

Emerging Futures Collaborative Limited: An Australian response to supporting Religious Institutes moving towards completion

1 Emerging Futures Collaborative Limited: Overview

As evidenced by the rapid growth of the Emerging Futures Collaborative Limited this innovative initiative is a proven success in response to the call for governance and support by Australian religious institutes moving towards completion.

Emerging Futures Collaborative Limited (EFCL) has been established as a ministry of religious institutes in Australia to serve and support Religious institutes moving towards completion. EFCL provides these religious institutes with access to a Commissary and Councillors, and ongoing shared administrative and support services, as required. These support services address all the religious institutes support needs, known and unknown, for as long as these are needed and enable the members of the religious institute to continue to live their charism and religious community life, as they have in Australia, until the last member dies.

EFCL is a not-for-profit company begun on 1 July 2021, with eight religious institutes as the members. The members' representatives appoint the eight-person board and the chief executive officer.

EFCL is the preferred future governance and support arrangement for many Religious institutes – 48 have expressed interest in writing in seeking its services when moving to completion. EFCL is currently assisting 19 religious institutes coming completion in Australia and one in New Zealand. In its short period of operation, EFCL has already been engaged to provide services to 13 percent of the member religious institutes of Catholic Religious Australia and based on the expressions of interest received, is expected to support around 32 percent of Australian religious institutes before the end of this decade.

As a collaborative of religious institutes, EFCL is a response to the call for cooperation between religious institutes. It is an expression of Pope Francis' call in his apostolic letter to all consecrated people (2014) *"for a growth in communion between the members of different Institutes,"* for religious institute members *"to step out more courageously from the confines of our respective Institutes and to work together at the local and global levels"*. This he says, *"would make for a more effective prophetic witness"* and he goes on to invite religious institute members to be *"part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening and mutual assistance"*.¹

The hallmarks of Emerging Futures Collaborative are religious institutes:

- Being in communion with each other for mission

¹ Pope Francis (2014) *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated people on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, n. 3; https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacraati.html. Accessed on 12 November 2022.

- Continuing to cultivate and adopt behaviours and practices that deepen their identity as *communio* and the Catholic identity of EFCL
- Choosing to work together to create their future
- Coming together to liberate and generate a freedom for energy and transformation
- Creating a new picture of and for Religious Life
- Creating a platform from which new possibilities might emerge
- Offering governance and support for groups in need of assistance
- Acknowledging the sense of urgency and acting now.

The aims of Emerging Futures Collaborative are to:

- Be a mission-led structure, holding the charism of each congregation within the charism of religious life
- Meet the needs of religious institutes in transition
- Meet the needs of religious institute members within the transitioning religious institutes
- Facilitate religious institute ownership of, and trust in, their own transition and the new structure
- Be religious institute-focused providing services and support in keeping with a tailored service and support agreement with each religious institute
- Proclaim a new way of living religious life
- Be accountable to the religious institutes, to their members, their stated wishes and their asset distribution plans
- Take responsibility for known and unknown obligations that are transferred from the religious institutes
- Be financially self-sufficient and to offer financial support to religious institutes in need of it.

As evidenced by the rapid take up and the projected growth of EFCL services this innovative initiative is now proven as a successful response to the call for governance and support by Australian religious institutes moving towards completion.

EFCL is a source of hope for members of religious institutes, as it acknowledges the grieving inherent in diminishment while enabling members to live religious life to the full in their community in Australia in their changing circumstances. EFCL accompanies religious institute members as they walk each other home and come to completion.

Further information on EFCL is available at www.emergingfuturescollaborative.org.au

2 Evolution of religious life in Australia – challenges and opportunities

Key challenges and opportunities have been identified as follows:

- Demographics: ageing and diminishment
- The geography of Australia
- Collaborating with the laity
- Unmet needs in Oceania

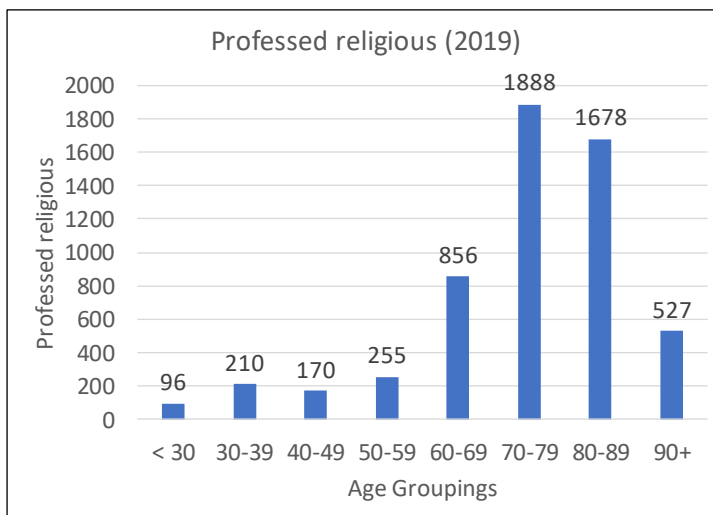
2.1 Demographics: ageing and diminishment

The numbers of suitable religious to take the responsibility of Commissary are diminishing whilst the projected need will grow rapidly over the next 3 – 10 years.

In 2019, the date of the last national survey of religious in Australia, almost three quarters of professed religious (72%) were 70 years or older, whilst only 8 percent were under 50 years of age.

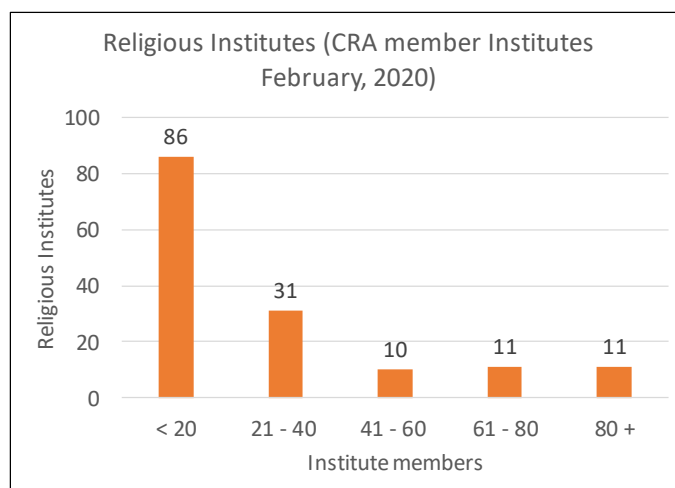
In the almost 36 months from February 2019 to November 2021 the total number of professed religious reduced from 5,680 to 5,300.

Some religious institutes no longer have members who are suitable to constitute Canonical leadership and many more expect to be in this position within the next 3-10 years.



Larger Religious institutes will be unable to take on the responsibility for smaller institutes as the need grows and they themselves diminish.

Some larger religious institutes have already taken canonical responsibility for others currently in need of an appointed Commissary. However, this practice is not sustainable as the former are diminishing comparably to smaller religious institutes and the need for suitable religious to undertake the role of Commissary will grow rapidly over the next decade. At present there are 86 Australian religious institutes with less than 20 members. Fifty-seven of these institutes have less than ten members.



In the diminishment of religious life, Australia has mirrored international trends. We have been through a phase of congregational amalgamations and currently leadership teams of three of our larger congregations have taken on the office of leadership for small diminishing congregations. However, neither of these approaches will be sustainable, and the collaborative model is now the preferred approach for the future.

When looking to the small proportion of 'younger' members of religious institutes in Australia, it is considered not to be judicious to rely on this group as a source of future Commissaries

and Councillors. This age group has lived a different type of religious life, followed changed ministry patterns and rarely served on leadership teams. It is our hope that the existence of EFCL and its role in assisting religious institutes to completion will allow these 'younger' members to minister in religious life according to their call and particular gifts and expertise.

2.2 The geography of Australia

The Australian continent has unique challenges due to a relatively thinly spread population over its vast geographical areas.

Australia is the sixth largest country in the world, whilst its population ranks 55th. Australia's landmass is almost as big as Europe's whilst the European population is 18 times larger than Australia's. As a result, Australian religious communities are spread across a very large geographical area.

Geography is therefore an important factor for religious institutes seeking access to canonical governance and other support within their region of Australia as they move towards completion. This need has seen congregations seeking the services of EFCL to enable them to live their charism and religious community life in their local communities.

2.3 Collaborating with the laity

We have an established foundation of collaboration and trust between religious institutes and laity in Australia, and there is a compelling opportunity to extend this collaboration to the governance of religious institutes moving towards completion.

Collaboration between religious institutes and laity to provide civil and canonical governance is a proven success in Australia through the Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (MPJPs). We commend the Holy See for the innovative step of authorising these new canonical entities some thirty years ago. Further, the establishment in 2016 of Australia's Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons, the only such association in the world, has enabled MPJP trustees to support one another in their ministry and ongoing formation.

These developments have laid strong and trusted foundations of lay involvement in the Australian Church and create the opportunity for lay people to walk, in a new way, with religious institutes in the governance of the religious institutes themselves. This synodality is reaffirmed in Article 132 of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* -On The Roman Curia And Its Service To The Church In The World: "The Dicastery (DICALSAL) studies issues relating to cooperation between the laity and ordained ministers in virtue of their baptism and the diversity of charisms and ministries, in order to foster in both an awareness of co-responsibility for the life and mission of the Church".²

² https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html. Accessed 10 November 2022. Article 132.

2.4 Unmet needs in Oceania

Australian religious institutes provide governance to religious foundations and ministries established in Oceania and have a responsibility to ensure suitable sustainable governance options are in place.

Religious institutes have established religious foundations across the developing nations of Oceania and Australian religious institutes continue to provide governance and financial support to their religious institute members in Oceania. The diminishment of capacity for governance in Australia has consequences for provision of sustainable governance across Oceanic religious institute structures. A sustainable congregational governance model for diminishing religious institutes in Australia is therefore required not only for their members in Australia, but also for a given religious institute members in Oceania.

3 Recommended changes

Recommendation 1: Appointment of lay people to the position of Commissary.

It is recommended that DICALSAL, acting in its capacity as Ecclesial Authority of religious institutes, agree to appoint suitable lay people to hold the canonical role of Commissary for religious institutes requesting this, when they are no longer able to elect a suitable governance structure from their own membership.

Recommendation 2: Dialogue with DICALSAL

It is recommended that representatives of the Members and the Board and senior staff of Emerging Futures Collaborative Limited have the opportunity to dialogue in person with members of DICALSAL about effective pastoral and governance responses to the continuance of Religious Institutes in Australia, New Zealand and Oceania.