria. Pre-ordination leadership and previous workplace experience was often discounted by selection panels and appointment boards.

With few full-time stipendiary roles available and increasing numbers of men from outside the Diocese competing for them, women now find the likelihood of their securing any role limited.

Inequitable distribution of opportunities

A clear manifestation of the cultural issues cited above, is the inequitable distribution of access to fulfilling stipendiary positions in ministry units where some measure of success would be possible.

Unless one has the patronage of the Bishop, how does one know what roles are available?

The Bishop said, 'we have men finishing college this year and they are the breadwinners'.

No support from the Bishop, who 'did not have a job for me'. But young men from Sydney were being brought in to fill vacancies.

The Bishop said to me, 'What do you want me to do? I'm not an employment agency.'

Decisions regarding placements of rectors are not transparent. The other two dioceses where I have been a senior leader, I received more feedback and it was much clearer why appointments were made.

In a system where merit and competence are poorly defined, and women's life circumstances viewed as challenging, the explicit support of the Bishop and those who can influence them is critical, particularly in securing a first placement.

Of the women who have been in senior full-time stipendiary roles, most were provided with their first position by the then Bishop. In securing first time roles, some women encountered bishops that overtly stated how they privileged male 'breadwinners' for positions.

While the Diocesan Bishop appoints rectors (in conjunction with appointment boards), large parishes often select and appoint their own assistant ministers. These roles are critical training grounds for people to move into more senior leadership roles. Many women observed how these roles have been filled by men trained outside this Diocese and that these opportunities were increasingly closed to women.

Some commented how they felt that they were more likely to be given problematic parishes where positions were unfunded, or marginalised positions so that they felt 'set up to fail' and then scapegoated for being inadequate to the task.

The only role I was offered (for which I was very grateful) was one with no income, only a house and car. This was personally pursued by the rector of the parish, not the Bishop.

I was never given any choice about whether I should be paid, the funding for my position (paid to men before me) was simply removed.

Women often need to work part-time in a parish, but when they want a man to follow, they quickly find the funds to pay full-time. This happened to me on two occasions.

The parade goes by on the top, and I'm the girder under the bridge. And there's a gender component - how many families have an older woman who's holding it all together?

The subtle devaluing of the diaconate and chaplaincy was also observed, particularly as these vocations have become increasingly feminised and marginalised from parish ministry. Many women who had commenced ministry as chaplains or assistants in a part-time or non-stipendiary capacity spoke about how they felt disadvantaged or less competitive when seeking subsequent stipendiary positions in parish settings. Chaplains, the majority of whom are female, felt invisible and overlooked. They felt that pursuing full-time stipendiary work had become more insurmountable than it may have been in the past.

To many women the processes and decisions for more senior appointments were often not transparent.

I've worked in a number of dioceses and have had very senior roles and when I returned to Canberra and Goulburn that experience was not valued and no role of any kind was available to me.

My part time role as archdeacon was treated as a hobby - I was not taken seriously.

Women felt that they were often invisible when important roles became available. This was particularly the experience of chaplains and deacons. Several cited examples where men who took up a similar role were better paid, given a full-time job or became an archdeacon.

Conditions of service

Women commented on how taking up the opportunity to serve God in full-time stipendiary roles was a core expression of their faith in Christ. However, the role of senior minister or rector now had little to commend it, to either men or women.

The Diocese needs to address its conditions of service for women, including parental leave and support for women while studying.

Women still need to eat and live in a place - we have all the same needs as men.

You can't do two jobs if you are running a local church. It's on your mind 24/7.

You can't be what you can't see. The lack of role models now makes it very difficult for younger women to consider ordination.

Leading a parish is a much less attractive role than it once was and is virtually untenable in parishes where there is only one ordained, stipendiary minister. The constant demands, diocesan expectations regarding compliance in volunteer groups, role ambiguity and constant criticism from parishioners takes a toll.

Women had few doubts that the 24-hour demands of ministry rely on the presumption of unpaid domestic support in the form of the 'ministry wife'. Today, these home arrangements are rare, leaving ministry leadership roles increasingly unsustainable. Consequently, some younger women are deciding not to go into parish ministry or pursue ordination because of the perceived workload and unrealistic expectations when more parishes have diminishing resources.

Women were alert to the compounding effect on younger women that arises from the absence of women in stipendiary positions. Many have never experienced a woman in a full-time stipendiary role.

Where women have been able to secure flexibility in arrangements, whether in the formation process, or in parish ministry, they found the experience more fulfilling.

The possibility of change

Most disturbing were perceptions that little will or can be done to arrest the change that has occurred, with women commenting:

Women will always be called and God will use them, the question is can Canberra and Goulburn?

I hope this Report will be a 'wake up call to the Bishop and the Synod so that this Diocese can return to inclusion and balance.

It makes me angry that the voice of women has been silenced. Can we be confident that this report will be taken seriously by Synod?

I see no point in remaining in an institution that is incapable of reform and can't provide safety, let alone support.

For these reasons, some women interviewed no longer see themselves as belonging to Canberra and Goulburn Diocese. Several have disengaged, some

will leave. Others see no point in ordination as they are already in local ministry positions and do not aspire to engage with the Diocese more broadly.

Conclusion

It seemed that women find the stipendiary role of chaplain, rector, archdeacon or parish leader to be fulfilling when they enjoy the Bishop's overt support, have strong personal support networks and whose life stage and personal circumstances are conducive to a demanding senior role.

These women have provided their ministry to the Diocese despite the universal experience of unconscious bias and overt sexism, ranging from gendered assumptions to discrimination and bullying.

While participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to have their voice heard, considerable pain, distress and frustration was expressed by almost every woman interviewed. Some were angry while others spoke of internalising their difficulties, particularly their own loss of confidence and quiet withdrawal. A few felt a legacy of trauma at what they have been expected to tolerate because they are in ministry.

While some were hopeful that the Diocese will heed this clarion call, others had become disengaged and disillusioned, expressing scepticism that the issues will be treated seriously or that the Diocese will act.

7. Discussion

Addressing constraints

The Working Group uncovered a painful but powerful picture of the experience of women in ordained leadership in this Diocese. At every level from training and formation, selection for ordination, and appointment to positions, we found a growing tendency to prefer and even to import men from beyond this Diocese, rather than to support and encourage the leadership of our own women.

Addressing the many obstacles encountered by women will require a systemic approach that takes into account how women and men together share in the threefold order of the church so that the mission of God can be fulfilled in the world. The issues of equality and justice should not be dismissed as mere secular concerns. They are themes deeply embedded throughout Scripture and ultimately exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:19). The risen Jesus commissioned Mary Magdalene, the Apostle to the Apostles, to bear the good news of the resurrection to the world (John 20:17). It is therefore important that these matters of gender bias and discrimination be addressed.

Developing a systemic approach to achieve cultural and organisational change will be difficult. Although many people in our Diocese support women's full participation in leadership, our culture and organisational systems can operate with assumptions, behaviours and processes that counter that objective.

How will our Diocese respond to the growing disparity of women in leadership over the short, medium and long-term?

It is hard to imagine how any change will be achieved without a specific group tasked to discern, develop and evaluate efforts made to achieve change.

Outlined below are the systemic constraints and barriers, as well as suggestions that will inform a Diocesan strategy. While many of these will also improve the experience of men in the Diocese, the current gender disparity in full time stipendiary roles is the issue the Working group was tasked to address. A Diocesan strategy that values full participation by women should:

1. address cultural barriers and bias;
2. overcome inappropriate role expectations and workplace constraints;
3. ensure procedural fairness; and
4. actively nurture women's vocations and ministries

Addressing cultural barriers

Clearly, one of the significant issues to be addressed is the wider culture that shapes our attitudes and within which we live and move. Women are dealing with barriers in both the wider society, as well as the overlay of attitudes and behaviours within the church. In both society and the church, women and men, young and older people are given differentiated roles. Sexist and ageist attitudes that prevent women's full participation derive from these.

Despite so many sad and painful experiences, we did not uncover a story of women as victims. Despite much opposition and struggle, the women interviewed pursued their vocational call, found ways to minister, and furthered the growth of God's kingdom with deep commitment, often in ways that were inspirational.

It is clear that underpinning our expectations of clergy, particularly the role of rector, lies a masculine model of leadership. As a Diocese we need to consider how to improve our culture and theological outlook in order to enhance respect for women's calling. These include strategies to ensure that differences in theology and ecclesial style do not become entrenched adversarial positions, as has happened elsewhere in the Anglican Communion. The mission of this Diocese and the mission of the church of God require a sense of unity in the

body of Christ as well as leadership by women and men in full partnership to succeed.

Suggestions for the Diocesan strategy to address the barriers and constraints faced by women include leading sustained conversations about women's place in diocesan culture and addressing any negative and adversarial attitudes, behaviours or positions within the life of the Diocese.

The episcopacy, along with other diocesan leaders, can consider how to highlight and profile women's place and contribution in ways that respect their gifts and vocation. They have a critical role to ensure that the Diocese has sound teaching for the full ministry of women in the church. According to the Ordinal, the Bishop has a specific role to be a figure of unity. Together with other diocesan leaders, the Bishop can clearly rebut disrespectful attitudes and behaviour, model courtesy and respect, as well as to teach and proclaim the biblical imperative for justice.

Overcoming inappropriate role expectations and workplace constraints

When fewer women present for ordination, this contributes to the decline in the number of women in ordained ministry positions who are then available for senior leadership roles. Changes need to be made to the way parishes operate.

Too many parishes continue to assume a masculine model of ministry where the ideal candidate is a young man with a family and domestic support provided by his wife. Parishioners are likely to need help addressing their spoken and unspoken expectations about people's capacity to provide ministry today.

The workplace for rectors and senior ministry leaders needs to meet contemporary workplace standards. This involves improvements to the processes and ordinances.

Clergy conditions of service need to be addressed as a matter of priority. When young women consider the possibility of pursuing ordained vocation they observe a 'muddy and unattractive pathway' on these matters. While it is true that men can also be affected and disadvantaged by current workplace conditions, it is clear from the statistics that their impact on the ministry careers of women is disproportionately large.

Remuneration for women needs to be appropriate. All people deserve to be paid for their service and it is a biblical principle that the worker is worth their hire (1 Timothy 5:18). Focussing salaries on 'breadwinners', who are presumed to be male, and assuming that women have existing sources of financial support is problematic. Expecting women to operate in honorary, part time and financially unsustainable positions is inappropriate.

The parish as a workplace is perceived by many women as fraught with risk. The role of rector with its undefined, weak boundaries between public and private life, as well as long and demanding hours, is regarded as problematic. Modern workplaces attend to both physical and psychological safety, provide adequate backup and mentoring, and ensure proper and safe processes to address conflict and bullying. The parish as a workplace consistently lacks many of these safeguards.

Suggestions for a Diocesan strategy include a move to a parental leave model that would allow both men and women flexibility in their roles as parents and leaders. In taking this step, the Diocese would signal strong support for the important and central role of the carer, a role that is so often and so easily disregarded as peripheral. The role of church workers and the rector in particular, needs to have clear expectations and boundaries on work hours and availability set. These need to be clear to wardens and parish councils at the very least. The Conditions of Service Committee needs to address these issues as soon as possible, to ensure that Diocesan workplace practices better reflect contemporary reality.

Ensuring procedural fairness

Ensuring organisational systems respect women's calling is an important component of a systemic strategy. This is particularly the case for people who already feel that the system disadvantages them due to their gender, age or other factors.

Selection and formation processes came in for strong, sustained and widespread criticism from the women interviewed. Distinct and often unconscious gender bias in appointment processes, including selection panels and CABs appears to be common, with questioning often focussed on women's domestic arrangements rather than their ministry skills. When there is also a strong male power dynamic underpinning the process, this is experienced as psychologically unsafe.

Even if it is the case that such behaviour is less likely now than in former years, the Diocese must ensure that the processes for selection, formation, and appointment are clear, courteous and competent. It is also important that candidates feel that they matter, that these processes are well coordinated and that their personal vocational journey is under proper pastoral oversight.

The Diocesan processes for dealing with conflicts, complaints and grievances, whether clergy or lay initiated, must be seen to be procedurally fair, competent and safe. The Bishop is not the appropriate person to handle these when he/she holds power over licensing. A number of women expressed lack of confidence in the current processes, most of which are conducted by men.

Suggestions for the diocesan strategy to overcome some of these constraints include providing training for all CAB members, so that unconscious bias is accounted for, and criteria for what constitutes effective ministry are clear. This can help avoid inappropriate emphasis on personal attributes and domestic arrangements. Similarly, archdeacons (at times new to the role) need professional development in what constitutes procedural fairness, how to lead these processes and challenge inappropriate questioning. Alternatively, trained facilitators could be appointed either as process leaders or advisors to the CAB, as is the case in some other dioceses.

It is also important for the Diocese to consider how selection, formation and appointment processes are effectively coordinated and overseen, with a person-centred focus as well as a compliance administrative focus.

The current policies and procedures for dealing with complaints by and against clergy, as well as parish conflict need to be strengthened with respect to their effectiveness, fairness and safety. Adequate representation by both men and women is required for these resolution processes to be safe and effective.

Actively nurturing women's vocations and ministries

When it comes to encouraging women in ministry leadership, it seems that no one bears the particular responsibility for ensuring that organisational reform occurs and positive change is achieved. An inadequate information system inhibits accountability because long-term patterns of ordination, selection and appointment can go unnoticed.

Good modelling at parish as well as diocesan level is important. If young women are to see themselves as possible leaders, then they need to see good female leadership models, including in the membership of parish council, wardens, and committee roles across the Diocese. The gender balance on many diocesan committees is poor and needs to be an important part of the consideration when appointments are made.

Suggestions for a Diocesan strategy include initiatives that provide opportunities to learn from role models and for active mentoring of women at every stage of the journey to full time stipendiary ministry. It should not be difficult to incorporate childcare arrangements into planning for diocesan events like Synod and clergy conferences. A Diocesan women's network focussed on nurturing vocation and ministry would not be difficult to implement. A diocesan wellbeing and support role to nurture (women's) vocations and ministry could be considered, as could reporting to Synod regularly based on a survey of women about their experience in the Diocese.

The Synod should also commit to set objectives that will move our Diocese towards increased parity for women in leadership with respect to ordination, appointments, diocesan committees, boards and councils. The Diocese could

seek advice from other professional bodies and church groups about strategies for building full partnership with women.

The way forward

How will our Diocese respond to the growing disparity of women in leadership over the short, medium and long-term?

As we present this report to Synod, it is clear that turning this situation around will require far more than a few adjustments to conditions of service. The Diocese will not benefit from the full partnership of women in leadership without sustained and deliberate action to address the substantial barriers to women's ministries that exist. While some barriers will be readily addressed, overcoming other constraints identified will demand long-term, sustained attention, and ongoing active commitment and resourcing (Blackwell et al. 2021; Purser & O'Brien 2021). It takes four or five years for a woman offering for ordained leadership in 2024 to be ready to assume ministry leadership roles. We must support her for the entire duration of this journey.

The Working Group proposes the establishment of a Women in Leadership Commission, which while not permanent, should be put in place for no less than five years to ensure that the widespread and complex barriers to women's ministries are addressed. In drawing attention to these issues, and providing advice to the diocesan leadership, the Commission would be in a position to assist the Diocese to reverse the long-term decline in women's leadership, and in women offering for ordained ministry.

The Commission should be under episcopal oversight and leadership. It should be chaired by (at least) the Assistant Bishop, thus ensuring that its findings and recommendations are heard at the highest levels of the Diocese and acted upon.

The Working Group also proposes that the Commission comprise five to eight persons and that women in current or recent ministry leadership roles should be in the majority of the Commission's appointed positions. The rest should comprise those able to consider and/or effect systemic, effective responses. The composition of the Commission should ensure a mix of theological and ecclesial traditions. We further suggest that the Bishop lead the appointment process in consultation with the Working Group. The Commission will require modest secretariat support and resourcing.

The Women in Leadership Commission should develop and lead the implementation of a systematic and strategic approach to reduce the disparity between men and women in full-time stipendiary roles. The goals of this Diocesan strategy would be:

- to address cultural barriers that have caused the decline in women offering for ordained ministry, including attitudes that are patronising and hostile to women's leadership in the Church of God;
- to provide safe and attractive workplaces for clergy, with adequate supports, conditions and realistic expectations;
- to ensure the processes and procedures by which those in stipendiary ministry engage with the Diocese are procedurally fair, psychologically safe, well coordinated and competently managed;
- to establish and invest in approaches that nurture the ministry and leadership of ordained women, through vocational discernment opportunities, networks, mentoring and role models.

Conclusion

The Diocese's capacity for ministry will be enhanced by committing to address the current gender disparity and by developing and implementing a strategic and systematic approach to correcting it. For when people commit themselves to God's work of justice, those who have endured pain in the past find healing, the Body of Christ is built up, and our Diocesan mission and witness in the world is strengthened.

Appendix 1. Review of research on gender disparities in ministry leadership

In our Diocese, two surveys were conducted in the early years following women's ordination to the priesthood in 1992. Elaine Farmer's 1994 survey of 14 ordained women found some positive signs of affirmation of women's ministry within and outside the church. It noted significant discrimination and stereotyping, a lack of professional recognition, poor representation in leadership and decision-making, and inequitable employment processes. The Diocese set up a task force which surveyed 14 respondents in 1996. A key finding was the perception that only full-time stipendiary parish clergy were regarded as 'real' by the laity and other clergy. This perception had a disproportionate impact on women clergy as a group given their relatively high numbers engaged in part-time, non-stipendiary and/or non-parish work (Macneil, 1996).

In the Australian Anglican context only three surveys about women's experience of ordained ministry have been conducted at a national level:

- Janet Scarfe's 1993 survey of over 50 women from 14 dioceses, 'Lip service is still a problem,' conducted through Monash University for the Movement for the Ordination of Women.
- Gary Bouma's (and Monash University team) 1996 report, 'Commencing clergy careers: gender differences among Anglican priests and deacons: a research report to the Women's Commission of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia'.
- Heather Thomson's 2013 survey 'Taking stock' (conducted under the umbrella of Charles Sturt University) reviewing the picture for the 20th anniversary of women's ordination to the priesthood.

While the surveys are not directly comparable, both Scarfe and Bouma comment on the continued significant experience of discrimination and sexism evidenced in the 2013 survey. 60.6% of women reported experiences of gender discrimination in the previous 5 years.

Thomson's research, like that of Purser & O'Brien in the Church of Ireland, uncovers a "duality of experience" (Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Women are happy to be in ministry, fulfilling their God-given vocations, yet also experiencing discrimination and sexism. Acceptance of women's ministry continues to be a major issue. Thomson's (2013, p.33) survey found 77.3% of ordained women felt that the Anglican Church of Australia needs 'to make changes to allow ordained women to minister more effectively and with a greater sense of acceptance.' As Bouma (2014) commented 'rejection of one's ministry due to gender continues to be frustrating at least and very hurtful at most. It is a fundamental denial of a person and is deeply demoralising.'

Our Diocese is not alone in noting stagnation and even decline over the last decade in the proportion and number of women ordinands and of women in

leadership roles such as rectors, archdeacons and church-planters. In both Australian churches and internationally, women are over-represented in subordinate, part-time positions and are less likely to serve as bishops, professors in theological institutions or as leaders of churches (Phelps, 2023; Sullins, 2000).

Robbins & Greene (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with 21 women in full-time stipendiary ministry in the Church of England and found all had experienced gender-based opposition during their ministry, sometimes explicit (eg. communion refusal) but often implicit (eg. subtle microaggressions like undermining), with the latter being harder to deal with. They also identified a tension in the women's experience between 'genuine theological objection' (which was generally respected) and misogyny. In the Church of England in 2013, only 22% of younger ordinands were women (Graveling, 2015). There, women are more likely to be in self-funded roles; come to ordained ministry later in life; and more likely to be lay rather than ordained ministers (Ministry Statistics, 2020).

Research from the Episcopal Church in the USA has noted a stubborn persistence in the discrepancy between men and women clergy in paid, full-time appointments, rectorships and leadership positions (Nesbitt, 2009). In the Church of Ireland, a review after 30 years of women's ordination found that only 65 of 227 active clergy were women (Purser & O'Brien, 2021).

Closer to home, in the Diocese of Melbourne, a 2016 report found that the ratio of ordained women to men had been 'stagnating or going backwards' (Blackwell et al., 2021). Like our Diocese, after two decades of relative gender equity in ordination to the priesthood, they have witnessed growing disparities in the last ten years and the need for active commitment and sustained resourcing to address them (Blackwell et al., 2021; Purser & O'Brien, 2021).

Understanding the barriers

Australian and international research suggests that barriers to women's full participation in church leadership cluster together in mutually reinforcing ways. This means that no single area can be addressed in isolation or piecemeal fashion. Rather, overcoming the host of barriers will require concerted and coordinated effort to shift multiple theological, cultural and organisational systems. Put another way, integrating and promoting full partnership of women in leadership is required in every system for lasting change to be achieved.

Cultural barriers

The fact that the Anglican church is embedded in Australian society and culture facing its own struggles with discrimination and misogyny, is widely recognised (Bouma, 2014; Macneil, 2014; Woodlock, 2018). Calls for the church to operate differently to the broader culture, by modelling power sharing and collaboration

(Macneil, 2014; Pickard, 2009), seem difficult to enact. It is worth noting that Macneil, among others, recounts that the campaign for the ordination of women was accompanied by hopes of broader cultural change within the church: for 'full equality of men and women' and the 'mutual recognition of gifts and skills' (lay and ordained), a church that could credibly speak to the broader society.

Barriers to women's leadership are often invisible. Diehl & Dzubinski's (2016) analysis of gender-based leadership barriers in the US helpfully maps these at 'macro, meso, and micro levels', that is at societal, organisational, and individual/personal levels. They argue that supporting women in leadership requires a broad perspective, taking into account the multitude of barriers faced at different levels of society. Such an analysis has the potential to help us target strategies of support.

Theological barriers

The full equality of men and women in ministry flows from our shared gifting by the Holy Spirit, our unity in Christ and is reflected throughout the New Testament. Despite this biblical witness, Bouma (2014) suggested that 'the presence of theologically legitimated patriarchy continues to lie at the foundation of many of the problems women in ministry encounter' and that further progress would not be achieved until 'the hard work of ridding the church of patriarchal theologies, language and liturgies is done'. Purser & O'Brien (2021) similarly view patriarchal theology as a major barrier to the full participation of women in the leadership of the church.

Fry (2021) makes a comparable observation based on his research with male clergy: 'belief in gender differentiation—that men and women should occupy distinct spheres... limits the possibility of gender equality within the CoFE' (Church of England). He rightly observed that 'the beliefs and actions of men continue to shape the experiences and opportunities afforded to women' – hence his research focussed on male leaders, their beliefs and behaviours.

In the Church of England gender discrimination is institutionally legitimated. Provisions exist for 'gender traditionalist clergy' with clergy and congregations being able to 'opt out' of working with women priests with 'flying bishops' enabling alternate episcopal oversight. There are no such legal provisions in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. In practice, however, there are 'no go' areas for ordained women in this Diocese.

The rise of complementarian theology and the polarisation of positions regarding gender roles (complementarian versus egalitarian) has meant that theological arguments regarding women's leadership in the church are being revisited in ways that might not have been anticipated in 1992. The impact of complementarian theology on women's ministry aspirations and on access to leadership experience is likely to be significant, but there is little research in this area (Shorter, 2023).

Modelling and leadership

Women in ministry leadership roles present a way for other women to imagine themselves in ministry. An absence of women in senior roles makes it less likely that other women might discern a call to pastoral ministry or consider it a possibility. Research from the Church of Ireland identified that female clergy feel overwhelmingly (68%) that 'the main decision-makers are male' and that women do not see other women in leadership positions (Purser & O'Brien, 2021).

Australian research found that women in ministry leadership described other women looking to them as 'models' and helping other women 'find their voice.' (Woodlock, 2018) This research pointed to the importance of ensuring women fill public-facing roles such as speaking at conferences. Likewise, gender parity on church committees and working groups will expose junior women to the leadership of more senior women. (Woodlock, 2018).

Call and discernment

Women experience barriers at the very first step: discernment of vocation to ministry. Australian Church of Christ researcher Janet Woodlock (2019, p.8) rightly observes that the discernment of vocation 'occurs in a social context' and that 'for women socialised in male-dominated church cultures, discernment of a pastoral ministry call may be misheard, disregarded or delayed.' The 'early yearnings' experienced by women may be discouraged by messages that women's roles are limited. Women are less likely to be encouraged than men to consider church leadership and, especially in male-dominated churches, are less likely to be 'tapped on the shoulder' for ministry opportunities. The paucity or absence of role models is likely to create a negative feedback loop: if you don't see women in leadership, it is harder to imagine this as a possibility.

Woodlock (2019) discusses some initiatives trialled to address barriers at this point: programs with young adults to promote vocational discernment (in a broad sense), including to ministry; vocation days which pay particular attention to encouraging women.

Formation

Among conservative male clergy, Fry (2021) found that those who had built strong relationships with women in theological college, even across different theological positions, were more likely to affirm women's ministry. Fry's work on the Church of England (2024) is particularly interesting because he focuses on hearing male clergy who hold theologically conservative positions in relation to women's ministry. He argues that, in order to obtain senior positions in the church, it is necessary to obtain 'social and spiritual capital', gained through networks of relationships and access to resources, and thus enabling

professional progression. Women priests, he argues, are often denied such access.

In relation to the Church of Ireland, Purser & O'Brien (2021) suggested the appointment of both male and female directors of ordinands. The presence of partnership at this level helps normalise equality and affords the opportunity to adjust organisational systems that can otherwise operate with unconscious bias.

Early ordained ministry experiences

Macneil (2014) suggested that in the first wave after 1992, early appointments in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn were made on gendered lines, and the assumption that men were the primary breadwinners. Men (whose wives it was assumed had secondary careers) were often appointed to small rural parishes. Women were often given part-time or honorary roles in view of their husband's more important careers. Thomson's study (2013) notes that early ministry placements are often decided on a financial basis, neglecting other aspects of fit.

Bouma's study (1996) showed stark differences in experience of men and women in relation to initial appointments. Men were all in full time, stipendiary ministry. Just under 70% of women were full time, 85% received a stipend, but less than 40% received full allowances and expenses. No men, but 38.5% of women, were in chaplaincy. Unfortunately, no comparative data was collected at the 20 year mark.

Fry's work is again helpful here in trying to realistically promote cultural change. As in Australia, new clergy in the Church of England are generally placed with clergy holding a shared religious tradition. How the training incumbent models ministry, including how they relate to female colleagues, will be highly formative as 'shared identity leads to shared behavior'. Fry (2021) recommended that the willingness to 'share capital' with women regardless of tradition should be emphasised in the selection of training incumbents.

Selection and recruitment

Bouma's study (1996) showed stark differences in the experience of men and women in relation to selection and initial appointments. 'Men's paths through selection were described as short/smooth (80%) compared with 23.9% for women.' No Australian research is available on more recent experiences. Bouma's later research (2014) found that 58.5% of female Anglican clergy had experienced discrimination from their superiors in the church.

A significant theme in the international research is that suitably qualified women are overlooked in selection processes. Women in the Church of Ireland felt that superior female candidates are frequently overlooked 'because of being female'

(Purser & O'Brien, 2021). This research also indicated that married women face even greater discrimination in selection processes than single women, perhaps due to attitudes about marriage and parenting. It suggested reform of interview processes in line with best practice in the secular world (for example, clear selection criteria, asking interviewees identical questions etc.) and gender balance among directors of ordinands might address this discrimination (Purser & O'Brien, 2021).

Workplace conditions of service

The Australian and international literature overwhelmingly points to unsatisfactory workplace conditions as the most significant barrier to women pursuing and continuing in ordained parish ministry. These issues include role ambiguity; a gender pay gap; unreasonable work hours; workplace bullying and sexual harassment; lack of organisational support; job insecurity and absence of workplace protections; and unreasonable and gendered expectations of clergy families.

Both the Australian and international literature pointed to women's experience of bullying and especially of sexual harassment from their congregation as factors leading to women's resignations (Greene, 2015; McDuff, 2008; Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Robbins & Greene, 2018; Thomson, 2014). This is especially the case for younger women (McDuff, 2008). In the Anglican Church in Australia, 67.2% of female clergy reported experiencing bullying and 25.2% reported sexual harassment (Bouma, 2014).

Many women have felt unsupported by their churches when these issues are brought to the attention of their superiors. As in Australia with our Sex Discrimination Act, clergy in the UK are not protected by their Equality Act meaning that female clergy have limited avenues through which to bring experiences of sex-based discrimination and sexual harassment to the attention of their superiors such that they will be taken seriously. This lack of legal protection is cited as a significant obstacle to change (Greene, 2015). American research, however, found that female faith workers are less likely to experience workplace harassment where they have high organisational support and job security (McDuff, 2008).

The absence of workplace entitlements such as parental leave, carer's leave and the realistic possibility of family-friendly hours are repeatedly found to be obstacles for clergy women with children. Clashes with family life and work are widespread barriers to women's leadership in ministry especially the availability of maternity leave and of childcare in 'antisocial hours' (Greene, 2015; Phelps, 2023; Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Thomson, 2014).

Role ambiguity and the attendant expectations of the clergy family are also significant obstacles for clergywomen, especially those who are married. Clergywomen are often expected to do the work of both the vicar and the 'clergy wife' or to do 'feminine tasks' such as cleaning the church (Holleman, 2023; Robbins & Greene, 2018).

The question of a gender pay gap is more complex. Most of this research is from the USA where the gender pay gap for clergy (women's 93 cents for men's dollar) is actually *less* than in other industries. Nonetheless, married female clergy make only 72 cents for men's dollar and clergywomen with children make even less (Schleifer & Miller, 2017). This is perhaps because women clergy are often in more junior positions. Nevertheless, women in senior roles such as rectors also suffer a gender pay gap compared to men in equivalent roles (Lummis, 2008). It is also perhaps because congregations anticipate forgoing the additional labour of the 'clergy spouse' by not expecting the clergy husband to perform the work of the clergy wife or that their expectation that clergywomen's husbands will be the family breadwinner (Schleifer & Miller, 2017).

Mentoring and networking

Clergywomen often feel isolated and unsupported. English research suggests that while some female clergy feel well supported by their archdeacon or bishop, others have nowhere to go if they had a problem (Greene, 2015).

In both Australia and overseas, clergywomen feel excluded from networking opportunities that are often informal and dominated by men, describing the church as a 'boys club' (Thomson, 2014). In the Church of Ireland, for instance, clergywomen described an 'informal boy's club' where important decisions were made with official decision-making apparatuses reduced to a mere formality.

Networking is presumed to be a male activity whereas when women meet this is presumed to be merely pastoral care (Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Research from the USA indicates that whereas ministry mentors are invaluable for women, few ministers are willing or available to serve as mentors to more junior clergy (Newkirk & Cooper, 2013).

Promotion to senior roles

In both Australia and internationally, women ministers are not being promoted to senior roles. They are over-represented in subordinate positions and are less likely to serve as bishops, professors in theological institutions or rectors/senior pastors (Phelps, 2023; Sullins, 2000). This trend is in part due to the dominance of men on decision-making positions where 'men promote men' as Irish research suggested (Purser & O'Brien, 2021).

It could also be due to the presumption that women prefer to take on pastoral care roles rather than leadership roles which, in turn, deters women from pursuing these more senior roles (Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Tan, 2014). Australian research suggests that women are not 'trained' for leadership (Thomson, 2014).

Appendix 2. One-to-one interviews

Part 1: Your experience of stipendiary ministry

- 1.1 Vocation - *Could you share your experience of exploring or discerning a call to ordained ministry? What nurtured or supported you in this? What constraints and barriers did you experience?*
- 1.2 Selection - *Could you share your experience of being selected for ordination. What nurtured or supported you in this? What constraints and barriers did you experience?*
- 1.3 Formation - *Could you share your experience of formation or training for ministry, including student placements. What nurtured or supported you in this? What constraints and barriers did you experience?*
- 1.4 Seeking and securing a stipendiary position - *Did you seek and secure a stipendiary position when you were ordained? What nurtured and supported your ministry? What were the constraints and barriers?*
- 1.5 Subsequent experience of ordained ministry - *Where have you found support/affirmation? What barriers have you experienced?*
- 1.6 Leadership - *How do you feel about taking on leadership roles?*

Part 2: Your thoughts/perspectives on the current disparity between men and women in full time stipendiary roles in this Diocese

- 2.1 What do you think are the reasons for the current disparity between men and women in full-time stipendiary roles and in senior leadership roles?
- 2.2 How could the Diocese address this disparity?
Do you have suggestions in relation to encouraging vocations, selection, formation and training, appointment processes, or working conditions that might help address the disparity or create greater opportunities for women?
- 2.3 Any other suggestions or comments?

Closing Questions

How do you feel after the interview?

How do you feel about the future for women in leadership in the Diocese?

Appendix 3. Additional statistical information

Summary

The Diocese has fairly consistently ordained three women for every four men since the early 1990s. However, far more men than women have transferred from other dioceses, and this changes the ratio of female to male priests from 3:4 to less than 1:2.

Paid positions have also been proportionately higher for men than women. 1 in 3 women have an honorary licence. Only 1 in 15 men do so.

Men are currently nine times more likely to lead a parish or ministry unit than women. Within two years of the first ordination of women, four women were leading ministry units. Thirty years later there are still only four women leading ministry units. The highest proportion, when 25% of ministry units were led by women, was in 2014.

The Diocesan governing entities are far more likely to have equal gender representation if they are social justice and youth oriented. Bishop in Council, ADS Board and Ministry Executive have ratios of women to men of 1 to 2; 1 to 3 and 1 to 4 respectively. The ADS executive is 2 to 9.

Counting the numbers

Researching the statistical background of ordained ministry in Canberra Goulburn has been an interesting, and frustrating, exercise.

The only database of ordinations and licences that has been kept is for individual people's licence history, rather than general counting of numbers. Even then, the information available is incomplete and does not record anything like the myriad of expressions of ministry positions.

The conclusions reached in this paper are based on a database provided by the Bishop's office, with secondary material found in the Australian Anglican Directory and a few copies of the Diocesan Directory. The information had to be manually counted because of the format of the database.

Of necessity, some assumptions have been made.

- If a person is primarily licenced to a chaplaincy position (eg a school) their licence sometimes also records they are attached to a parish. These 'secondary' licences have not been counted, as they would artificially inflate position numbers. Authority To Officiate (ATOs) are not included, as they were usually for retired clergy and have no other information about place or nature of work attached to them.

- These numbers are designed to show the gender breakdown of the number of ordained people in the Diocese. To this end, transitional deacons are not included as, except in two cases, they were priested in either the same or following year. To include them would have doubled the figures and given an inaccurate account of how many ordained people are ministering in the Diocese in each year.
- There is no record of when clergy left the Diocese, retired or even died.
- The personal data available starts in 1996. This was effectively three years after women were first ordained priests in December 1992. Parish data starts in 1993. The Australian Anglican Directory of 1995 says there were two male deacons, 46 male priests, no female deacons and 16 female priests in the Diocese.

Counting the people

Vocational deacons

Thirty-one women have been ordained within the Diocese as vocational deacons (see Figure 5). One woman has transferred to the Diocese as a vocational deacon.

Seventeen men have been ordained vocational deacons. Two have transferred into the Diocese.

Women have been made vocational deacons in small numbers (no more than three women per year) fairly consistently over the last 28 years. Men were made deacon more commonly before 2006, when six were ordained. Since then, however, only two men have become vocational deacons.

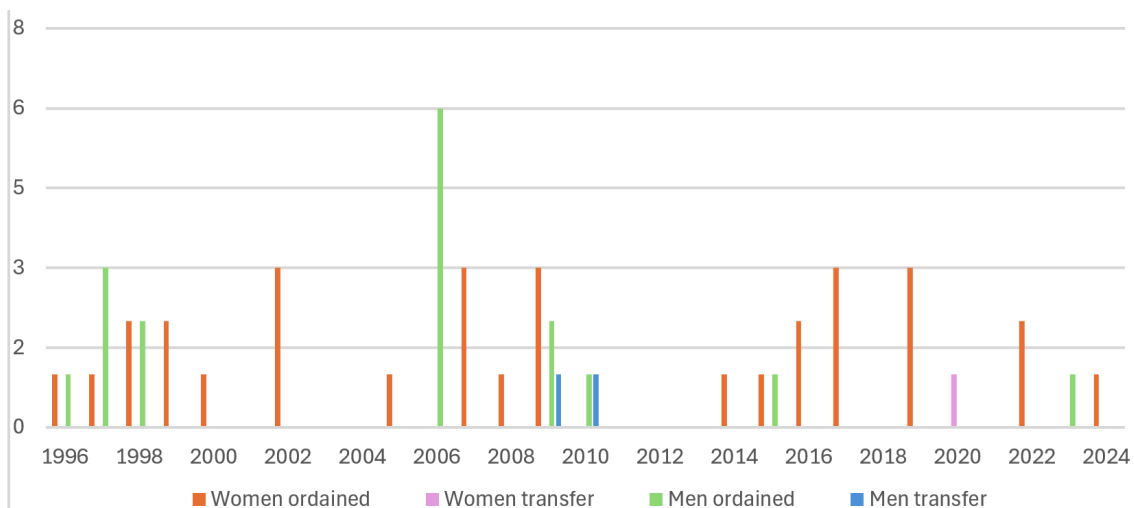


Figure 5, Vocational Deacons

Priests

Since 1996, 58 women have been ordained within the Diocese as priests. 8 women have transferred to the Diocese either as a priest, or as deacons who became priests in this Diocese (see Figure 6).

80 men have been ordained as priests. 77 have transferred into the Diocese.

In the last 28 years, 3 women have been ordained for every 4 men. However, when we look at the numbers who have transferred into the Diocese to take up a ministry position, the ratio becomes 1 woman for every 10 men transfers.

This pattern has dramatically changed the overall ratio of women to men. The ratio of 3 women to 4 men locally ordained becomes less than half, with 9 women to 20 men in total.

It should also be noted that there is a small but regular cohort of people ordained here who are military chaplains and will not hold long term positions in the Diocese. It is not possible to record their numbers.

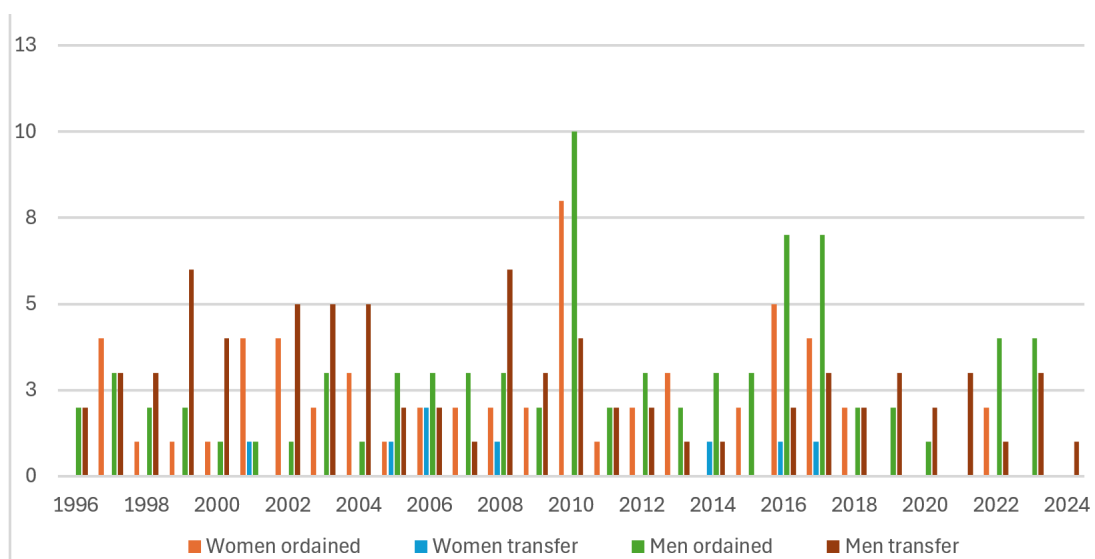


Figure 6, Ordinations to the Priesthood

Counting the jobs

What types of ministry positions has each person had?

The numbers of licences issued is larger than the number of people ordained. This is for two reasons. First, there was a cohort of people already ordained in 1996. As they took new positions they were issued new licences. Second, people move around within the Diocese and are issued a new licence for each new position.

The diocesan database records some of these licences as honorary. Given some of the ministry units for which licences were issued, and some of the women interviewed telling how they were licenced, there is a suspicion there are more honorary positions than are recorded. The assumption for this paper has been made that unless stated as honorary, each licence was for a paid position. The licence does not record the amount of payment. There are part-time positions as well as house-for-duty positions that cannot be quantified.

Vocational deacons

Women have held 24 honorary licences and 11 paid licences (see Figure 7). They have been for 29 parish positions and 9 chaplaincy positions. There has also been one licence for St Marks and one for Anglicare. However, it should be noted (but cannot be accurately recorded) that some vocational deacons held jobs as chaplains in organisations that weren't Anglican. So, their licence would not reflect where they conducted most of their ministry, only the parish that they were nominally attached to. This artificially inflates the ratio of parish/chaplaincy positions.

Men have held 9 honorary licences and 5 paid positions. They have been for 7 parish positions and 4 chaplaincy roles. There were 3 St Mark's licences.



Figure 7, Deacon Licenses

Priests

Women have held 31 honorary licences and 99 paid licences (see Figure 8). This is a ratio of 1:3. 101 have been parish positions and 8 chaplaincy roles. There has been one licence to St Marks.

Men have held 18 honorary licences and 265 paid licences. This is a ratio of 1:15. 234 were parish-based and 30 chaplaincies. 14 licences have been issued for St Marks, one for Anglicare and one for the Diocese.

When a parish is vacant a Locum Tenens is appointed. Since 1996, 44 men have been appointed Locum and 12 women. In 5 of the women's cases their appointment was a period of discernment prior to their appointment as priest in charge or rector in that parish.

As can be seen, men are far less likely to have an honorary position than women. There have been 2½ times more paid licences, and 2¼ more parish licences issued to men. This can be partly explained when we consider the existing men in the Diocese before 1996 and the greater numbers ordained and transferred in the years since.

The number of licences for St Mark's is the most gender specific. We need to remember these are for ordained people working at St Mark's, not for all positions at St Mark's. It appears that only people in full-time employment were issued specific licences. However, it appears that since 1996 there have been 17 ordained men and 3 ordained women on full-time staff.

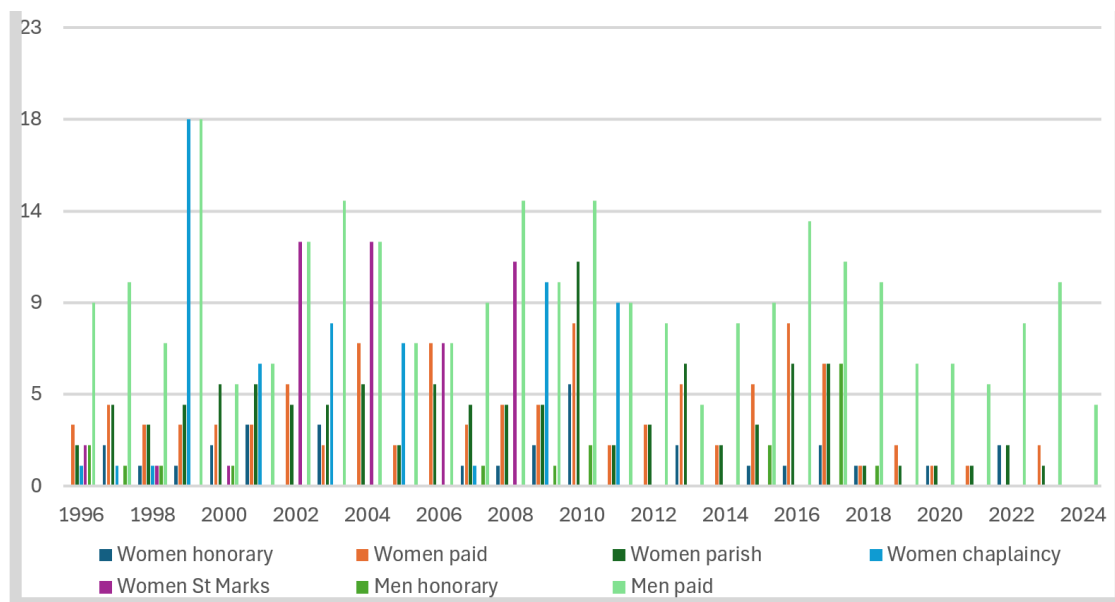


Figure 8, Priest Licences issued

Counting the Parishes

As with all the statistics, these figures have been hard to collate. The Diocese does not have a single record of who was in charge of every parish each year that we could access. The figures below are from the Australian Anglican Directory (starting in 1993), except for 2016-20 when it was not produced. The information for those years come from old diocesan directories within personal collections.

This figure (Figure 9) makes no distinction between a rector/priest-in-charge and a long-term locum when a ministry unit is vacant.

Two years after the first women were ordained, four of them were leading ministry units. Thirty years later, four women are leading ministry units, and one rural chaplain is working in a rural parish where the Assistant Bishop is technically in charge, and one woman is locum.

In between, the number of women leading parishes rose until 25% of all ministry units were led by women in 2014. Then there has been a steady decrease to 2024, where only 10% of parishes are led by a woman (see Figure 9).

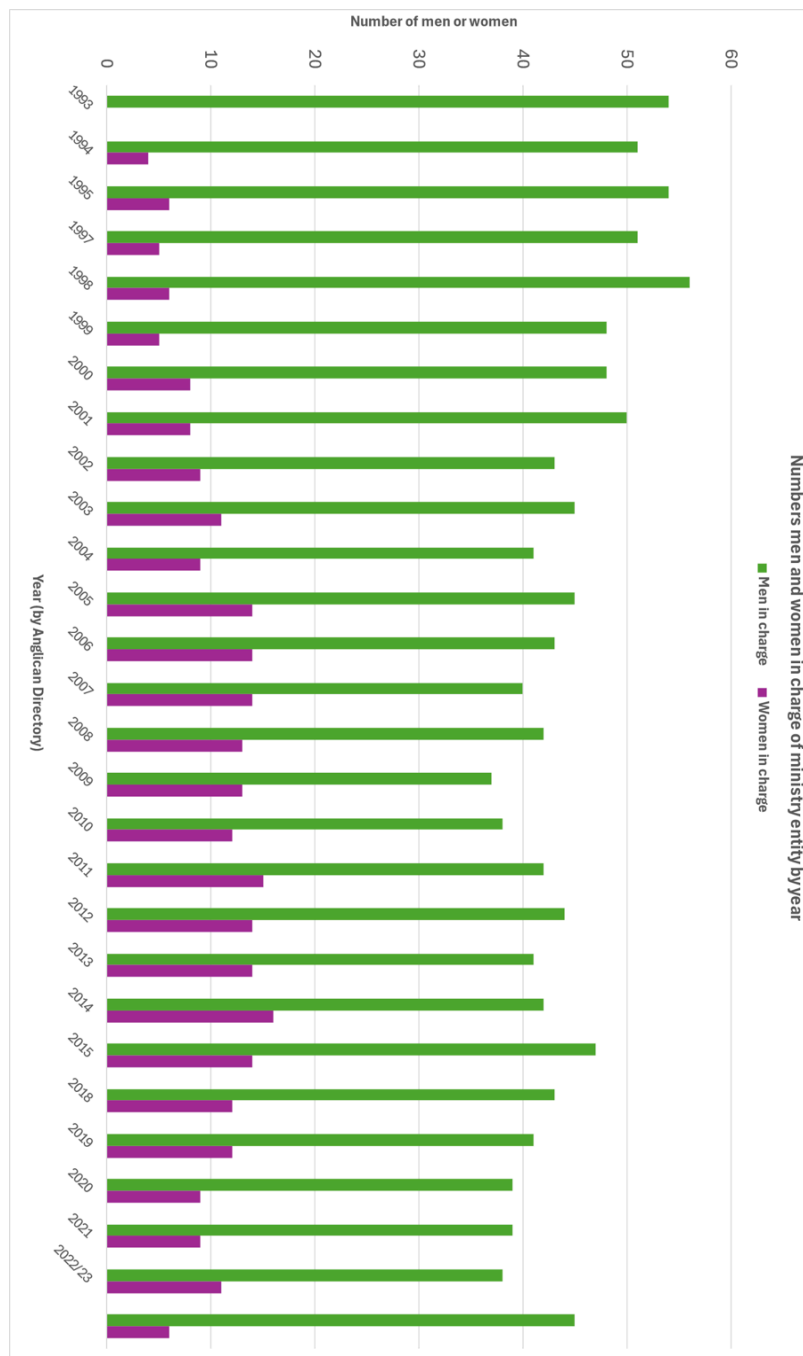


Figure 9, Men and women in charge of ministry entity

The Diocese

An issue raised by the majority of the women interviewed for this research, both individually and in focus groups, was the ‘blokey’ nature of diocesan governing bodies. The figure (Figure 10) below shows numbers of men and women on diocesan entities, taken from Synod reports of 2023.

In addition, the ADS executive has 9 men and 2 women (representing education and support services).

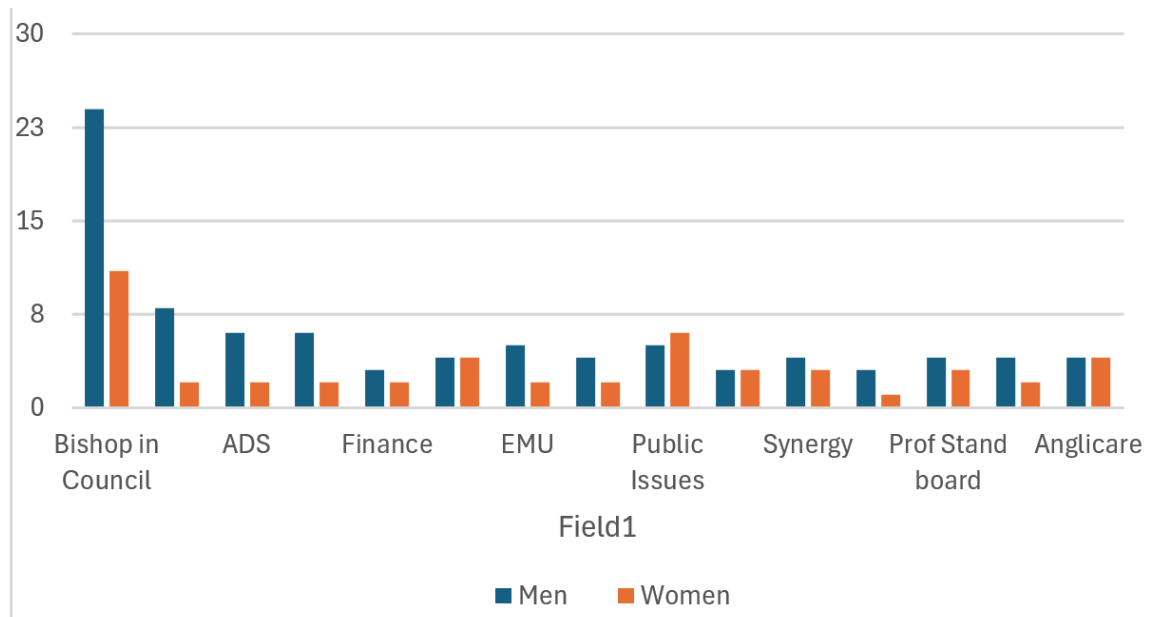


Figure 10, Diocesan Entities by gender, 2023

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