

## The Catholic Challenge

One of the biggest challenges in Catholic ministries today is the nurturing of an authentic Catholic identity and culture in the face of increasingly secular and corporate operating environments. In the next few Mercy Moments, we will examine aspects of Catholic identity and we encourage leadership teams, Boards and all of those working within Catholic ministries to take the time to engage with the question of genuine and sustainable Catholic identity in our changing world.

The concept of 'identity' is complex and cannot be explained with a simple definition. What Catholic identity actually looks like in a Catholic organisation is shaped by many factors including the spirituality and charism of its tradition, the work of the ministry within the mission of the Church and its organisational culture influenced by its beliefs, values and behaviours.

Sharkey reminds us that Catholic identity cannot be reduced 'to a series of dot points or simple slogans'. He asserts that 'the Catholic tradition of faith has grown over millions of lifetimes spanning a myriad of times, places and cultures' and that 'while recognising that Catholic identity is always larger than its local expressions, Catholic faith always and ultimately has to be lived as a commitment in the mind, heart and hands of each (Catholic) person, formed in a (Catholic community) that is located in a particular point in time'.

So, the challenge for those in Catholic ministries is to explore the ways we can understand Catholic identity, to ensure ministries are demonstrably 'Catholic' and to invite all of our people (whatever their faith or spirituality) to be part of this challenging way of seeing the world. We are indeed fortunate to have strong foundational beliefs upon which Catholic

identity rests: the life and teachings of Jesus Christ reported in the Gospels, Catholic tradition including beliefs and sacraments which capture the mystery of God's presence in ritual and blessing and contemporary Church teaching including Social teaching in encyclicals such as Laudato Si (On the Care of Our Common Home).

While we operate in the corporate space with its financial imperatives, staffing challenges and socio-political pressure, the question we should ask ourselves regularly is: what makes us different as a Catholic ministry?



**Called to take  
root in every  
place, the  
Church has  
been present  
for centuries  
throughout  
the world, for  
that is what it  
means to be  
'catholic'**

(Fratelli Tutti #278)

Reflections: How would you describe Catholic Identity in your ministry?  
In what way is the Catholic identity of your ministry under pressure?

*We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which our ministries exist and the Elders both past and present on whose land we walk, work and live. We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.*