

**Catholic Religious Australia
National Assembly
“Charism Beyond Borders”**

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Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie**

When advertising the theme of this Conference, “Charism Beyond Borders” Sr Veronica McCluskie wrote that “as Bishop of Port Pirie, Greg O’Kelly SJ will bring a perspective on Church and the struggle between the “charismatic” (Religious life) and the “institutional”, and the need for both to listen, learn and support each other for the building up of God’s kingdom”. Sr Marion Gambin went further and said that the Planning Committee hoped I might present “something on the ecclesial perspective on lay involvement, collaborative leadership, and what are you hearing of the struggles to do the above in relation to Church?:” And the programme we have before us says that I will be speaking on “Charism: A Church Perspective”.

Well, how long have we got?!... There was a Jesuit scholastic once who got up to announce his paper as “God, Man and the Universe” and one of the old Fathers in the audience leant over to another and said “well, he won’t run out of matter...”

Sr Marion mentioned “collaborative leadership”. I think she may have used a loaded phrase... I had just read the opening statement of Cardinal William Lavada, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on the doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, where he mentioned the need to foster “a patient and collaborative renewal of this Conference”. And the final paragraph of the statement itself said it would be the “task of the Archbishop delegate to work collaboratively with the offices of the Leadership Conference...” So thank you, Sr Marion, for such an innocent topic free from all hazard or unwelcome consequences...It’s like going tiptoe through the minefield!

The intervention by which an Archbishop has been placed as a referral point for the LCWR is a very disappointing gesture, one scarcely showing trust. We also know, not only from the Northern Territory, but from the story of various Religious Orders that intervention has rarely been the appropriate response to a situation, when someone outside the charism is placed in charge of a group with a different charism.

This topic can be explored through a couple of lenses, that of Religious finding new expressions for their living of their charism beyond what was the style and circumstance at the time of their founding, and secondly, how the charism of a Religious Order might be

shared beyond the borders of the Order itself, a challenge of significant scope. Paul VI once described the Jesuit vocation as being “wherever in the Church, even in most difficult and extreme fields, in the crossroads of ideologies, in the front line of social conflict...” It is a dangerous place to be at the crossroads of ideologies. People can snipe at you, and you can get run over. But the vocation to Religious life is essentially a prophetic one, and the Religious is a sign of the Church trying to respond to the needs of the times, and so often in the history of Religious Orders our vocation has called us to times of tension and to be healers and reconcilers in the name of Christ.

The Boston Theologian Peter Phan describes Jesus as the “border-crosser par excellence”:

What distinguishes Christ from all others is His ability to cross all kinds of borders in order to share the life of others and to be in solidarity with them. In a culture of pluralism, it is the kind of border crossing, in humility and love, to reach out to the “other” that convinces and converts people, not brilliant systems of ideas and doctrinal propositions. Clearly, Jesus was a border-crosser par excellence. He continually crossed borders in His Incarnation, ministry, and death and resurrection.

The role of prophetic and healing Religious today is well expressed in another document from my tradition which says “our ministry is particularly directed towards those who have not heard the Gospel; those who are at the margins of the Church or society; those who have been denied their dignity; those who are voiceless and powerless; those weak in faith or alienated from it; those whose values are undermined by contemporary culture; those whose needs are greater than they can bear”.

It is obvious that we live in a Church today in which there is some type of struggle going on, a clash of interpretations and movements. The fiftieth anniversary of the commencement of the second Vatican Council has brought this to the fore. The publications of the Right are evincing a new found glee, seeing the revival of former externals.

At a recent Jesuit ordination I said in the homily, “In an age when restorationist styles seem to be at work in the Church, especially in the liturgy, and trends exist that might favour a resurgence of clericalism, it is essential to recall there is only one priesthood in the Church, the priesthood of Christ, and all the faithful share in that through baptism. The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of the ministerial priesthood being at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful. All the faithful are baptised as priests, prophets and kings, and the one called to Holy Orders is to work to enable the priesthood of all the faithful to exercise itself in the world, so that the Church, which is the Body of Christ, might continue through all its members, lay, consecrated and ordained, to be the presence of Christ for the world, living the mission of anointer, healer, preacher, and shepherd.”

What surprised me were the comments that passage received, as if it was something new. But lay baptismal ministry is orthodox teaching. Clericalism is not. There was an issue of “Inform” in 2009, the Year of the Priest, where the then Editor wrote:

The distinctive character in the soul (of the priest) is the basis for the distinctive clerical dress required of the priest. His wearing of priestly dress is a proclamation of Christ, an outward sign of his consecration by and to Christ, and it makes him recognisable and available to God’s people.

That is poppycock. It is the interior that flows to the exterior, as Ignatius would say – not the other way around.

Clericalism did much to blunt the Church in our recent past, placing both heavy demands and unwarranted power in the hands of the ordained, at the same time relegated the laity to a role of passive and subservient dependence on the clergy. Blessed John Paul II is quite clear in this area, as he wrote in his Holy Thursday Letter to Priests in 1990:

The priesthood is not an institution that exists “alongside” the laity or “above” it. The priesthood of bishops and priests, as well as the ministry of deacons, is “for” the laity, and precisely for this reason it possesses a “ministerial” character, that is to say one

of service. Moreover, it highlights the “baptismal priesthood”, the priesthood common to all the faithful.

As Archbishop Tim Costelloe writes, “it is the Church, the community of the baptised, not just a group within it, which is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people”. It is the whole body of the baptised that carries those attributes.

Pope Benedict, the scholar Pope, commented on these tensions of interpretation in 2005. He referred to them as two hermeneutics. Hermes was the Greek god of language. A hermeneutic can be described as the conceptual structure in the light of which we interpret something. Pope Benedict spoke of two contrary hermeneutics quarrelling with each other about the implementation of the Vatican II. The first hermeneutic is one of reform and renewal in the continuity of one subject, the Church. The second hermeneutic is one of discontinuity and rupture which effectively discounts continuity, and sees the post-Vatican II Church as radically different to what we experienced as the pre-Vatican II Church. You would be familiar with the passage of Fr John O’Malley’s “What happened in Vatican II” where he contrasts the different emphases before and after the Council. It represented, he said, a shift “from commands to invitation, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion...” Fr James Bacik had an earlier dichotomy when describing the change of perception of priesthood in the Church – “from pedestal to participation, from classical creature to bearer of the mystery, from the lone ranger style to a collaborative ministry, from monastic spirituality to a secular spirituality...”

Such dichotomies can be instructive and helpful in the short term, but limited in any long term application. It is the same Church, before and after. Such listings smack of black hats and white hats, villains and goodies. All of us know that human life and the consecrated life is far more complex than that. Simplicity serves nobody. Religious life became a feature of the life of the Church in its ancient days, and has always been a changing life form within it, and this continues to the present, as even now newer forms of it are expressing themselves. Of all images of the life of the Church, Religious life, corresponding to the charisms gifted to

countless men and women through ages of remarkable diversity, shows the continuity over those different ages and cultures of radical discipleship of Christ in this world.

As a Religious myself I would like to express my distress at some of the comments on Religious Life given by Cardinal Frank Rode, then Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life. They seemed to release a chain of hurtful misunderstandings. It was during his time of administration that the investigation into female Religious Orders in the United States was commenced. In 2009 Cardinal Rode, himself a member of a Religious congregation, claimed in an address in the United States that attempts at renewal of Religious life had been “dominated by the hermeneutic of rupture, and a pseudo-aggiornamento had overtaken the renewal the Council called for, resulting in a naturalism that centres on man himself, the supremacy of a climate of radical subjectivism.” Sadly, I have read the recent claim of a senior cleric that for some Religious the involvement in social justice issues had either replaced or largely displaced the person of Christ.

We all know that some individual Religious and some communities seem to have lost the plot in recent years, but while there is little justice in generalisations, there is nevertheless much room for hurt. Certainly there is no endorsement of such attitudes among the Australian Bishops as a body. Any Bishop who does not cherish his Religious is a misguided person. The presence of Religious helps Church to be Church. Their absence results in the weakening of the witness to the Gospel in a diocese. I know that very well, for my diocese.

How to be Church is a question and challenge facing us greatly now, across the borders, lay and ordained, in city and country, but it seems a starker question in the more remote dioceses with diminishing resources and fewer vocations. In 1972 the Port Pirie Diocese counted thirty-nine diocesan priests, seven Religious priests, five Religious brothers, and ninety-three Religious sisters. Today we number twenty-five priests, of whom five are on loan from overseas; there are no Religious priests, no Religious brothers, and our Religious sisters now number only nineteen. We have not had a priestly ordination in eighteen years, or a seminarian in nineteen years – until this year when a young Filipino has joined our ranks.

There is a creative aspect coming out of this, because the Holy Spirit is of course with us, and changing circumstances result in new discoveries. The rediscovery of the theology and spirituality of baptismal ministry has resulted in our circumstances of greatly increased lay involvement since 1972. In 1972 we had fourteen Religious Congregations, and now we have six, as we sadly watch the retreat of the Religious back to the cities. If I might make a rueful remark, it does make the collaborative approach desired by the Religious difficult to accomplish when often the communication from the Religious Order is simply the announcement the Congregation is withdrawing, so the Bishop must look to try to fill the hole. When one has few resources, adult faith formation is a real challenge, but the fruits are there when one tries, and the Religious we do have rise and stand tall and lead by their example of involvement and nurture. In the circumstances confronting us now the Church as a whole has to do what Religious Orders are doing now themselves, looking at regrouping, reconfiguring, and in some ways refounding. The challenge to help Church be Church, looking at how the Church might reconfigure and recommence brings with it the excitement of challenge.

I said above that any Bishop worth his salt would cherish his Religious. It has been quite striking to me when moving from the city to the country to see how appreciated our Religious are by the people. The prophetic character and nature of Religious life stands out so strongly as these Sisters show the life of radical commitment, and move to meet needs that they themselves see and discern that they should address, not relying on being told what to do. The Sisters in the country seem to me to be better known than Sisters in the city. They are not as anonymous. They are known individually and stand out in the community, and are much appreciated by the people. Cherished, is the word. They are regarded as precious gifts whom we want to fight hard to keep, no matter how old, for the sake of the people, so Church can be Church still, even in our reduced communities. Elderly Religious can become anonymous and unseen in the city. Living in a supportive community in the country, they do enormous good as a ministry of support and encouragement to their lay brothers and sisters, and they are figures of prayer.

We do have to listen, as Sr Veronica put it, that the charismatic and institutional aspects of the Church need both to listen, learn and support each other for the building up of God's kingdom. We have to listen in order to hone our charism. The Lord has called us to listen like a disciple, as Scripture says; listening, listening to how the Spirit moves, where the needs are, not just the what I do but the how I live, all this is what a disciple must do. Some

do say that Religious have lost the plot, as we have all heard, and it is often put to us that what attracts young people is visible witness, lived community and corporate commitment, as opposed to a life akin to that of a secular institute.

Last year in Santa Clara Sr Sandra Schneiders gave a very reflective and informative paper on all this area, entitled "That Was Then...This Is Now..." She points out how the extraordinary phenomenon of the huge growth in Religious Life after the Second World War presented an image of Religious Life that was peculiar to only several decades. In the twenty-five year period between 1940 and 1965, a span of only twenty-five years, about the same number of women entered convents as had entered in the first two centuries in the United States. She noted that the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century was a period of great immigration into United States, many migrants arriving from Catholic countries. She notes "women Religious were the primary agents in keeping these newly arrived Catholics, who found themselves in a militantly anti-Catholic environment, grounded in their faith. Sisters built the Catholic school and hospital systems, provided social services of all kinds for Catholics, and for many if not most Americans, for good or for ill, they were the real public face of Catholicism. They were a, if not the, major factor in the mainstreaming of Catholics in American culture...." And very much the same could be said for Australia. The decline in numbers entering Religious life today has little to do with any idea of a disillusionment or a sense that the Sisters have taken the wrong path in their adaptations. Sister Sandra points out all the other factors that are more pertinent – small families is one obvious example. Hers is a very worthwhile and balanced account.

There is an acceptance now that the complete staffing of institutions is not what we are called to in the Church of today as Religious. When I was at primary school all the teachers were Josephite Sisters. When I went to the Jesuit College, all the teachers were Jesuits, except for two. When I was made headmaster at Riverview in 1982 fifteen of the Jesuit community were full-time teachers and boarding masters. There was something not right about that over-presence. When a garden is full of one type of beautiful flower, other flowers cannot emerge. That is the change now. As Sr Sandra said "we do not need hordes of novices to scrub miles of gleaming corridors in giant mother houses, or armies of young nuns to staff the institutions of a ghetto Church defending itself against the world. And it is certainly not our vocation to supply a huge corps of docile unpaid workers for the hierarchies."

We must listen in order to hone ourselves as true disciples, but we must not resile from that which is of our essence. On social justice issues, for example, we follow what the 1971 Synod of Bishops stated in their document “Justice in the World” where it was stated that “action on behalf of justice (is) a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel”. Not just a dimension, but a constitutive dimension.

It comes back to our charisms as Religious Orders, why we are who we are. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, once said that a vocation is what is there when all the games have ended. So when the externals have been assessed for what they are, externals, what do we have in our charism that says why we are who we are. It is not an easy quest. To quote Fr Peter Phan again, about Jesus being the border-crosser, “because Jesus was at the margins (the borders), in His teaching and His miracle-working, He creates a new and different centre, one constituted by the meeting of the borders of the many and diverse worlds, often in conflict with one another, each with its own centre which relegates the other to the margins. Jesus was certainly beyond the borders. The letter to the Hebrews says that He died “outside the city gate and outside the camp” (13: 12-13). What are the charisms we want to take beyond the borders?

Renewal demands we always stay in touch with, revisit constantly, our foundation, the why we were brought into being. And we should also hold as a truth that every novice in some way is called to refound the Order. We must go back to the foundations. There is a clutch of distinctive traits for consecrated persons. Some are shared by the lay faithful, but as an aggregated cluster they are the identity mark for those women and men we call the Religious, or our newer term, those in the Consecrated Life.

To repeat, all charisms derive from our baptismal charism. By baptism we were anointed as priest, prophet and royal person, and became part of the Body of Christ. Indeed, all baptised are to be Christ’s presence in the world, following the words of Jesus in John’s Gospel – “As the Father sent me, so I also send you.” And then He showed them His hands and His side. It was a commission by Christ for the whole Church, to be missionaries to the world, and to show to the world the wounded hands and side, the hands of justice and care for the outcast, and the wounded side of love, mercy and compassion.

Baptism is the soul-changing event Christ gives us. It is our identity experience. I have become a convert to holy water, though now I try to call it baptismal water. When the priest sprinkles it around, whether it be on the people, or on the school gymnasium, it is not something magical, to alter the molecular structure of the edifice or the person, but simply a reminder again that baptism is the basis of all things Christian. Anointed as priest, prophet and royal person – all share this charism. The priestly aspect of healing, blessing, reconciling and bridging between God and humanity. The prophet is one who speaks by her or his life the words of truth. The royal person, following what was a circumstance in Israel, the one who would care for the widow and the orphan. We must live Religious life in this context, relating it always to the Church, the Body of Christ in the world.

The charisms gifted to Religious men and women are not directed to functions in the Church, but are manifestations of the working of the Holy Spirit through individuals in the Church. They have no borders, but they must always be exercised in the context of the Church. But nevertheless it is not surprising if there is a creative tension, through the nature of things, between the hierarchical Church and Religious life. The truth is that we make our vows to God, not to the Church. We can touch on this later.

What is this clutch of distinctive traits for us as consecrated persons? Firstly, Religious are signs of the holiness of the Church, as Vatican II said. It is a holiness expressed through radical discipleship, the giving over of one's life to be poor, obedient and chaste as Jesus was poor, obedient and chaste. It is no accident that Religious life began in the Church as the Age of Martyrs ceased.

Secondly, there is the distinctively prophetic role of the Religious in the Church. The Religious are to live the prophetic life in the Church, listening to the Word, being doers of the Word and bearers of the Word to others. They are to be healers and searchers and pointers, pointing always to the One who came to give us life to the full.

Thirdly, Religious are called in a special way to be witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus as its plays out in our ordinary lives.

To elaborate these three categories. Firstly, signs of the holiness of the Church arising out of radical discipleship. There is the way we used to speak about our three vows, poverty being all I have; chastity being all I am; obedience being all I will be.

The total commitment the Religious gives is reflected in different ways, in a formula of vows, and even other things like the inscription on the inside of the ring the nun is given at her final profession. I read of a Mary Knoll Sister who was sent as a twenty-one year old to Japan in 1954, and whose ring inscription is "Deus Solus", and I know the ring of Loreto Sister Deidre Rofe had an inscription she chose, "Fiat. Alleluia." The enterprise was for real. The vow formula for the Jesuits, penned by Ignatius himself, has the young Jesuit taking his vows as offering perpetually "hoc holocaustum", the complete burnt offering of Israel. As Sr Sandra puts it

...we will be what we have been since the first century, disciples personally called by Christ to commit ourselves totally to Him to the exclusion of any other primary life commitment, and out of that life-long relationship to participate without reserve in the mission from the One who so loved the world as to give the only Son so that all might not perish but might have eternal life.

Religious are to live the Universal Call to Holiness the Church has received, in a dedicated sense. They have been called to set their lives aside for this, no matter how busy the apostolate. To support their apostolic activity, each Religious Order has had somewhere in its phases the exercise of the contemplative life. The Dominicans express it well as "contemplata aliis tradere", to hand on to others those matters deeply pondered. The contemplative gift of the Religious is of crucial importance now, in an age where there is so much need for depth and discernment. One cannot discern unless one has come home to oneself, there to find the Lord in the centre of our hearts, and listen to Him. Numbers of Orders describe themselves as "contemplatives in action", an acknowledgement that branches must be plugged into the Vine if they are to have the sap of life. This takes dedicated time. "Be still and know that I am God". Otherwise it is like the film, "Running on Empty".

That is how I see the possible enriching vocation of retired, elderly Religious. Rather than remove them to the anonymity of a large house in the city, if they were able to stay as a

small cluster of Sisters living in an ordinary house in a town, then the contemplative witness they would give could only enrich the Church.

Religious are called by vocation to be sifters of the Spirit. One cannot do that without a prayer life. Fr Adolfo Nicolas, the present Father General of the Jesuits wrote recently – “how can we help the young to draw the most from their own hearts and to learn from the wisdom of the past in order to enable them to create a better future. We want them to thrive, to dream great dreams of life and of hope. And we want to offer them the tools that will help them discern from among the many dreams offered them which ones follow the path which offer the true joy of our Lord Jesus, and which ones simply follow the shallow trends of profit and the market of the moment... We must “enter the depths of our hearts in order to find the work of the Spirit”.

Secondly, the role of the Religious as prophetic ministry. There is no need to elaborate this, as much is so well known. Again, however, it demands a life of prayer, because one cannot be a prophet of the Word if one does not listen to the Word, and listening demands time and silence. The Religious as prophets also points to where needs might be addressed. There should be a restlessness about Religious, going beyond the borders. The Mary Knoll Sister to whom I referred earlier, and who has been in Japan as a missionary since 1954, spoke of the missionary as being at a crossroads between the cultures, no longer American yet still not Japanese. She wrote, “what happens is you are not at home in either culture. It’s really a kind of rootlessness. What happens also then is that you transcend both. That’s the gift that you can really bring.” Being in the world, but not of it. The spirit who blows must always disturb our leaves and branches. Fr Nico said something about the Jesuits which would pertain to any member of an apostolically Religious Congregation – “..it is an essential part of our Jesuit spirituality to be, in a sense, always apostolically restless, to continue to ask questions about the nature and quality of our service in order to sense the Lord drawing us to greater generosity and new frontiers.” So he also sees that we are called to go beyond borders.

Being a prophet can cause tension, and probably should if it is a true prophetic role. The practice of the prophets has been to make people uncomfortable. There will be a healthy tension in the Church between its hierarchical character and the prophetic nature of the

consecrated life, our history tells us. We make our vows to God, not to the institution, not to the Church. The ministry of Religious is deeply ecclesial, but not necessarily ecclesiastical, as Sr Sandra says. She also notes that “Religious, by profession, derive their primary ecclesial community identity from their Congregation, not from the parish. They minister out of the charism of their Congregation, according to its constitutions and under the leadership of its elected officers.” None of our thinking, however, must take us away from the Church. Religious life for us can only exist within the Church which if we do not love, then wrong things are happening. Despite the harm inflicted on persons like Mary Ward and Mary MacKillop, there remained a bond of loving identity with the Church. Ignatius Loyola was also poorly treated by the official Church, arrested and jailed three times by the Inquisition. He also knew the animosity of Cardinals and even a Pope or two towards his Society and its style. Yet in writing the Spiritual Exercises he included his “Rules for Thinking with the Church”, a Church that was astonishingly corrupt in so many forms. He insisted that his men have the disposition *sentire cum ecclesia*, feeling with the Church, the sense of loving identity.

Thirdly, Religious as witnesses to the saving power of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The recent intervention into the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the United States is not something that Religious Orders have not experienced before. It has happened not infrequently in the history of the Church that Religious Orders have needed to be called into line, to be reformed. It has also not been unknown in history that the wider Church, both through the Holy See and through the local Church, has often misunderstood Religious life. The denunciation of Mary Ward could not have been more severe and grossly humiliating. Locally our own Mary MacKillop knew the cross that was part of her title, coming at the hands of the Church. Ignatius was arrested three times by the Inquisition. Eugene de Mazenod had great trouble getting approval for his Oblates. Jesuit Father General Pedro Arrupe incurred the disfavour of the Holy See.

Religious Orders themselves have inflicted hurt within themselves. One thinks of how the founders of Orders were sometimes treated by their very own, St Francis of Assisi, St Alphonsus Ligouri, Blessed Edmund Rice, Br Andrew founder of the Brothers of the Missionaries of Charity. Interventions are also not new to us. The Christian Brothers had a

Jesuit imposed upon them as Superior General. In Australia any number of bishops tried to impose themselves on the Josephites. The Holy See intervened in the Jesuit Order and appointed its own Papal Delegate to govern the Society in 1981. It is a call to the cross, especially when the pain is inflicted by Mother Church. John of the Cross was jailed by his brethren. St Peter Claver died almost completely neglected and shunned by his community. We Religious are called to carry the cross, but at times we inflict it too. In my own story there is the episode of the suppression of the Society of Jesus. Two thousand men at one stage were dumped on the shores of Italy, having been arrested overnight in Spain. Many Jesuits spent years in jail. The General of the Order died without trial in the Papal prison. For an Order that was being suppressed because of its sense of pride (though it was really the antagonism of the Bourbon Monarchies), the Order accepted the Papal instruction with remarkable obedience, even though it had all the marks of being annihilation.

Coming out of this hurt there is the role of the religious as a prophet of the Church, being a healer and searcher. It has been a role of Religious to rise as healers when different ideologies or understandings of the Church are at odds. One thinks of St Catherine of Sienna, or the witness of St Francis Assisi, and St Theresa of Avila. It is often through Religious that the Church acts prophetically, recalling people and Church leaders to truer forms of discipleship. The institutional Church can at times find it hard to be prophetic, to rise above its environment. The comment was made that the American Bishops were slow to denounce the war in Iraq, even though John Paul II had condemned it from the outset. We can become immersed in our own environment. There is the example of Jesus in the temple, where the institution did not recognise Christ in its midst.

Many of the great reformers have been members of Religious Orders, and have encountered great opposition in their proposed reforms. I was composing this on the Feast of St Norbert, who all his life found resistance from the local clergy. When the Missionary Sisters of Service came into the Diocese of Port Pirie, they came well-prepared and well-versed in the outlook and what creative mindset of Vatican II, and encountered great opposition from some of our clergy, who condemned them from the pulpit as heretics, almost a throwback to one hundred years earlier when Mary MacKillop had to endure something similar in the Adelaide Cathedral.

What we are talking about are rich themes for what is now in our Australian Church the Year of Grace. What better time for Religious Congregations to contemplate their charisms and how they might go beyond their borders, to build up the Church and to be Church among those who are alienated from us. As you have read, the Year of Grace was proclaimed by the bishops from Pentecost this year to Pentecost next year as a time of renewal and retreat for the Church, not a time for new projects, but a time to look at what we do in a deeper perspective. The bishops catalogued the challenges facing us as Church in Australia, the disillusion with the Church, the aging of our congregations, the advances of secularism, the distantation of the young from the worshipping communities of the Church, the decline in vocations to priesthood and Religious life, the tsunami impact of the abuse scandals causing Church to be so discredited among so many, the militancy of movements which advance themselves as alternatives to the Christian Gospel, and so on. How to meet such challenges? The response has been to go back to the One because of whom we exist, the One who has drawn countless men and women in paths of holiness over the centuries, back to the face of Christ. We can be preoccupied with projects and causes, and forget the One on whose account we commit ourselves to such actions. We are to listen when critics say that what motivates us is the social crusade not a response to discipleship. Archbishop Tim Costelloe in his sermon at his installation as Archbishop of Perth spoke these words which could both confront and comfort us as Religious, calling us back to who we are, because without that appreciation all of the above is cant. Tim Costelloe said in his first sermon in the Archdiocese of Perth

Many of you know that I belong to the Religious Congregation, the Salesians of Don Bosco. Some years ago, the Superior General of the Salesians, Fr Pascual Chavez, speaking as the President of the Union of Superiors General in Rome, made an extraordinary and confronting statement. "The greatest challenge facing Religious Life today" he said, "is to return Christ to the Religious Life and to return the Religious Life to Christ." I am sure that when they first heard these words, the leaders of the many Religious Congregations present must have been puzzled and even affronted. Perhaps they asked themselves how anyone could pose such a question to a group of people who were vowed to a life of obedience, poverty and chastity within the Church. At the risk of puzzling and even affronting people tonight I want to put the same challenge, to myself first of all, and then to all of us here. The greatest challenge facing the Church today is to return Christ to the Church, and to return the Church to Christ. The greatest challenge facing each one of us today is to return Christ to our lives and return our lives to Christ. This is not a challenge to be

something other than we are. It is a challenge to be more fully, more deeply and more openly what we already are.

To conclude this section with a comment on collaborative leadership. Bishops have their own charism, seen in the tradition of the Church as entrusted with the teaching gift of the apostles and the overall care for the whole body of the Church, participating in the graces the Church enjoys as being teachers, healers and prophets in the world, as do the Religious in their own special way. So in attempting to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church of the day, any Bishop who does not tap into what the Religious might contribute to that understanding, who does not include Religious among his principal sources of insight, like a second set of eyes and ears, when attempting to hear how the Spirit is calling the Church of that diocese, then it would be a diminished Church.

The second lense through which this title of Charism Beyond Borders may be viewed is how we share our charism with others, and especially with those now called to lead the works that have engaged us.

The need to elevate our theology and spirituality of being called by baptism to ministry, a call for all people, Religious and lay, is absolutely crucial if the Church's works of mercy are not to descend into being merely secular philanthropy. The challenge of charism going beyond the borders of the members of the particular congregation is of enormous significance for the Church in Australia today. In history it was the Religious Orders who exercised the ministry of the Church in works of mercy. Religious Orders were founded to undertake all types of works, from the care of orphans to the care of the aged, to the education of children and young people, to the redemption of captives, to care for the sick and dying, and so on. We in our age are experiencing an enormous shift in the Church, something that has not occurred for several centuries, the decline of the active control of institutions of corporal works of mercy by Religious Orders and their entrustment to lay panels and boards. Around Australia, as has happened overseas, we are aware of numbers of examples of works founded by Religious Orders and now controlled by boards or councils composed of very fine people but who with their business background focus more on the deed of the work rather than the why and the how and the spiritual nourishment that must sustain that work if it is to be a reflection of the Gospel. We know that in our own country that it has been a

challenge faced by other Christian denominations, that the religious character of a school, for example, has diminished to being little more than a feature of their past, with perhaps one chaplain out of a staff of two hundred, and with the view of the staff that the religious dimension of the school is the work of just that one chaplain, and not their concern. We have gone from the age when Religious conducted these institutions, to the next period when ethos was maintained to a significant extent by the presence of former Religious who continued to live with the values and sense of mission acquired when they were Religious, to a time now when such people have retired. There is no doubt that the philanthropic continues, but how keenly it is enlivened by the Gospel, rather than a sense of altruism, remains a very strong challenge. The need to look at charism beyond the borders is, as I say, of huge significance now for the Church in Australia. How do we transmit charism beyond the borders of our own Congregations? We no longer lead our works in most cases, but nevertheless we are still called to guide them.

Back to the charism. There are two schools of thought on this topic, I am informed by Sr Elizabeth Dodds. One that is more frequently espoused in Europe is that a charism cannot be spoken of as going far beyond the vowed Religious themselves. People can talk about a charism, but not live it. To live it one must be a vowed member, sharing that story in community, committing oneself to regular daily prayer, living in obedience to Superiors and so on. Anything else is knowing about the charism, rather than living the charism. That is not an approach shared in the United States or Australia, as far as I can see, but it does demand that we be serious about what we mean when we talk about sharing our charism. I read one example of a nursing Order where in a programme of weekend inductions for senior staff over two years, the charism was given on two weekends. If someone was missing on one of those weekends, then they would have only got half the charism!

The challenge is there. I think that when we first started to try to share the charism with our lay colleagues, even calling them terms like collaborators, we did not sufficiently alert ourselves to the basic spirituality of baptismal ministry shared by all Christians. We undersold our lay colleagues in a certain sense, going straight to the charism of the Religious Order rather than attempting to help our lay people rediscover for themselves the charism of ministry coming from their baptismal character, as members of the Body of Christ in the world. Up until the late 1970's we Jesuits were like most Religious Orders, and had some naïve conviction that the charism would be caught by osmosis. What makes a Jesuit school Jesuit?, it was asked. Having Jesuits there was one of the answers - clearly an

inadequate answer now. We started seriously in 1980 with the Colloquium on the Ministry of Teaching, and though these seminars and retreats went very well, there were from the very beginning comments made that our lay staff did not want to be turned into being mini-Jesuits. I prefer St Benedict said one. Initial incomprehension? We do have to have a critical mind, if the charism is to be shared properly, and we should not retreat from facing some of the issues. We can easily over-use and misuse the word, as we do with the word “discernment”, and so undersell or falsify the richness of the concept. There is a phenomenon of polycharism, which can lead to charismatic dyspepsia. Many of you would know now examples of people who started in a de la Salle school, moved to a Dominican school, then to a Marist school, and are now coming to a Salesian school. This is the real world, so how does one deal with such phenomena.

The serious challenge is not to remain simply at the level of the cognitive with our lay colleagues. We must enter into the area of the affective. It is simply not realistic to expect that everybody employed in a work sponsored by a Religious Order will want to enter into the spirit of that Order. That should not make us desist from focussing on the leaders. There is a core group of the movers and shakers and atmosphere makers, and among those are people who really want to learn more about the charism of the Order, want to help it form and feed their own spiritual lives. The cognitive and the affective are two levels. If the affective is not developed among the leaders in our works, then I think it is hollow language to talk about charism.

Focussing on the spirit bearers in any of our works does not permit us to neglect the more general approach for all our staff. There is a theology of baptism ministry to which all are called, and to which all must be alerted. It is a basic spirituality in the Church, and into which the Religious Orders have plugged themselves since the sixteenth century, as virtually all Religious Orders in these last four hundred years have been founded for the apostolic Religious life, the living of the baptismal ministry in the world, preaching, teaching and healing. In trying to alert our lay colleagues to this theology of baptismal ministry for all our people, we can still look at that through the lens of a particular founder, such as Benedict or Augustine or Francis or Dominic or Mary Ward or Mary Aikenhead, and so on. How does the outlook, spirituality, etc of the Founder colour the basic call to baptismal ministry?

Concerning the desire to share one's charism, it must be admitted that numbers of Religious Orders do not have any specific charism. They were founded to meet a pastoral need, and the founder often cobbled together a devotional programme reflecting the devotional life of the time. Some did not even pray the Prayer of the Church until more recent times.

In such cases, and also those where there is a more specific charism, it is necessary to look to the founders, to read what has been called not just their story, but their deep story, not just the story of their lives, and what they did and where they did it, and what happened, but what was it that drew their soul. What was it that prompted the founder to move towards gathering a group around herself or himself? What confronted her or him in those times to act in such a way? What in the makeup of the founder, and what in the Church of the times there tipped that person into action? There was an extraordinary faith in the providence of God in most of the founders of our Congregations. Some knew that increases would not come until after their deaths, people such as Nano Nagle of the Presentation Sisters, Mary Ward and her Loreto's, Mary Aikenhead also, and others. But still they acted, lead by the Spirit. It is the deep story, as Professor Margaret Thompson calls it, that can be cherished, what tipped the founders into action?

Look at the how of their doing. What was the style of action of the founder and the early members of the Congregation? It was quite some years after the formal inauguration of the Jesuits that Ignatius completed the Constitutions of the Order, but even in those the term "our way of proceeding" features strongly and "our way of proceeding" was frequently used in the early day of the Order to explain how any particular enterprise might be approached. Look at Mary MacKillop who before the age of twenty-seven had not only embarked upon schools in remote places, but had founded a Providence, a Refuge and a Solitude to meet various categories of need among the women and elderly of the Adelaide of her day. There is a wonderful photograph of the Sisters of Charity at Potts Point during the Depression of 1931. The unemployed men with devastated faces are seated in a row, all with hats on, (probably put into order by a Sister with a school background!), and the nuns are serving them morning or afternoon tea, from a table adorned with a tablecloth and a vase of flowers, with nice crockery so that each man was presented with a plate for some cakes and a cup and saucer – all reflecting the dignity with which those on the margin must be treated. There are the Sisters of Mercy in the 1880's in Young, New South Wales, who saw the need that aboriginal children had for education, and took those young ones in at a time when the State refused to do so. There are the Christian Brothers who moved to Western Sydney, to start a

new work among the boys who had dropped out of school all together. How does the Order proceed, and what can one derive from this? All this must be shared with our lay colleagues if our charisms are to go beyond the borders.

In these challenging times for a Religious life, when we consider how to reshape, reconfigure or refound ourselves, the Spirit is alive, and growing new gardens. Movements by different Congregations to join with others may no longer be seen simply as a survival mechanism, but actually is bringing about a sense of élan and new hope. Vivifying. That is a good thing for followers of the Lord who came that we might have life and have it to the full.

I would like to conclude this talk with a quotation from the Assumptionist Superior General, Fr Claude Marechal given in a talk in Sydney in 2001 where he described the charisms of the Orders as “the great Gospel ideas.” It is a description we can share readily with our lay colleagues now leading works formerly conducted by our Congregations. The charisms of the Orders have given people, he said, a story to enter, a language to speak, a group to which to belong, a way to pray, and a work to undertake, a face of God to see. It is worth repeating those phrases; they are almost like arms of the Spirit, lifting us up in the work we do as we attempt to communicate our charism beyond boundaries, giving to the people who wish to associate themselves with us a story to enter, a language to speak, a group to which to belong, a way to pray, a work to undertake, and a face of God to see.

May we, and those who wish to join us in our journey, be so blessed.

Thank you.