

# INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF CATHOLIC WOMEN:

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES FROM AUSTRALIA

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### Content Warning:

This report refers to experiences and impacts of gender-based violence in church contexts. If you need support, the website <https://safeinourworld.org/find-help/> will direct you to assistance in your geographic region and language.

This research publication was prepared and published on Awabakal, Dharawal, and Gadigal lands. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge that the lands on which we work remain unceded.



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# 1. Table of Contents

|                                                        |           |                                                   |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>1. Table of Contents</b>                            | <b>3</b>  | <b>8. Support for reform</b>                      | <b>29</b> |
| <b>2. Executive Summary</b>                            | <b>4</b>  | 8.1. Support for reform, even radical reform      | 29        |
| <b>3. Introduction</b>                                 | <b>7</b>  | 8.2. What does reform mean?                       | 32        |
| <b>4. Literature review</b>                            | <b>8</b>  | 8.3. Summary                                      | 32        |
| 4.1. Introduction                                      | 8         | <b>9. Issues in the Catholic Church</b>           | <b>33</b> |
| 4.2. The Catholic Church in Australia                  | 8         | 9.1. Women's involvement and leadership           | 34        |
| 4.3. Barriers to women's participation                 | 10        | 9.2. Liturgical reforms                           | 41        |
| 4.4. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic               | 13        | 9.3. LGBTQIA+ inclusion                           | 42        |
| 4.5. Synodality                                        | 13        | 9.4. Marriage, reproductive decisions, and family | 45        |
| <b>5. Methodology</b>                                  | <b>15</b> | 9.5. Misuse of power                              | 50        |
| 5.1. Research design                                   | 15        | 9.6. Catholic social teaching                     | 55        |
| 5.2. Recruitment                                       | 15        | 9.7. Climate action                               | 56        |
| 5.3. Instrument                                        | 16        | 9.8. A humanitarian approach                      | 58        |
| 5.4. Storage, access, and disposal of data             | 16        | 9.9. Inclusion of marginalised people             | 59        |
| 5.5. Data preparation and analysis                     | 17        | 9.10. Formation of laity                          | 60        |
| <b>6. Catholic identity and participation</b>          | <b>19</b> | 9.11. Church leadership and governance            | 61        |
| 6.1. Strength of Catholic identity                     | 19        | 9.12. Processes for listening and dialogue        | 66        |
| 6.2. Descriptions of current relationship              | 19        | <b>10. Discussion of key findings</b>             | <b>68</b> |
| 6.3. Ecumenism                                         | 22        | <b>11. References</b>                             | <b>72</b> |
| 6.4. Summary                                           | 22        | <b>12. Appendices</b>                             | <b>76</b> |
| <b>7. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic</b>          | <b>24</b> | 12.1. Appendix A: Abbreviations                   | 76        |
| 7.1. Church closures and impacts on faith and practice | 24        | 12.2. Appendix B: Glossary                        | 77        |
| 7.2 Post-pandemic participation in parish life         | 25        | 12.3. Appendix C: Survey instrument               | 80        |
| 7.3. Summary                                           | 28        |                                                   |           |



## 2. Executive Summary

The International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW) was undertaken in response to the call for submissions to the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops. It was devised and managed by researchers Drs Tracy McEwan and Kathleen McPhillips at the University of Newcastle, and Professor Emerita Tina Beattie at the University of Roehampton, London, for the commissioning body, Catholic Women Speak (CWS).

The ISCW consisted of both closed and open questions, and explored the concerns, insights, and experiences of Catholic women involving church reform and the COVID-19 pandemic. This report is based on the responses from 1,769 women in Australia who completed the survey throughout March and April in 2022.

A strength of the ISCW is that it captured the complex diversity of Catholic women from across the world, their hopes, fears, struggles, and aspirations. This analysis of responses from Australia conveys the diverse insights and standpoints of respondents, while also sharing their clear and strong call for reform across multiple areas of church life.

The central findings can be summarised as follows:

1. Catholic identity was highly important to respondents, with participation in parish life and faith in Jesus Christ and the gospel featuring heavily in open responses.
2. Perspectives on the extent to which faith and participation were impacted by church closures during the COVID-19 pandemic were divided. However, online worship was highly valued and many respondents discovered new ways of sharing their faith.
3. Most respondents supported reform in the Catholic Church, including radical reform.
4. There was majority agreement for issues of reform canvassed in closed questions across areas of:
  - Misuse of power
  - Full inclusion and respect for LGBTIQ+ people in all church activities
  - Women's inclusion in leadership (at all levels of the church, preaching, ordination to the priesthood)
  - Climate action
  - Freedom of conscience with regard to women's sexual and reproductive decisions
  - Allowing remarriage after civil divorce
  - Gender inclusive language in liturgy.
5. The extension of the sacrament of marriage to same-sex couples did not receive majority agreement.

6. Older respondents were more supportive of reform and change than their younger counterparts across most themes, with younger respondents more likely to convey conservatism.
7. Open responses repeatedly maintained women were undervalued and silenced in church settings. A smaller group of respondents emphasised women were valued in their feminine role.
8. The way power and authority are exercised in global and Australian Catholic Church governance was identified as an important issue.
9. Leadership and governance were seen to be in urgent need of reform in areas of clergy leadership, co-responsibility in governance and decision-making, transparency and accountability, economic management, and employment reform.
10. There was strong support for improved lay formation including better access to catechesis and theological study.
11. Personal experiences of alienation and harm in Catholic settings were commonly described, and some respondents made disclosures of exclusion, sexual and spiritual abuse, and workplace harassment.
12. Experiences of alienation and harm were typically experienced when diversity and the complexity of life decision-making was not respected or recognised, particularly in regard to the role of women in church leadership, and Catholic teachings on gender, sexuality, and remarriage after civil divorce.
13. Many open responses reported church leaders should do more to address misuses of power, including the implementation of transparent and accountable reporting practices, and better provision of assistance for people who have experienced harm.
14. Inclusion in church communities and ministries for those marginalised by gender, sexuality, ability, race, and age, as well as groups who feel excluded by church teachings was highly important to respondents.
15. Open responses prioritised a humanitarian approach and advocacy and action to issues of poverty, economic justice, and ecology. Some respondents supported the notion of the Church as separate from the secular world and criticised social and ecological action as a politicisation of faith and doctrinal teaching.
16. Respondents sought implementation of processes of listening and dialogue in church communities and organisations, although there were reservations expressed regarding the ability of church leaders to hear and concretely address concerns raised in such forums.

# A Snapshot of Australian Catholic Women

89%

agree with the statement  
'My Catholic identity  
is important to me'

70%

agree women should be  
fully included at all levels  
of church leadership

76%

agree reform is  
needed in the  
Catholic Church

79%

agree Clericalism  
is damaging the  
Catholic Church

83%

agree Catholic social  
teaching is a good resource  
for social justice action

73%

agree LGBTIQ persons  
should be fully included and  
respected in all church activities

70%

agree church leaders  
are not doing enough to  
address the perpetration  
and cover-up of sexual abuse

82%

agree with the statement  
'Church leaders need to do  
more to address other forms  
of abuse, including abuses of  
power and spiritual harm'

### 3. Introduction

The International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW) was commissioned by the international organisation Catholic Women Speak (CWS) in 2021 as part of the call for submissions to the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops. It explores the concerns, insights, and experiences of Catholic women involving church reform and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global results of the ISCW informed the CWS submission to the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops (Beattie, McEwan, and McPhillips 2022) and the *International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW): Analysis and Report of Findings* (McEwan, McPhillips and Pepper 2023), which documented the ISCW methodology and provided key findings and recommendations.

This report contains the full results of our analysis of ISCW responses from Australia. It reports on previous studies concerning Catholic women in Australia, historical and current contexts of Australian Catholicism, and key issues relevant to central themes of the study.

The methodology provides detail about the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research protocol. It is followed by a summary of participants' responses to the four main themes of the survey: Catholic identity and participation; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; support for reform; and issues in the Catholic Church. In each thematic area we include examples from the open response questions to demonstrate the range of women's voices that the survey captured. The final discussion identifies key findings and reports on how these compare with the international findings.

## 4. Literature review

### 4.1 Introduction

This review of literature provides a summary of information on issues that relate to women in the Catholic Church in Australia.<sup>1</sup> It aims to provide background and context to our analysis of ISCW responses from Australia. For a more extensive review of literature related to the study of Catholic women more broadly see McEwan, McPhillips and Pepper (2023).

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### 4.2 The Catholic Church in Australia

Catholicism is Australia's largest religious grouping, with 1 in 5 Australians (20%) self-classifying as Catholic in 2021 (ABS 2022). The percentage of Australians who nominate as Catholic has been decreasing over time, but the fall has been slowed by immigration from regions with high numbers of Catholic adherents, such as Southeast Asia and South America (ABS 2022). Global migration patterns have caused the Australian Catholic Church and its parish communities to become increasingly multicultural (McEwan, Sterland and McPhillips 2020).

The Catholic Church is one of the largest non-government employers and property owners, by value, in Australia (Dixon et al. 2017; Millar, Schneiders and Vedelago 2018). It employed 1.8% of the Australian

workforce in 2015-16, or 0.94% of the adult population (Dixon et al. 2017). Across various workplaces, Catholic employees are engaged in diocesan and parish administration, provision of education, pastoral care, health, aged care, welfare, and community services. Of the total workforce employed by the Church in 2015-2016, some 45.6% were engaged in the education sector and 38.2% were employed in the health and aged care sector (Dixon et al. 2017).

In Australia, women constituted just over half (52.5 %) of the total Catholic population in 2021 (NCPR 2023),<sup>2</sup> more than three quarters (77%) of the Catholic workforce in 2015-16 (Dixon et al. 2017), and most members of religious institutes (ACBC 2021).

1. Services provided under the collective banner of the Catholic Church are delivered by numerous entities and organisations, including religious institutes, incorporated and unincorporated not-for-profits, various rites, and cultural and language groups. The Catholic Church in Australia is, however, at the same time a single institution under the authority of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and the Holy See, with a shared doctrine and law (ACBC 2021; Dixon et al. 2017).

2. This material was prepared by the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) of the ACBC from Census data obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).



## 4.2.1 Studies of Catholic women in Australia

There are very few peer-reviewed research studies that have investigated Catholic women in Australia as a separate cohort.

From 1996 to 1999 an Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) research project on the participation of women in the Catholic Church, published as *Woman and man: One in Christ Jesus* (Macdonald et al. 1999), was conducted to investigate the participation of women in the Church in Australia. Among its major findings it identified gender inequality as a significant barrier to the participation of Catholic women in church life (Macdonald et al. 1999).

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) has surveyed and reported findings on Catholic church attenders in Australia every five years, since 1996<sup>3</sup> (Pepper et al. 2018). Various cohort studies of Catholic women have been undertaken since the inception of the NCLS. One such study is McEwan (2018) which explores changing patterns of religious practice and belief among different generations of church-attending Catholic women in Australia. McEwan (2018) found an overall reduction in measures of religiosity in successive generations of Catholic church-attending women, with an apparent upswing in the religiosity of younger women that contests the notion of uniform generational decline.

In 2017, the ACBC commissioned an online survey of young people (aged 16 to 29 years) in Australia. Some 15,000 young people responded of whom 56.8% identified as female (Dantis and Reid 2018). Closed minded or biased attitudes, particularly related to sexuality and marriage and the role of women were identified as barriers to young people being heard in the Church (Dantis and Reid 2018).

Although not a research study, the preparation for Australia's Fifth Plenary Council collected data from Catholic women. The first phase of Listening and Dialogue began with consultations with the Catholic community in Australia. More than 222,000 people participated contributing to 17,457 submissions, from 4,699 groups or organisations and 12,758 individuals (Dantis, Howell and Reid 2019). Of the individual submissions some 49% of respondents identified as female (Dantis, Howell and Reid 2019). While the subjects raised in submissions were wide-ranging and diverse, 'strongly discussed topics included the ordination of women and the inclusion of divorced and remarried Catholics' (Dantis et al. 2019, p. IX).

3. In 1996, the Catholic Church Life Survey was carried out as an independent project, parallel to the Anglican and Protestant NCLS. From 2001 on Catholic churches were included in the NCLS.

## 4.2.2 Church attendance patterns

Recent research regarding Catholic church-based participation shows a significant decline in Mass attendance in Australian parishes in recent years (NCPR 2020). Vatican statistics relating to the conferring of the sacraments of baptism, marriage, first Eucharist, and confirmation also show a drop in sacramental participation in Australian parishes (NCPR 2021).

Compared to the census population of Catholics in Australia, Mass attenders are more likely to be female, aged over 50 years, university educated, born overseas, and speak a language other than English in their home than Catholic adherents who do not attend Mass (NCPR 2020). Some 3 in 5 Mass attenders in Australia are women (Dantis, Reid and Chee 2021).

In 2016, some 1,730 of the 623,400 Catholics at Mass in Australia on a typical weekend attended the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM). This amounts to 0.28% of Catholic Mass attenders and 0.007% of the Catholic census population (NCPR 2020). TLM attenders are under-researched. As a very small sub-group

of all Mass attenders they tend to be subsumed within larger cohort studies (Rymarz 2022).

Each successive generation of women is significantly less likely to attend Mass than the previous generation (McEwan 2018; Powell et al. 2017). Younger church attenders are also less likely than older attenders to see themselves involved in a parish or attending Mass in the future (Reid and Dantis 2019). However, some evidence suggests that the small cohort of young women who do attend Mass are becoming increasingly devout. There are several possible reasons for the upswing in some measures of religiosity including the loss of less devout young attenders (McEwan 2018).

Research by Reid and Dantis (2019) indicates significant differences in what church attenders from different age cohorts value most about being Catholic. Younger attenders (aged 15 to 29 years) tend to value beliefs, teachings, and a connection with God, with older attenders more likely to value community and Mass/sacraments (Reid and Dantis 2019).

## 4.3 Barriers to women's participation

### 4.3.1 Debates around feminism

In Australia, Catholic women have been impacted by shifts in expectations regarding the role of women in society. For instance, since the 1960s and 1970s, women in Australia have secured significant gains in health, welfare, education, and financial independence. Improved access to sexual and reproductive health services, childcare, and superannuation have provided women with greater agency in life decision-making (Gibson 2003).

Through the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by the successes of the second wave women's movement, Christian women in Australia formed church-based, feminist

movements and circulated various publications to promote women's status in Christian traditions (Madigan 2021; Massam 2012; McPhillips 2016). Catholic women, encouraged by Vatican II, undertook theological study and developed Catholic feminist theologies and movements. However, by the late 1990s and 2000s, a drop in church attendance, neoliberal political agendas, and a growing awareness of clergy perpetrated child sexual abuse (CPCSA) meant these movements operated with reduced membership as younger women tended not to participate (Madigan 2021; McPhillips 2016).

In response to the teachings of Pope John Paul II a movement of “New Feminism” emerged and rose to prominence in the mid-1990s (Beattie 2006; Schüssler Fiorenza 2016). New Feminism promotes a dualistic, complementarian notion of gender identity. Known as “gender complementarity” this theological anthropology establishes women as “equal but different” to men, with maleness and femaleness imagined as ontological binary sex/gender positions that correspond to certain biblically prescribed gender roles and responsibilities (Case 2016; McEwan 2022; Ross 2013; Schüssler Fiorenza 2016). New Feminism contests claims of women’s subordination and instead encourages Catholic women to exercise their talents and rights in line with complementarian roles and qualities (Beattie 2006; Case 2016; Schüssler Fiorenza 2016).

Catholic feminists in Australia continue to use inclusive, participatory, and egalitarian ways of thinking to pursue gender equality and make significant contributions to scriptural and theological scholarship (Hunt 2020; Madigan 2018, 2019). Yet, feminism’s goal of gender equality and its pursuit of roles for women outside the patriarchally-defined limitations of gender complementary have been openly critiqued by recent papacies. Popes John Paul II and Francis have likened feminism to ‘imitating models of “male domination”’ (John Paul II in EV, para. 99) and ‘machismo with a skirt’ (Francis as cited in Vatican News 2019). By contrast, the movement of New Feminism is legitimised by Pope John Paul II’s (1978–2005) theological analysis on human sexuality (known as Theology of the Body; John Paul II 2006) and feminine genius theology (MD, paras. 30-31).

### 4.3.2 Women and leadership

In recent years, despite renewed effort by church-based feminist movements, recognition of the equal status of women in the Catholic Church has stalled (CWC 2023; CWS 2023; Madigan 2018, 2019; Voices of Faith 2023). In 2013, the election of Pope Francis raised expectations for greater equality for Catholic women. However, despite an emphasis on synodality, pastoral ministry and socio-ecological justice there have only been small gains for women’s equality, especially in leadership (Case 2016; Hunt 2023).

The recent decisions of Pope Francis regarding women’s right to vote at synods and their access to the ministries of catechist, lector, and acolyte, must be examined alongside his backing of Canon Laws which make the ordination of women subject to the same severe and grave punishment as CPCSA (CCL, canon. 1379; Zagano 2021). His continued use of the language of gender complementarity,

alongside his critique of feminism suggests there will be only minor gains towards women’s full inclusion during his papacy (Hunt 2023; McEwan 2022).

Despite significant support amongst Australian Catholics for increasing women’s leadership opportunities in church related employment, Catholic women have poor access to positions of responsibility and authority in church-based organisations (Condon 2019; Madigan 2019; McEwan and McPhillips 2017). While women in Australian Anglican and Uniting Churches have had access to ordination for over 30 years, calls for ordaining women in the Catholic Church have not been successful with little sign that this could change in the coming years (Humphries 2021; Madigan 2019; Massam 2012; McEwan and McPhillips 2017; MOW 2023). Similarly, women’s access to the diaconate has been discussed by church leaders, but as yet has not been approved (Zagano 2023).

### 4.3.3 Catholic teachings

Despite the call for mercy by Pope Francis towards those marginalised in the Catholic Church, Catholic theology and church teaching on key areas including reproduction and sexuality, and the status of divorced and remarried women, single mothers, and LGBTIQ+ people remains exclusionist and divisive (Hunt 2020; McEwan 2022). In Australia, many Catholic women no longer widely accept or follow church teachings relating to sexuality, marriage, and reproductive and sexual health (Dixon 2013; Hughes 2022; Macdonald et al. 1999).<sup>4</sup> Younger Catholics report negative experiences in church communities related to closed attitudes to teachings on sexuality, marriage, and the role of women (Dantis and Reid 2018).

Although the 2018 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes found half (50%) of all

Australian adults who identified as Catholic claim that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex was not wrong at all (Hughes 2022), violence against LGBTIQ+ Catholics, perpetrated by Catholics, is escalating (Fawcner 2023).

In the 2016 NCLS Catholic church attenders were asked, 'On which public issues in Australia should the Catholic Church be most active?'<sup>5</sup> The most common responses were 'Poverty and disadvantage in Australia' (50%), 'Support for marriage and the family' (46%), and 'Asylum seekers/refugees' (38%). Some 26% selected 'Opposition to same-sex marriage'. Just 3% of Catholic church attenders reported that 'The Church should not be involved in public policy issues' (Dixon and Reid 2020).

### 4.3.4 The crisis of sexual abuse

In Australia and abroad, the Catholic Church faces a crisis related to the many cases of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults, perpetrated by clergy and members of religious institutes, and subsequent cover-ups. Disclosures from survivors, reports by world media, research reports, and multiple public inquiries identified the organisational culture of the Church as a significant contributor to child abuse (HIAI 2017; McPhillips 2018; RCIRCSA 2017a, 2017b; SCAI n.d.; Te Rōpū Tautoko 2022). In 2016, NCLS data showed Catholic church attenders in Australia reported a loss of confidence in

church authorities, with a majority agreeing that the response of church authorities to incidences of child sexual abuse (CSA) was inadequate and signalled 'a complete failure of responsibility' (Dixon and Reid 2018, p. 13). This same data showed older Catholic church attenders are more likely than younger attenders to be dissatisfied about the Church's response to the clergy sex abuse crisis (Dixon 2023). Dixon (2023) proposes that older attenders' higher level of dissatisfaction could be because they feel a greater sense of betrayal and anger than younger attenders, after a long period of belonging and service to the Church.

4. Catholic teaching holds that marriage is a life-long partnership between a man and a woman, with sexual pleasure 'morally disordered' outside its procreative purpose in such a union (CCC, para. 1601, 2351-2363). It forbids the use of artificial birth control and fertility treatments, including surrogacy, ovum and sperm donation, and artificial insemination and fertilisation, describing it as 'gravely immoral' (CCC, para. 2376-2377; HV, para. 11).

5. Respondents could select up to 4 options from Aboriginal issues, Asylum seekers/refugees, Bioethical issues (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, surrogacy), Drugs/substance abuse, Environmental issues/climate change, Framing issues, Human trafficking, Opposition to same-sex marriage, Poverty and disadvantage in Australia, Poverty overseas, Prisons and the criminal justice system, Standards in TV, film and literature, Support for marriage and the family, War and conflict overseas, Workplace conditions and laws, Another issue not listed here, and The Church should not be involved in public policy issues (Dixon and Reid 2020).

## 4.4 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unparalleled global challenges to public health and significant disruptions to economic and social life in Australia and abroad (ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO 2020; PM Glynn Institute 2022). From 2020 widespread government restrictions included limiting public liturgies and closing places of worship (Joseph and Hyde 2023; McCarthy 2021).

Australian bishops and priests were compelled to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. Many parishes and dioceses switched to online forms of worship and livestreamed Masses (McCarthy 2021).

The Vatican responded by establishing the Vatican COVID-19 Commission and announced special sacramental measures for general confessions where needed (McElwee 2020). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Francis, and the Australian Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement made statements urging Catholics to get vaccinated with approved COVID -19 vaccines (Catholic Australia 2023; CDF 2020; Gawel et al. 2021). Despite the barriers early international studies report either small increases or no change in faith following the COVID-19 pandemic (PEW 2021).

## 4.5 Synodality

Although the Synod of Bishops has been a feature of Catholicism since Vatican II, under Pope Francis the process of synodality has become one of the central mechanisms for resolving pastoral and theological matters (Clark 2021; Faggioli 2020; Pascoe 2023). For some commentators, Pope Francis' vision of a synodal church represents a renewed concern regarding the relationship between the Catholic Church and the secular world and between clergy and laity (Faggioli

2020), while for others it is a weakening magisterial authority (Lam 2023). Under Pope Francis the "synodal path" has been a method to engage the entire Church and particularly to raise the involvement and value the experience of lay people (Cornish 2022). How successful synodality is as a process is questionable, especially in relation to women's participation and representation (Clark 2021; Hunt 2021, 2023).



## 4.5.1 Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia

In 2018, the Catholic Church in Australia embarked on the process of its fifth Plenary Council. There were early indicators that the Australian Bishops were committed to address the inclusion of women in leadership roles (ACBC 2019a; Dantis et al. 2019). A positive position regarding women's participation however was not reflected in the Council working document or agenda (McEwan 2022). During the final assembly, in July 2022, a deliberative vote on a key document, which named and recorded that Council members had heard the frustration and disappointment regarding women's exclusion, failed to pass when it did not reach the required two-thirds majority support from the Australian Catholic bishops (Fawkner 2022). After a

spontaneous, silent gathering of 60 of the 277 members at the rear of the Council venue, the agenda of the assembly pivoted and a re-formulated decree on the equal dignity of women and men, was voted on and passed (Knott 2022). The re-drafted decree committed the Church in Australia 'to enhancing the role of women in the Church, and to overcoming assumptions, culture, practices and language that lead to inequality' (ACBC 2022b). The decrees from the Plenary Council have been sent to the Vatican for review and Catholic communities in Australia have been invited to consider how Council outcomes might be immediately integrated into local church contexts, the situation of women in the Church in Australia remains unchanged (ACBC 2022a; ACBC 2023).

## 4.5.2 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops

The 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops themed 'For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission' will be held in Rome in 2023-4 (General Secretariat of the Synod 2023a). The Synod, which is known colloquially as the 'Synod on Synodality' is one of the most important gatherings of modern Catholicism (Hunt 2023). During 2021-2023 Catholics across the world engaged in a 'consultation phase' of synodal listening and discernment (General Secretariat of the Synod 2023a). The ISCW was intentionally designed and implemented within this consultation phase, gathering the insights and

experiences of Catholic women across central issues related to participation and church reform (Beattie, McEwan, and McPhillips 2022). Despite early signs that women would have no voice in the Synod meeting, in April 2023 changes to the membership of the Synod were announced to allow, for the first time, women and lay people to be among the voting members (General Secretariat of the Synod 2023b). However, scepticism remains as to the extent that issues related to the inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ people will be addressed at the Synod meeting (Hunt 2023).

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Research design

The International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW) used a self-administered anonymous online survey to gather the views and insights of Catholic women from around the world with respect to 4 central concepts: identity; possible need for reform in the Catholic Church; issues

related to women in the Church; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Newcastle (H-2021-0430) in February 2022.

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### 5.2 Recruitment

The ISCW opened access to the online survey on 8 March 2022 (International Women's Day) and collected responses until it closed on 26 April 2022. Survey participants were recruited using purposive, non-random sampling through the Catholic Women Speak (CWS) international network (CWS 2023), the Voices of Faith network (Voices of Faith 2023) and the Catholic Women's Council (CWC) and its member groups (CWC 2023). The research flyers, which invited women to respond to the ISCW (available in 8 languages), were published on the CWS webpage with a link to the survey. People who followed the link could read the participant information statement and decide whether they wanted to participate. The ISCW had an upper limit of 30,000 respondents. Because non-random sampling was employed, the ISCW results cannot claim to be representative of Catholic women as a whole.

The ISCW was promoted via CWC and CWS social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and the CWC webpage with a link to the CWS webpage. Snowball sampling, a technique of building a sample through referrals (Bryman 2016), was implemented via an invitation to share the link to the research flyers on the CWS webpage from the CWS and CWC social media pages. Media outlets, including social media, and various other groups shared the link.

The ISCW very quickly garnered international interest and was promoted in various countries by individuals and CWC member groups. For instance, in Australia the CWC member organisation WATAC Inc. (Women and the Australian Church) and several parishes promoted the ISCW, as did Catholic organisations, reform groups, and media outlets. A link to the ISCW was made available on the Vatican's Synod Resources webpage (General Secretariat to the Synod 2023).

## 5.3 Instrument

The ISCW used a mixed methods approach with closed and open questions. In closed questions respondents used a 5-point Likert Scale to measure their level of agreement with a statement (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree). Open questions enabled respondents to elaborate on key concept areas or explore new areas not addressed in closed questions and give information on their experience in their own words (Bryman 2016).

Before proceeding to the survey, respondents were asked to complete 4 screening questions. If respondents answered 'yes' to all screening questions, they were asked to complete the full survey.

A respondent's identity was explored using 3 closed questions, as well as an open response question asking the respondent to record her current relationship with the Church. Four closed questions assessed general support for or opposition to reform in the Church. Level of agreement with various specific issues of reform in the Church was then assessed by means of 13 closed questions. An open response question was provided for the respondent to indicate other issues that they felt needed to be addressed.

Level of agreement with 7 statements about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was then requested. Two closed questions provided demographic information – age (under 25 years, 26-40 years, 41-55 years, 56-70 years, over 70 years) and country of residence.<sup>6</sup> A final open response question gave respondents the opportunity to contribute additional information or insights. The ISCW instrument is provided in Appendix C.

The ISCW instrument was translated from English into 7 languages: Spanish, German, Italian, French, Polish, Mandarin, and Portuguese. Translators were sought through CWS and the CWC.

The ISCW was hosted by Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) – a secure, web-based software platform designed to support data capture for research studies (Harris et al. 2009). The ISCW was accessed via a single link, which ensured anonymity but also opened the possibility of respondents taking the survey multiple times. The survey was to be completed in a single session – respondents could not return to complete it later.

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## 5.4 Storage, access, and disposal of data

Currently, access to the anonymous ISCW data is permitted only to the research team. Any data that identifies survey respondents was not used for analysis. The ISCW data will be retained securely for a minimum period

of 5 years from completion of the research and managed/stored in accordance with the University of Newcastle's policies. Following this time period, access to the data base may be granted to external interested researchers.

6. Age groupings approximately align with generational groupings, the Builders (born prior to 1946), the Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Gen X (born 1965–1979) and Gen YZ (born 1980–2001) (McEwan 2018).

## 5.5 Data preparation and analysis

### 5.5.1 Dataset preparation

Overall, 19,548 responses from across the world were collected (McEwan et al. 2022). The ISCW responses were initially collated and downloaded in Microsoft Excel format, for preparation for import into IBM SPSS<sup>7</sup> and NVIVO<sup>8</sup> for analysis of closed and open questions respectively.

The responses that were fully blank or had answered only identity questions and/or demographic questions were eliminated, resulting in 17,200 responses. Of these, 1,845 (11.6%) indicated their geographic region as Australia, with 3 providing open responses in a language other than English (McEwan et al. 2022). These responses were translated into English using DeepL.<sup>9</sup> During analysis of the open questions 76 cases were identified as duplicates or used offensive language and were ultimately removed, resulting in a final data set comprising 1,769 cases.

Missing data rates on each of the closed questions in the final cleaned dataset was less than 5.0% in Australia, with the exception of 2 questions: identification as an ecumenical Christian (8.1%) and no longer identifying as Catholic (11.2%).

Some 1,701 of the 1,769 respondents answered at least 1 of the 3 open-text questions. This included 1,678 cases who described their current relationship with the Church; 1,042 who indicated other issues that church leadership needs to address; and 1,051 who added further information at the end of the survey. To maximise the potential of the qualitative data all open responses were considered.

The age breakdown for the final sample is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Age breakdown of survey respondents from Australia**

| Age                             | Frequency   | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|---------------------------------|-------------|---------|--------------|
| 18 to 25 years                  | 51          | 2.9     | 2.9          |
| 26 to 40 years                  | 255         | 14.5    | 17.4         |
| 41 to 55 years                  | 385         | 21.9    | 39.2         |
| 56 to 70 years                  | 463         | 26.3    | 65.5         |
| Over 70 years                   | 608         | 34.5    | 100.0        |
| Total                           | 1762        | 100.0   |              |
| Missing (no age group supplied) | 7           |         |              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                    | <b>1769</b> |         |              |

7. <https://www.ibm.com/spss>

8. <https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>

9. <https://www.deepl.com/translator>

## 5.5.2 Analysis of closed questions

Analysis of closed questions was conducted in IBM SPSS. Univariate analysis – the examination of the simple frequencies on individual survey items – was undertaken on the responses to closed questions. The patterns in results across different items (for example, various issues of reform in the Church) were explored by means of graphical displays. Bivariate analyses were conducted

to examine similarities and differences in the patterns of responses between age groups. Because the number of respondents aged under 25 years was low, they were combined with respondents aged 26-40 years in the bivariate analysis. Tests of statistical significance were not undertaken due to the non-random sampling method.

## 5.5.3 Analysis of open questions

Open responses were analysed and interpreted using a modified grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Shooter 2018). The research team used NVivo software to code line-by-line themes that emerged from the subsample produced for each of the questions: (1) 'In a couple of sentences please describe your current relationship with the Catholic Church'; (2) 'Are there any other issues that church leadership needs to address?'; and (3) 'Is there anything else you would like to add?'

This type of 'open coding' is intended to let abstract ideas and insights emerge from the data. As themes and concepts emerged through the open-coding process, a revision

of connections and associations between codes was undertaken. During the coding process the research team regularly met to compare and explore connections and relations between thematic codes. Research notes documented emerging concepts, assumptions, and biases during the coding process. Data saturation (the point at which no new coded themes emerge) was achieved before all responses were analysed. The research team made the decision to continue coding the full subsample to age group representation.

For more detailed information about the methodology see McEwan, McPhillips and Pepper (2023).



## 6. Catholic identity and participation

Respondents were asked 3 closed questions about their Catholic identity and an open question which explored their relationship with the Catholic Church. Closed questions asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: (1) Catholic identity

is important to them; (2) they identify as an ecumenical Christian; and (3) they no longer identify as Catholic. An open question asked respondents to describe their 'current relationship with the Catholic Church' in 'a couple of sentences'.

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### 6.1 Strength of Catholic identity

A substantial majority (89%) of respondents in Australia agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'My Catholic identity is important to me', including at least 88% in each age group. Some 78% of those aged 18 to 40 years strongly agreed, compared with 60% of those aged over 70 (Figure 1). Likewise, 87% of respondents in Australia disagreed or

strongly disagreed that they 'no longer identify as Catholic' (at least 85% in each age group). Respondents aged 18 to 40 years were slightly more likely to strongly disagree that they 'no longer identify as Catholic' than older cohorts. Those aged 56 to 70 years were least likely to strongly disagree that they 'no longer identify as Catholic' (Figure 2).

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### 6.2 Descriptions of current relationship

A key theme of open responses was the high importance of respondents' relationships with the Catholic Church, including their Catholic identity and faith participation. It was common for responses to link participation and identity with Catholic faith grounded in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the gospel. Many respondents wrote about the centrality of the Eucharist to their lives and reported regular faith practices, including prayer, bible reading, meditation, contemplative spiritual practices, Rosary, and weekly Mass attendance.

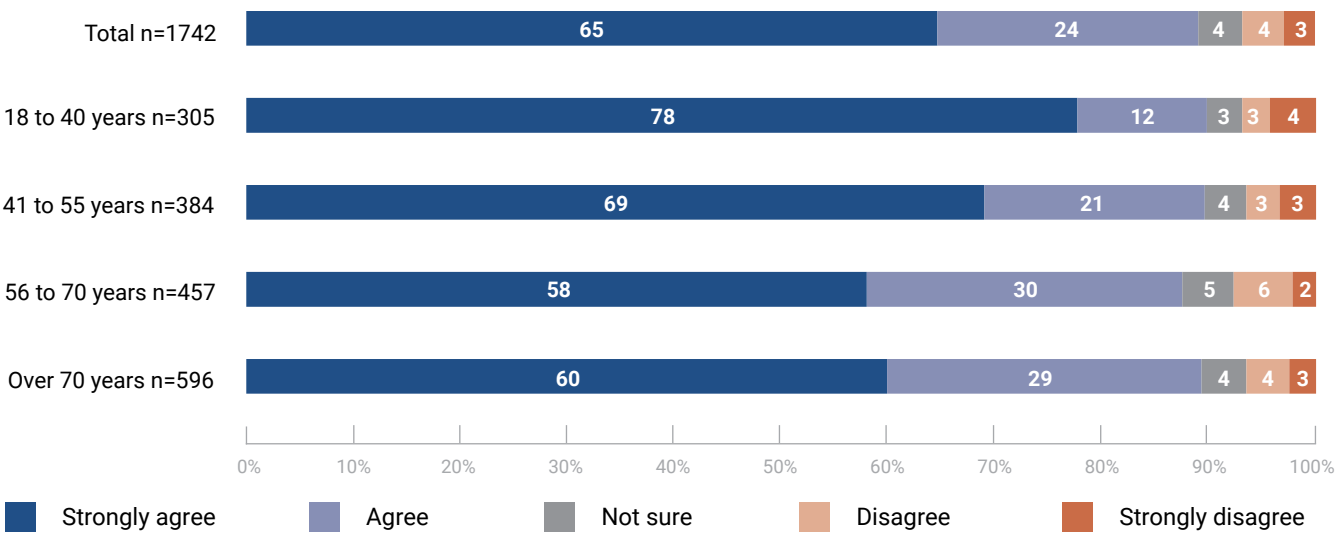
Many respondents, primarily from older cohorts, reported participation in parish groups or ministries. These respondents were contributing as members of parish pastoral or finance committees, and/or through a commitment to liturgical and/or ministry roles such as acolyte or senior server, catechist, reader (lector), visiting the sick or aged, eucharistic minister, music ministry, and liturgy coordinator. A few mentioned tending the altar or flower arranging.

Respondents who wrote about their participation in parish groups or ministries frequently mentioned the importance of community in parish life. Some made a connection between their parish participation and a sense of belonging and support. For instance, one respondent stated:

*I am a regular Mass goer, usually attending Mass on Fridays and Sundays. I participate in the Mass as a Reader and Minister of the Eucharist. I am also a member of the Parish Finance Council. My Mass community is very important to me. Several parishioners and I gather for coffee each Sunday after Mass and socialise on separate occasions (over 70 years).*

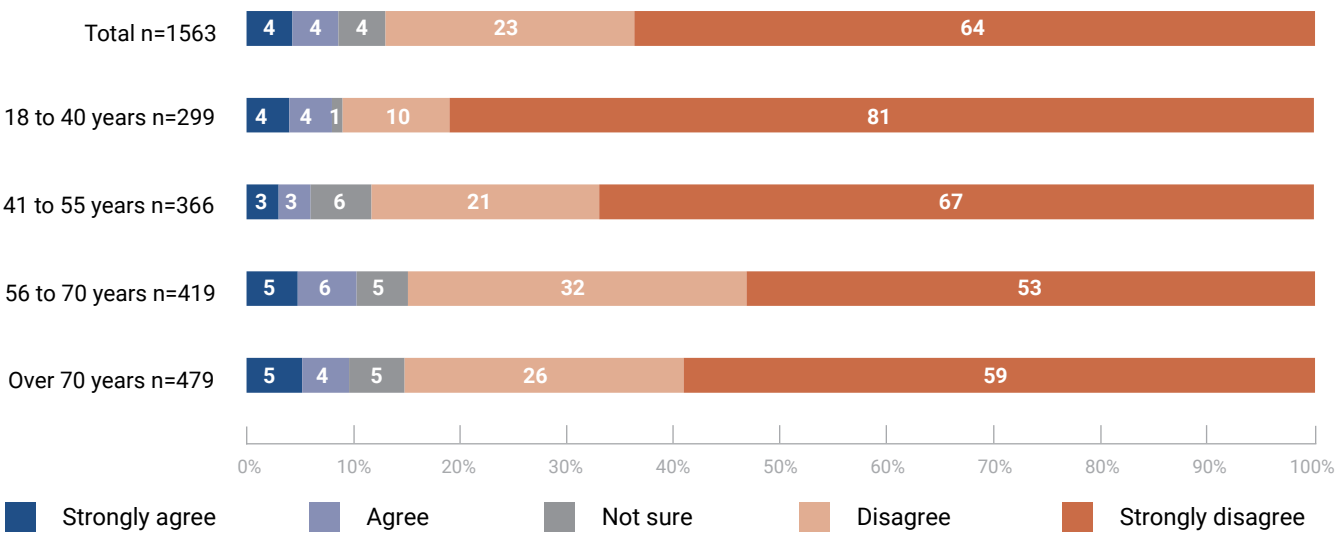
When describing their relationship with the Church respondents often labelled themselves 'active', 'involved', or 'practicing' Catholics, using the descriptors 'committed', 'strong', 'devout', or 'loyal'. Several expressed a deep love of the Catholicism and the Church. They used expressions such as 'I love the Church'

**Figure 1: Percentage by age ‘My Catholic identity is important to me’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 2: Percentage by age ‘I no longer identify as Catholic’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

and 'I love my faith'. For example, two respondents wrote:

Practising, passionate, actively engaged, volunteer, missionary hearted. I love the Church with all my heart, its wounds and all. A field hospital for sinners (18 to 25 years).

I love my Church, but I wish my Church loved me more (56 to 70 years).

While Catholic identity and faith participation were reported as highly important, respondents repeatedly described tensions or strain in their relationship with the Church negatively impacting their capacity to participate in church life. Respondents from all age cohorts used terms such as 'difficult', 'troubled', 'distanced', 'disenfranchised', 'disappointed', 'frustrated', and/or 'challenged'. For instance, these respondents described their relationship as:

Strained. My voice is not heard nor is it valued (41 to 55 years).

My current relationship with the Catholic Church is active but troubled. I feel we are called by the gospel to community and participation but made to settle for so much less (over 70 years).

I am a traditional Catholic, who attends a Latin Mass. I am bitterly disappointed in the current state of the Catholic Church (56 to 70 years).

Many responses raised the issue of women's diversity not being accepted or valued in church life. One respondent wrote:

I am sick of not hearing women's voices [in Church] including women who I can relate to (mothers and working women). I feel like the only voices that are perhaps heard are the ultra-pious, nuns, or consecrated women. Why is that our only avenue? Or maybe we can clean the church or arrange the flowers? (26 to 40 years).

Some respondents highlighted how a lack of acceptance of their experiences and situation made it difficult to participate. A few respondents, who identified as LGBTIQ+ or as single or unmarried in open responses, noted how difficult it was to find belonging and acceptance in their parish.

When describing their involvement and participation several respondents expressed 'sadness', 'hurt', 'alienation', 'despair', 'anger', and/or 'grief' regarding their relationship. For example, two respondents noted:

I am a member of a religious order and have worked in church ministries for decades. I feel

frustrated and angry with the patriarchal church that I see is stopping any progress (over 70 years).

I'd probably describe myself as a recovering Catholic - recovering from guilt and shame and fear. My reaction was to want to leave, but why should I? The Church should be of and for the people, and I'm trying to find a new way to fit into that (41 to 55 years).

Sometimes respondents commented on the crisis of sexual abuse. For instance:

I am deeply embarrassed and hurt by the way that the Catholic Church has handled years and years of sexual abuse (26 to 40 years).

Some respondents used terms such as 'ambiguous' and 'conflicted'. For example, one respondent described her relationship as:

Alternating between hope and despair: our times cry out for the healing presence of the triune God who became one like us and whose life, death and resurrection challenges us to care for the most vulnerable and marginal in our world. However, church structures often impede God's mission to make known the good news of the liberating love of God (56 to 70 years).

The ways that respondents reported dealing with difficulties associated with their participation or relationship with the Church differed significantly. Some respondents reported that they had stopped all involvement. Others still practised but purposefully distanced their faith and sense of belonging from the institutional or hierarchical Church. One such respondent said:

I work for the Catholic Church. I have mixed feelings about it as an institution. My faith and the Church are often two different things (26 to 40 years).

A few mentioned that they stayed involved but had decided to withhold financial support. One respondent explained:

I attend Mass on Sundays. The Eucharist is important to me, and I often feel it is what keeps me attending the Roman Catholic Church. I feel a great deal of alienation from the institutional church of priests, despite respecting Pope Francis. I do not support the Roman Catholic Church financially from deliberate choice. My faith is sustained by my contemplative spiritual practices (over 70 years).

## 6.3 Ecumenism

Most respondents in Australia identified as ecumenical Christians. Around 6 in 10 (58%) either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I identify as an ecumenical Christian'. Strong agreement/agreement increased significantly with age. About 1 in 4 (24%) respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, compared with 8 in 10 (81%) respondents aged over 70 years (Figure 3).

Open responses that mentioned ecumenism were largely supportive of Christian unity. One respondent wrote:

I work as an employee of the Church in a school setting. I was born and raised Uniting Church but did the RCIA.<sup>10</sup> I believe my Protestant upbringing does impact my values and belief system and makes me strive for an ecumenical and evangelical church, but I'm fully committed to my Catholic faith and raising my children in the Church (26 to 40 years).

Another mentioned the need:

To continue to strive for communion with other Christian churches, and to engage more meaningfully in inter-faith/religious dialogue (41 to 55 years).

Some respondents referred to participation in non-Catholic Christian denominations or

ecumenical movements due to struggles they had experienced in Catholicism. One such respondent reported:

I have struggled with the Church for many years seeking other avenues to support my spirituality however I have now found a place to belong but not in a mainstream Catholic Church rather among an ecumenical group who have their foundations in Catholicism (over 70 years).

A few respondents supported the concept of ecumenism but had reservations. For example, a respondent stated:

As a Catholic, meaning universal, I am open to all ecumenical unity and dialogue without lessening in any way our fundamental truths and beliefs (41 to 55 years).

A smaller portion of respondents who mentioned ecumenism expressed strong opposition to the notion of Christian unity. One such respondent explained:

I do not want ecumenism as the Holy Catholic Church is the Church set up by Lord Jesus. Others should change to fit into the Church, not the other way around. We must never change the dogma (41 to 55 years).

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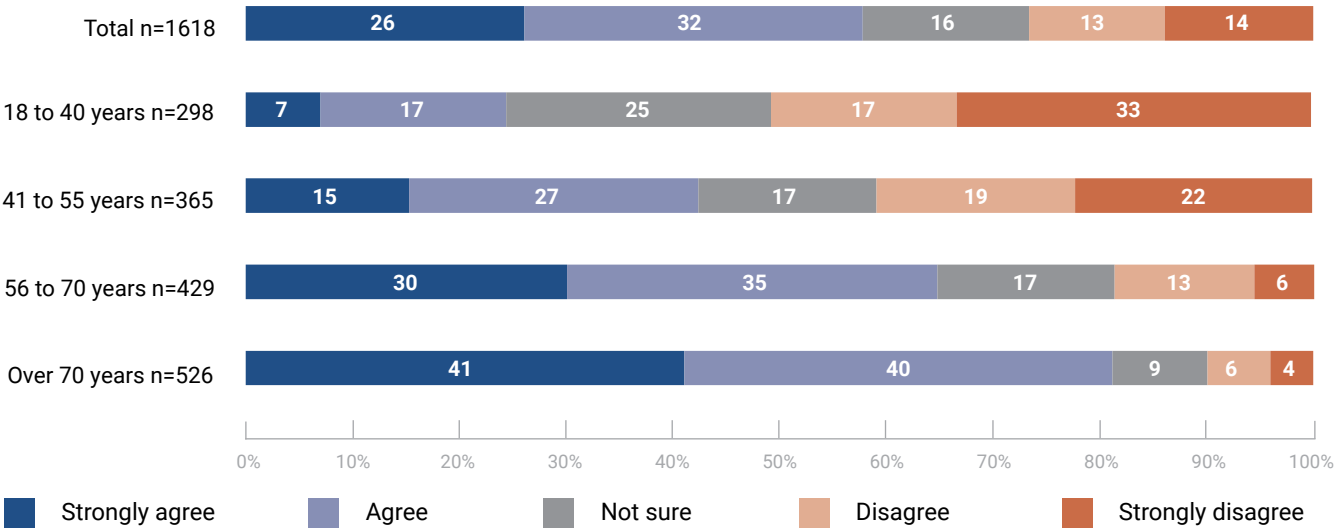
## 6.4 Summary

Catholic identity and faith participation were highly important to respondents in Australia; however, experiences of alienation and harm directly impacted respondents' capacity to participate in church life. In open responses, older respondents tended to orientate their relationship to the Catholic Church in terms of

parish-based ministry roles, often expressing a strong sense of belonging. Many open responses supported ecumenism and some reported involvement in other Christian denominations. However, a few respondents had reservations or understood Christian unity as compromising Catholic doctrine.

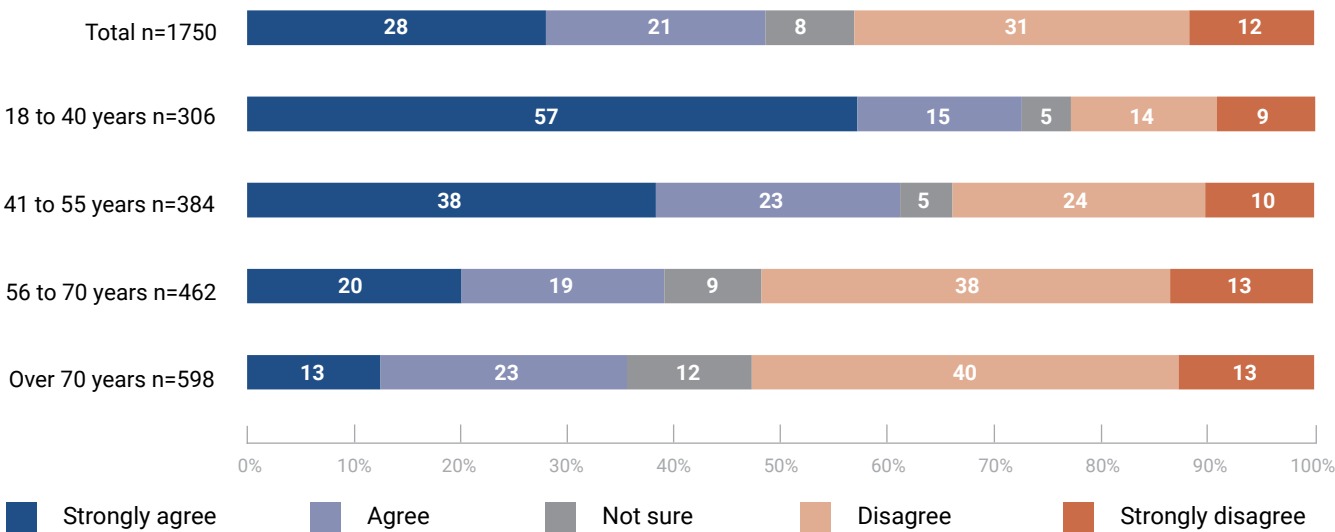
10. Often referred to as RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a process of formation offered to people who seek to become Catholic.

**Figure 3: Percentage by age ‘I identify as an ecumenical Christian’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 4: Percentage by age ‘I was deeply affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).



## 7. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Respondents were asked 6 closed questions regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their faith and church participation. The questions asked respondents to think about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their participation in the Catholic Church, and indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: (1) they were affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic; (2) their personal faith was deepened during the pandemic; (3) they discovered new ways of

sharing their faith during the pandemic; (4) they appreciated the opportunity to participate in worship online; (5) they do not intend to return to regular Mass attendance; and (6) they found new ways to engage with their community during the pandemic. Although open questions did not ask about the COVID-19 pandemic, some respondents mentioned the pandemic and/or expressed views about vaccine mandates, shutdowns, and church closures.

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### 7.1 Church closures and impacts on faith and practice

When asked about the affect COVID-19 the COVID-19 pandemic had on their Mass attendance, respondents were divided. Around half (49%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I was deeply affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic'. Slightly less disagreed or strongly disagreed (43%). There were significant age cohort differences. Some 73% of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed they were deeply affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic, compared to 36% of respondents aged over 70 years (Figure 4).

Half (50%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'My personal faith was deepened during the pandemic'. There were only small variations in responses by age (Figure 5).

Most respondents agreed that they had found new ways to share their faith during the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 6 in 10 (61%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I discovered new ways of sharing my faith during the pandemic'. There were some variations in responses associated with age. Younger respondents

were slightly less likely to strongly agree or agree than older respondents (Figure 6).

Around 6 in 10 (62%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I appreciated the opportunity to participate in worship online'. Older respondents were more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than younger respondents. Half (50%) of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed, compared to 69% of those aged over 70 years (Figure 7).

Almost 6 in 10 (57%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I found new ways to engage with my community during the pandemic', while less than half (45%) of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed, increasing to 41 to 55 years (52%), 56 to 70 years (60%), and over 70 years (64%) (Figure 8).

Only a small proportion of open responses mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of these responses were highly critical of government mandated church closures and vaccine mandates. One respondent raised the issue of:

The power government has on [the Catholic Church] with regards to COVID-19 mandates. To be singled out as dangerous and [churches] closed to parishioners is an injustice, particularly whilst brothels are seen as 'essential' (41 to 55 years).

Responses tended to express a sense of abandonment and outrage that church hierarchy did not resist government regulations, asserting that in closing churches the Church had prioritised physical health and ignored spiritual needs. For instance, one respondent wrote of:

A sense of abandonment by the Church during COVID. Prevented from receiving the Sacraments!! There are no words to express my disgust (41 to 55 years).

Some respondents who mentioned COVID-19 suggested that more could have been done to accommodate those who wanted to continue faith practice during the pandemic. One respondent highlighted:

I can see that more could have been done in Australia during the pandemic ... holy water made more available. Increased ministry to the families. Community engagement in tangible ways. Drive through Eucharist where possible. More public adoration events - drive thru or drive by (26 to 40 years).

A few responses mentioned priests who had thwarted mandates and continued church services. For example, one respondent recounted:

During the pandemic I found priests who were willing to disobey the Church's illegitimate, stupid, and harmful rule of cancelling mass. This was the only way I was able to survive the pandemic ... the only thing I had was my Lord in holy communion and to this day I cherish those stolen moments in the Church for our secret masses (18 to 25 years).

There were a few respondents who reported that the COVID-19 pandemic and shift to online worship had a positive impact on their faith practice. For example, one such respondent wrote:

I was deeply affected by not being able to attend Mass. I felt so much freedom in creating my own rituals, using inclusive language, and finding other ways to explore and express the depth of my faith. I now find it very difficult returning to Mass, only hearing the male voice and exclusive language in liturgy. Community was expressed in a very different way for me these past two years of the pandemic – in a way which fed and nurtured, and so deepened my faith (56 to 70 years).

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## 7.2 Post-pandemic participation in parish life

Around 1 in 5 (19%) respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I do not intend to return to regular Mass attendance'; a further 10% were not sure. There was some variation between age groups with younger respondents slightly less likely to strongly agree/ agree than older respondents (Figure 9).

Most respondents who mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic in their open responses were enthusiastic about returning to in-person Mass attendance. For example, one respondent stated:

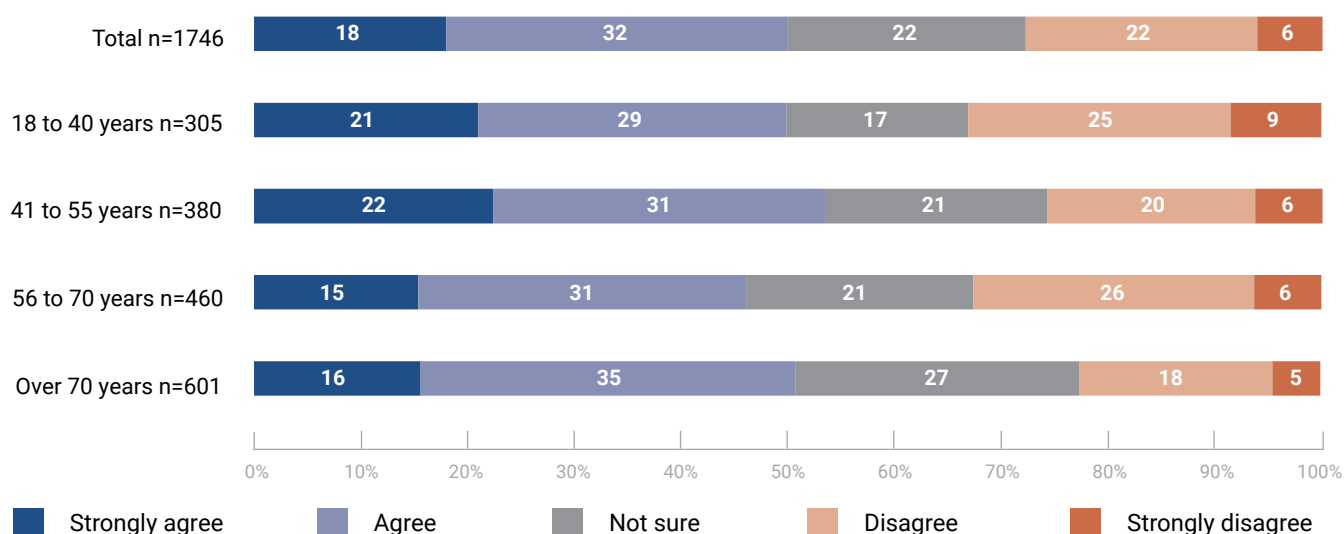
If anything, the pandemic helped me to appreciate my faith and commitment

to "Church" more and I have enjoyed being able to return to community (over 70 years).

There were a few responses that expressed concern that parishes and in-person Masses remained unsafe due to COVID-19, particularly for the elderly and vulnerable. For instance, one respondent wrote:

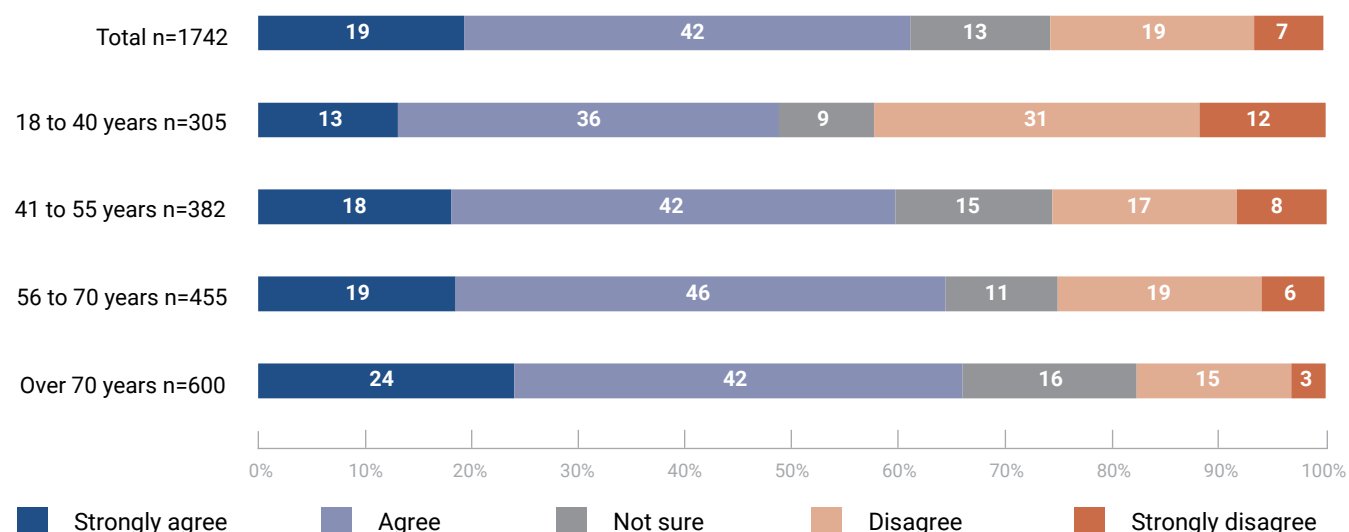
COVID-19 is not over. We are not acknowledging those people who have died. We are not caring for the vulnerable at parish Masses - large gatherings and 99% unmasked (56 to 70 years).

**Figure 5: Percentage by age 'My personal faith was deepened during the pandemic'.**



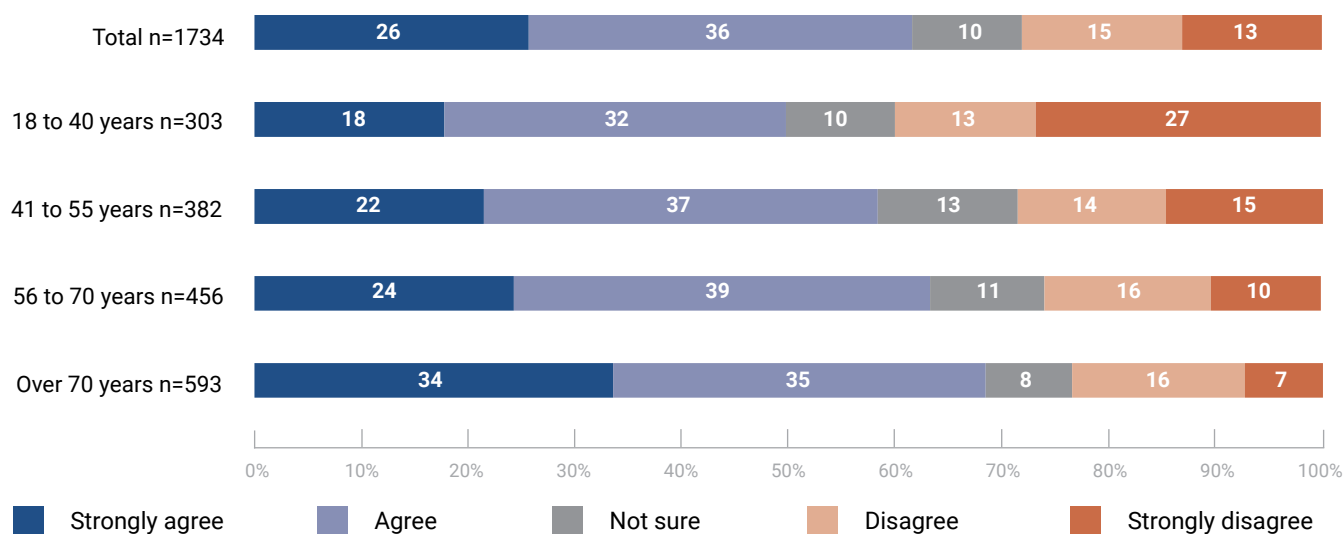
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 6: Percentage by age 'I discovered new ways of sharing my faith during the pandemic'.**



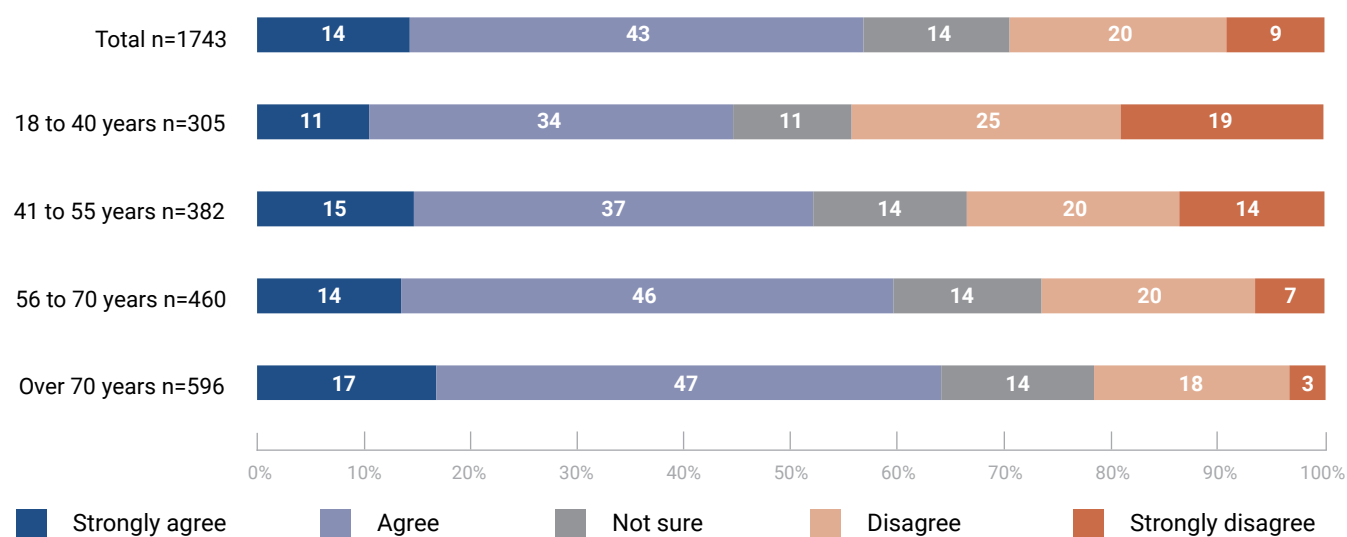
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 7: Percentage by age ‘I appreciated the opportunity to participate in worship online’.**



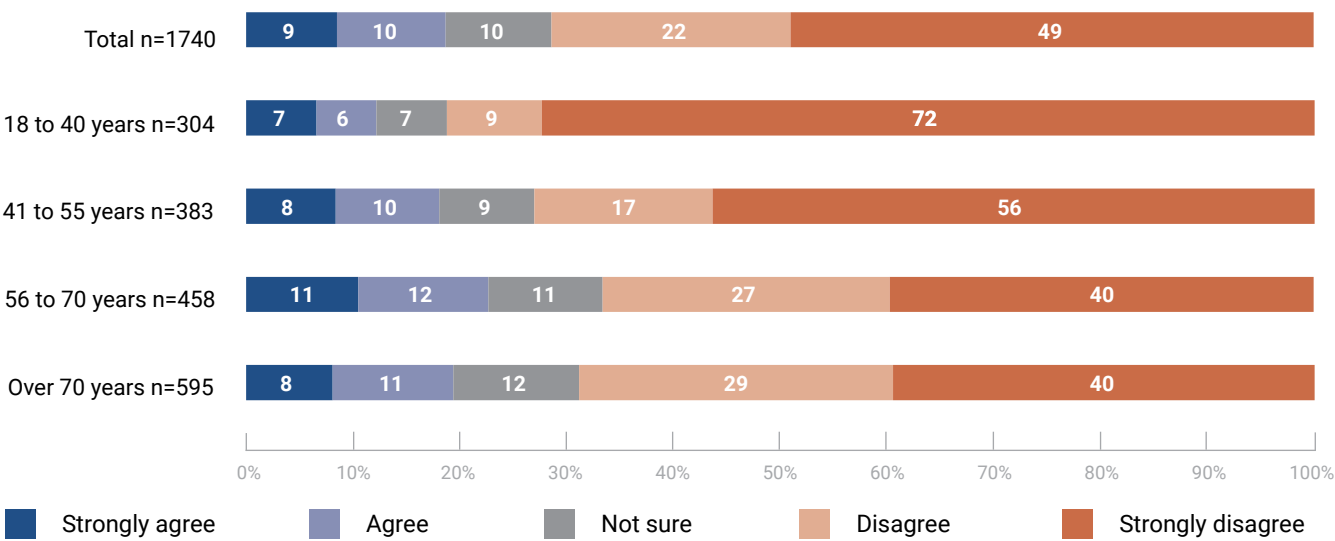
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 8: Percentage by age ‘I found new ways to engage with my community during the pandemic’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

Figure 9: Percentage by age ‘I do not intend to return to regular Mass attendance’.



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

### 7.3 Summary

Closed questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic showed divided perspectives on the extent to which faith and participation were impacted by church closures. Most respondents valued the opportunity to participate in online worship and discovered

new ways of sharing their faith. In open responses, a small proportion of respondents expressed a sense of anger and betrayal at government mandated church closures and vaccines.

## 8. Support for reform

Respondents were asked 4 closed questions about reform in broad terms in the Catholic Church. These questions asked respondents: 'Thinking about the possible need for reform in the Catholic Church', to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: (1) they supported

reform; (2) there was no need for any reform; (3) radical reform was needed; and (4) that without reform there was no place for them in the Church. The issue of reform was also mentioned in open responses.

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### 8.1 Support for reform, even radical reform

Three-quarters (76%) of respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I support reform in the Catholic Church'. Levels of agreement varied significantly between age groupings. Less than half (44%) of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed, compared to those aged 41 to 55 years (62%), 56 to 70 years (87%), and over 70 years (94%) (Figure 10).

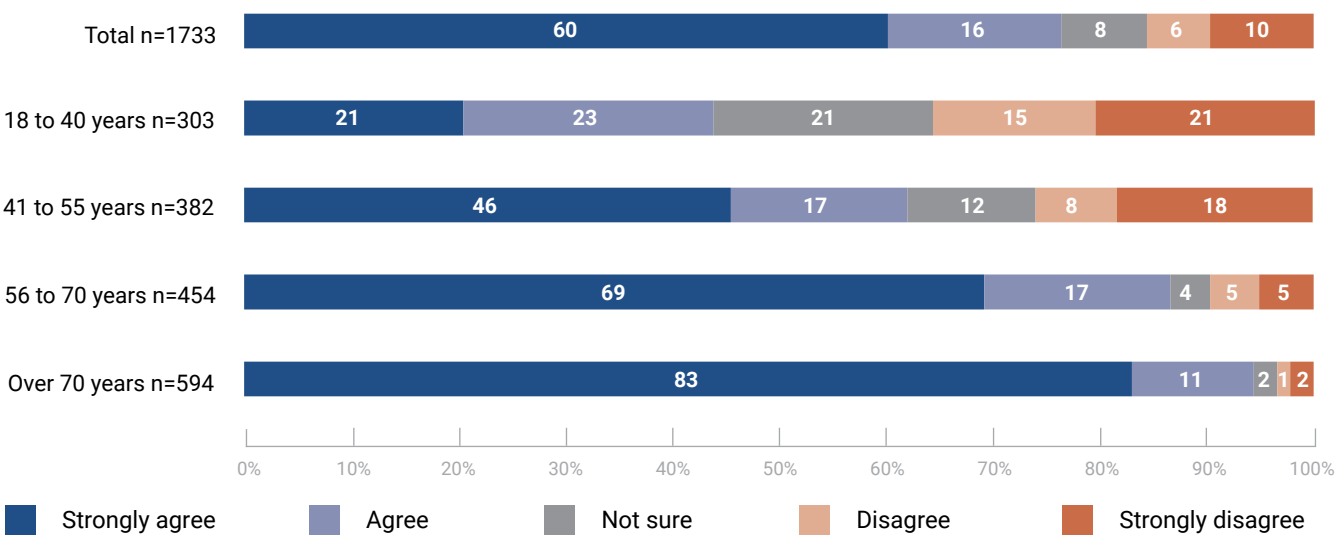
Some 16% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'There is no need for any reform in the Catholic Church'. However, there were large variations by age grouping. More than 1 in 3 respondents (35%) aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed, contrasted with 4% of respondents aged over 70 years (4%) (Figure 11).

Around 6 in 10 (63%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Radical reform is needed in the Catholic Church'. Again, there was a pattern of increasing strong agreement/agreement with age. A minority of respondents aged 18 to 40 (27%) and 41 to 55 years (47%) strongly agreed or agreed, compared to a strong majority of respondents aged 56 to 70 years (73%), and over 70 years (85%) (Figure 12).

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement 'Without reform there is no place for me in the Catholic Church'. Close to 3 in 10 (28%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed. There were variations that could be attributed to age. Strong disagreement decreased with age and disagreement and uncertainty increased (Figure 13).

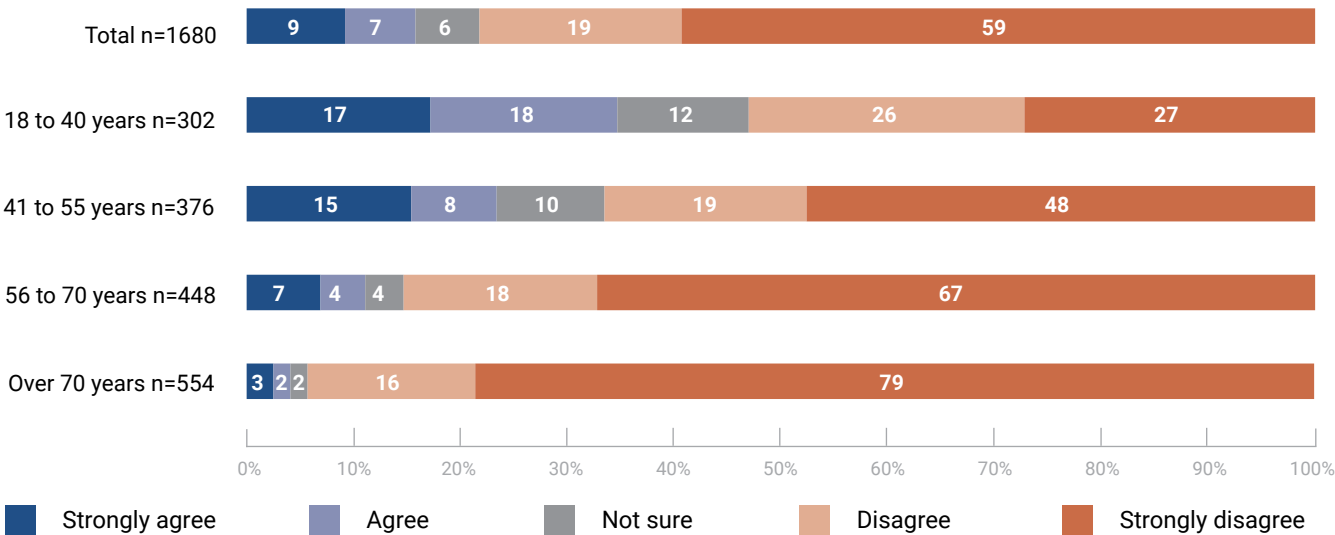


Figure 10: Percentage by age ‘I support reform in the Catholic Church’.



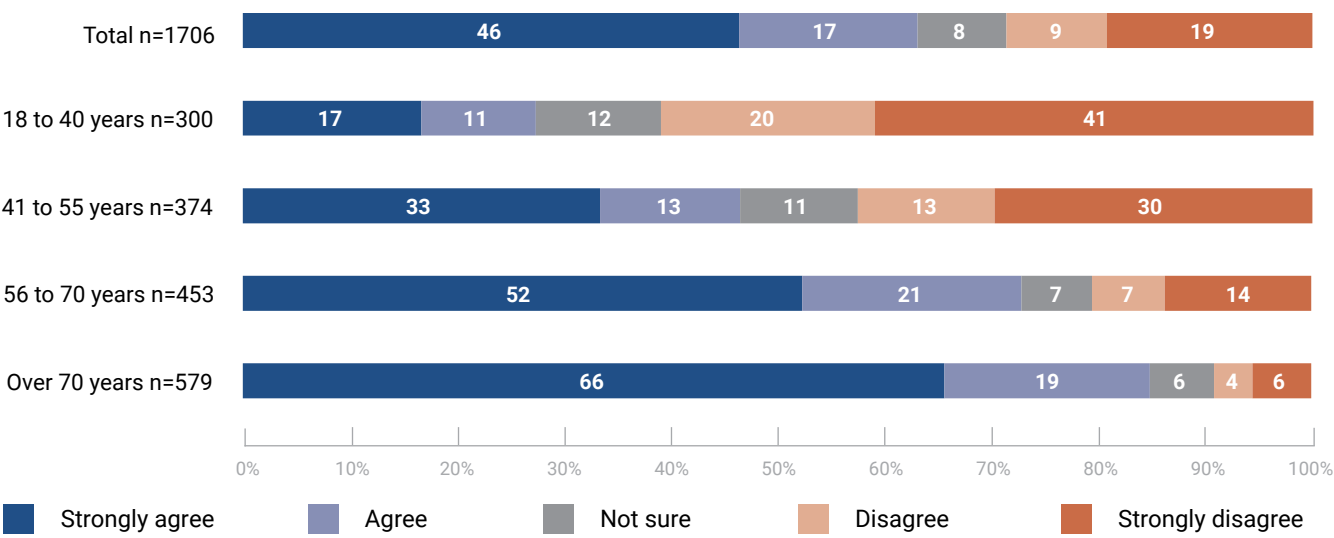
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

Figure 11: Percentage by age ‘There is no need for reform in the Catholic Church’.



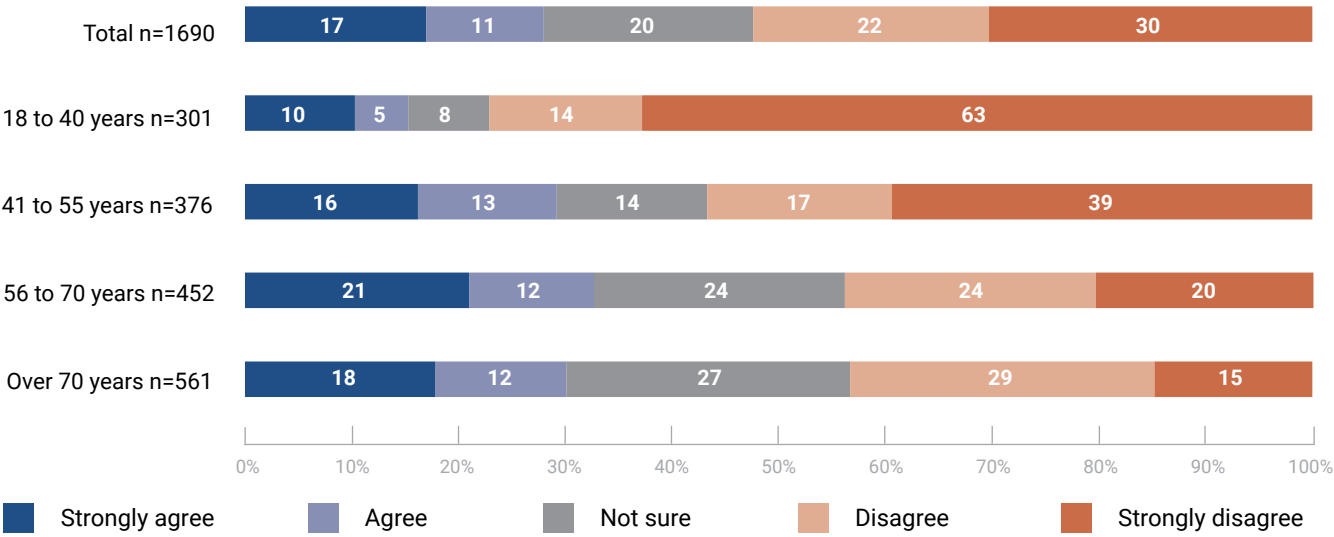
Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

Figure 12: Percentage by age ‘Radical reform is needed in the Catholic Church’.



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

Figure 13: Percentage by age ‘Without reform there is no place for me in the Catholic Church’.



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 8.2 What does reform mean?

Analysis of the open responses revealed a divergence of standpoint related to reform. On the one hand there was a group of respondents who sought reform. For example:

I am a Religious Sister and have been for 55 years. I love the Church, but see its many, many problems. I think we are seeing a system in its near-dying state unless very drastic changes are made. I want those changes to be made so the Church can be a dynamic source of grace and healing to the world. I currently sing and play in my parish choir, am a lector and Communion minister (over 70 years).

This larger group of mostly older respondents contended that a separation existed between the Church and its teachings and the realities of everyday life for adherents. In open responses this group prioritised the need for a less clerical church, with lay co-responsibility in governance, and a stronger stance from bishops and priests on issues of social justice including ecology,

economic justice, and the inclusion of women and LGBTIQ+ people. For instance, this respondent wrote:

Full inclusion of women and other radical reforms are urgently needed in the Catholic Church if it is to be relevant in the 21st century (56 to 70 years)

Conversely, there was a much smaller group of predominantly younger respondents who asserted the 'reform' the Church needed was a return to 'tradition', a state they associated with a rejection of 'modernisation', greater reverence and devotion to the Eucharist, more focus on orthodoxy in church teachings, and the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM). One such respondent stated:

The most important issue the church faces today is the loss of Faith in the Real Presence and the Church's authentic teaching. As much as possible, the Church needs to return to spreading these fundamental truths (18 to 25 years).

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## 8.3 Summary

Most respondents supported reform, including radical reform. There were, however, significant differences between age groupings. In open responses there was a large group of mostly older respondents who prioritised reformation of the Church and its

teachings via dialogue with ordinary Catholics and the secular world. By contrast, there was a smaller, younger cohort of respondents who rejected any modernisation of the Church and understood reform as a return to orthodoxy and tradition, including the TLM.

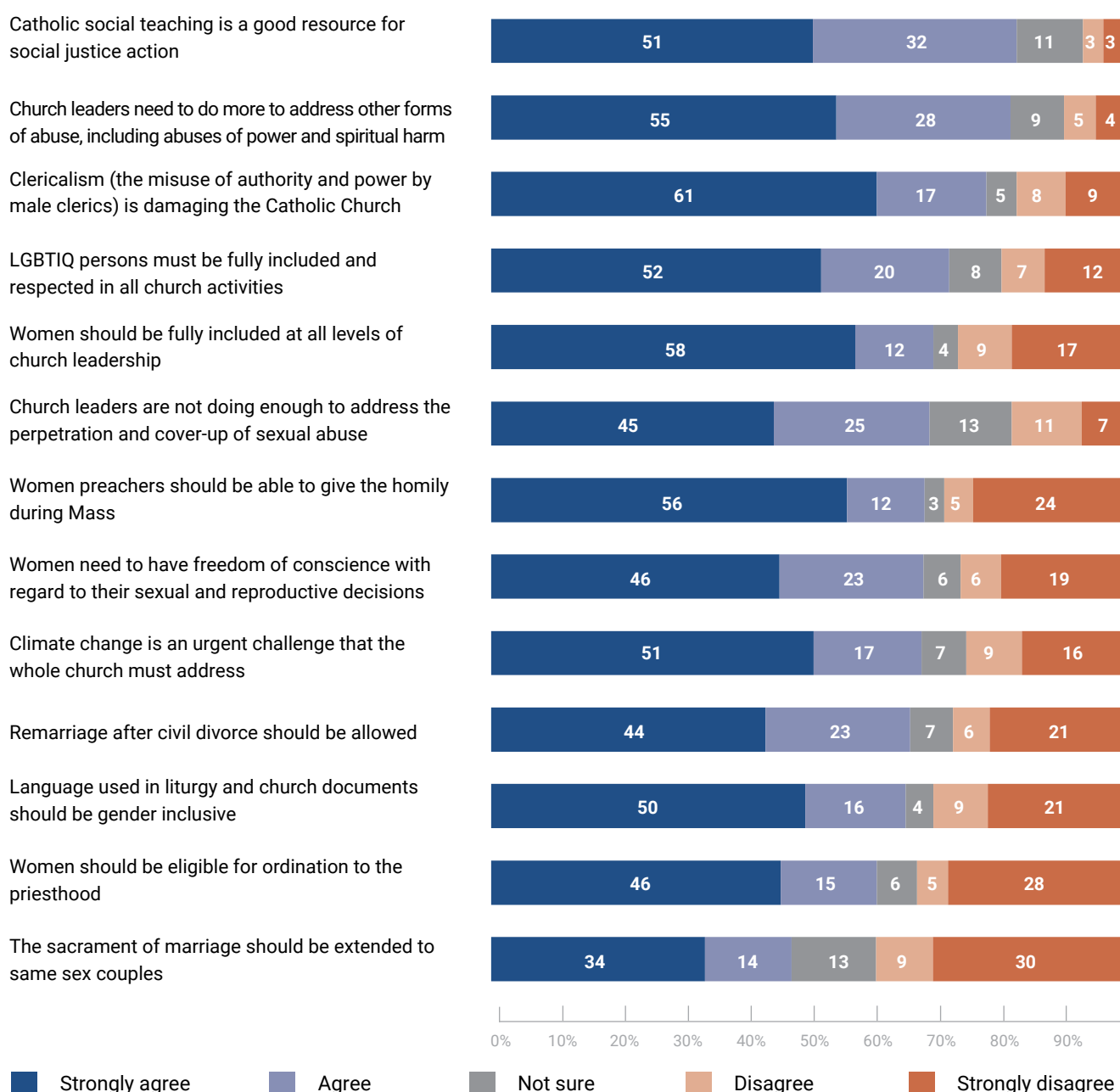
## 9. Issues in the Catholic Church

This section reports on the issues raised by respondents, via both the findings from the 13 closed questions associated with issues of reform in the Catholic Church and key themes arising from the analysis of the 3 open questions.

There was majority agreement for 12 of the 13 closed question statements (Figure 14).

In addition to the elaboration of themes raised in closed questions, open responses also mentioned the following: liturgical renewal; matters concerning children, young people and family life; social justice and humanitarian concerns; the inclusion of marginalised people; the formation of the laity; and church leadership and governance.

**Figure 14: Results for closed questions about specific issues of reform, ranked from highest to lowest strong agreement/agreement.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 9.1 Women's involvement and leadership

Respondents were asked 3 closed questions associated with the issue of women's inclusion concerning leadership in the Catholic Church. These questions asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: (1) Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership; (2) Women preachers

should be able to give the homily during Mass; and (3) Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood. Open responses raised concerns regarding women's involvement in the Church, including their inclusion in positions of leadership in parishes, dioceses, and Catholic organisations.

### 9.1.1 Inclusion of women at all levels

Most respondents in Australia agreed with the full inclusion of women at all levels of church leadership. Some 7 in 10 (70%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership'. Support for women in leadership did, however, vary relatively strongly by age grouping. Almost 1 in 3 (29%) respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, compared to 53% of those aged 41 to 55 years and 82% of those aged 56 to 70 years. More than 9 in 10 (93%) respondents aged over 70 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (Figure 15).

In open responses there was mixed support for the inclusion of women in leadership and in the Church more broadly. Most respondents who mentioned the inclusion of women in their open responses supported the full inclusion of women in all aspects of church life, including in leadership and decision-making. Some respondents expressed disappointment and/or anger at the Church's failure to include women. One such respondent maintained:

*I work in a Catholic school, but I rarely attend church. I have been disappointed by the lack of movement on so many issues within the Church and don't feel it is a place that welcomes women's leadership (41 to 55 years).*

Several respondents asserted that the inequality of women in the Church was mirroring and perpetuating gender injustices found in broader society. For example, one respondent wrote:

*Where are the women in leadership? One looks at the world. Women are often paid less than men, they are treated as second class citizens in many countries, treated as goods and chattels ... The Church is perpetuating the inequality and the inferiority of women (over 70 years).*

There were responses that named the inequality of women in Catholicism as 'sexism' and/or 'misogyny'. For instance, a respondent stated:

*I feel so rejected by the Catholic Church. As a Gen X woman, I feel no obligation of loyalty to the Catholic Church, unlike the generations who saw Vatican II. The Catholic Church will never change. I used to call it sexist; now I call it plain misogynist - it disrespects to the point that it hates women. We are half-people to those in decision-making roles, and most of the Australian Catholic bishops can't be bothered to stand up for us (if they sympathise at all) (41 to 55 years).*

When open responses were supportive of the inclusion of women, respondents often provided examples of their own experiences of marginalisation and discrimination. One respondent gave this account:

My husband is not Catholic and sometimes asks me: 'why would you want to raise our daughter in a religion that says she can't do the same things as our son?' He has a point. I love the Church but since I was refused as an altar server as a child, I had the sad sense that the Church didn't love me as much as it loved my brothers. I am hopeful for change. I will always believe in the message of the gospels (41 to 55 years).

A few respondents described women's subjugation in the Church as a form of spiritual violence. For example:

Treating women, as the Catholic Church, is patriarchal, abusive, and un-Christ-like. Spiritual abuse is as serious as physical and sexual abuse. The Catholic Church crushes women's spirits and thus many "choose life" and an authentic life with/in God, and simply walk away (56 to 70 years).

As discussed earlier, open responses often reported that faith participation was impacted by a profound sense of hurt, dismissal, and betrayal. For instance, one respondent wrote:

I have honestly lost hope that the Church is ever going to truly listen and understand how much it hurts women on a daily basis. Until all people are treated equally by the Church, we cannot be living God's mission (26 to 40 years).

Several respondents expressed dismay that women's voices were not being heard or listened to in church settings. A respondent who identified as a religious sister contended:

I am a Catholic religious sister, but I feel my voice is not heard in the Church (56 to 70 years).

Some respondents stated that their experience of being a woman in the Church was leading them to question their participation. By contrast there was a smaller cohort of respondents who felt strongly that women were already included and valued in the Church. One such respondent wrote:

I have always felt at home in the Church and valued as a woman. I do not see church teachings as restrictive but rather, as beautiful glimpses of God's vision for us (26 to 40 years).

In open responses this cohort of predominantly younger respondents repeatedly maintained that women have distinct biblically prescribed roles and responsibilities which, affirm women's equal dignity when upheld. For instance, a respondent noted:

The Church has upheld the true dignity and nature of women for thousands of years - the more it retains and propagates the biblical and traditional teachings on this, the more nourishing it will be for us as women (18 to 25 years).

Some respondents clearly connected the role and dignity of woman in the Church with Theology of the Body (John Paul II 2006) and feminine genius theology (MD, paras. 30-31; Schüssler Fiorenza 2016). A few asserted that it is women failing to accept and embrace complementarian gender roles, rather than gender inequality that is causing harm for women in church settings. For example, one such respondent maintained:

Male and female complement each other in all aspects of life. Each gender is valued. If we follow Jesus' teaching and love one another as God loves us there would be more peace and harmony in the world. It is personal egos and power struggles that cause harm (56 to 70 years).

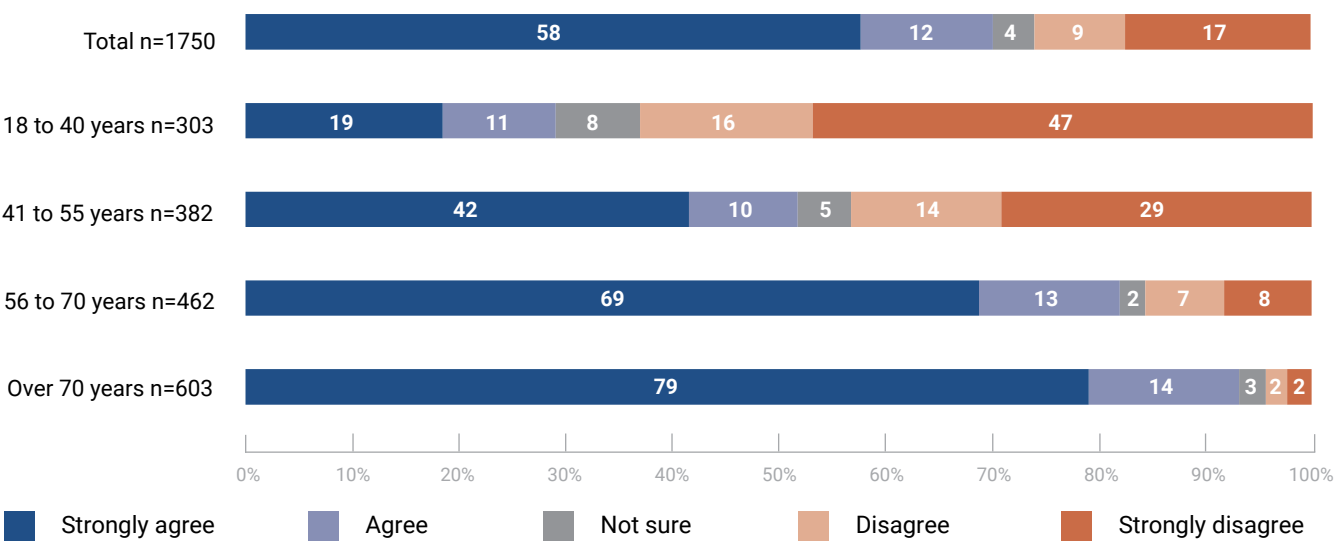
However, there were also responses that directly disputed the legitimacy of gender complementarity and associated ideologies. For example:

The way women are presented in the Catholic faith context is one of the core reasons that there is no progress towards an inclusive and equitable church. Many of these messages are subtle but it seems that femininity and womanhood are an impediment to true communion. Do women have different souls to men? Do all persons have the same dignity and reflect the divinity of God? Then how is it that they cannot participate at the highest levels in the Church? (41 to 55 years)

A few respondents critiqued how the use of the Theology of the Body in teaching sexual and reproductive health was contributing to a rise in harmful purity cultures in the Church. Some of these responses raised misgivings about the use of doctrine about Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a model for

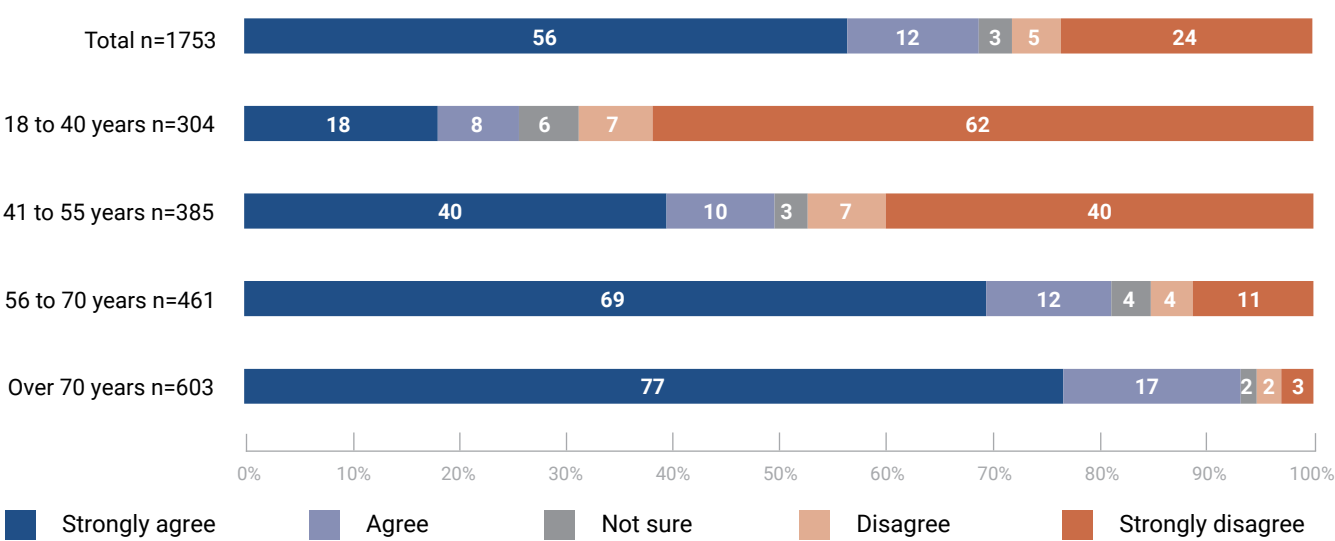


**Figure 15: Percentage by age ‘Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 16: Percentage by age ‘Women preachers should be able to give the homily during Mass’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

women, particularly her perpetual virginity (CCC, para. 499). For example:

Some of the language equating virginity with worthiness should be toned down, whether Mary's supposed virginity or anybody else's. Mary doesn't need to be a virgin to be worthy. It shouldn't matter if she was, and it shouldn't matter if she wasn't. I'm not advocating promiscuity; just less insistence that perpetual virginity is the best thing a woman could aspire to (41 to 55 years).

Conversely, there were some respondents who pointed to the Church's devotion

to Mary and other biblical women as evidence of women's value and inclusion. A few respondents suggested women imitate Mary rather than look to feminism, asserting that gender equality and feminism were harmful for women and the Church. For example, one respondent wrote:

Modern feminism is dangerous to the Church because it shows a complete lack of understanding of the sacredness of women ... Yes, abuses and errors exist, but the answer is not the farce that is "equality" - because we are not the same (26 to 40 years).

## 9.1.2 Preaching by women

Almost 7 in 10 (69%) respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Women preachers should be able to give the homily during Mass'. There were large variations between age groupings, with increasing support with age. A quarter (26%) of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed, compared to half (50%) of respondents aged 41 to 55 years and 8 in 10 (80%) aged 56 to 70 years. More than 9 in 10 (93%) respondents aged over 70 agreed or strongly agreed that women should be able to preach the homily during Mass (Figure 16).

Most open responses that mentioned women preaching expressed support for greater opportunity for qualified women to preach homilies during Mass. For instance, one respondent wrote:

I would like many bishops and priests in the Catholic Church to listen closely to the ideas and aspirations of Catholic women and give them the opportunity to participate in the life of the Church in the same way that men do, that is, access to positions of authority as priests and bishops and proclaiming the gospel messages as preachers and teachers (over 70 years).

A few respondents shared in open responses their personal experience of

having a calling to preach denied. One such respondent recounted:

About 10 years ago I got to the point where I couldn't keep going to Mass regularly because I felt so angry at the way the Catholic Church (the institutional Church) ignores my gifts, including for preaching (I have preached in non-Catholic churches) SIMPLY because I happen to be a woman. As a woman I feel virtually a non-person to the Catholic Church hierarchy (41 to 55 years).

While there were some open responses that strongly opposed the presence of women on the altar during the Mass, only a few specifically mention women preaching. These responses tended to urge women to embrace vocations already available to them. For example, a respondent asserted:

Trying to push women into roles within the Church, such as preaching at Mass and priesthood won't solve the problems within the Church. It would be better to instil in girls from the youngest age an understanding of their beauty and dignity as daughters of God and to nourish and encourage in them their natural skills and talents. Also, to truly value what women are and have and can do instead of devaluing motherhood and feminine roles (26 to 40 years).

## 9.1.3 The ordination of women

Although there was less support among respondents in Australia for the ordination of women than for women preaching, a majority were supportive. Around 6 in 10 (61%) respondents in Australia either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood'. As with other leadership issues, older respondents were a lot more likely to agree with the ordination of women than younger respondents. More than 8 in 10 (82%) respondents aged over 70 years strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, however only 1 in 5 (21%) respondents aged 18 to 40 years agreed (Figure 17).

Support for the inclusion of women in the diaconate, and for their ordination as priests was a common theme of open responses. For example, one respondent wrote:

There is no persuasive reason women should be excluded from priesthood. Women can have the vocation of priesthood and have all the same spiritual gifts as men (41 to 55 years).

Respondents who advocated for the ordination of women in open responses often noted that those excluded as potential candidates for the priesthood included LGBTIQ+ people and married men. For example, one respondent noted:

I am tired of being asked to "pray for vocations". The Holy Spirit calls many, whom the Church excludes on the basis of gender or marital status. Widen the tents, or the exodus will continue!! (over 70 years).

Several respondents used terms such as 'frustrated', 'despair', 'concern', 'disappointed', and 'discrimination' when writing about women's exclusion from ordination. For instance, one respondent commented:

I am a Catholic Christian who is tired and disappointed with the explicit and implicit male orientation of the Church. While there are only males celebrating the Eucharist,

power will remain male, sacramentally and canonically (56 to 70 years).

Responses which advocated for the ordination of women frequently made theological connections between ordination and the capacity of women to stand 'in persona Christi'. Some cited historical and/or biblical examples of women's leadership. For example, one such respondent recalled:

The early church had female bishops and the accepted scriptural texts are biased towards the rule of men. The Church is structurally misogynistic and protects males. This is a major flaw if you want to spread the truth, fully accept and love each human being and mimic what Christ did. To me the Catholic Church is not truly a Christian organisation (41 to 55 years).

There were respondents whose support for women's inclusion in the Sacrament of Holy Orders was based on a personal vocation or call from God. These respondents conveyed a sense of sadness at not being able to live out their vocation and wrote about their call to priesthood and the diaconate:

I feel called to priesthood. Now I weep and wonder how required transformation will occur. Clericalism is eradicating any growth (over 70 years).

I feel called to minister as an ordained deacon and am connecting with other women who feel the same. It seems that the Holy Spirit is working to prepare people for the small change in canon law that would make this possible (26 to 40 years).

A few respondents stated they had left the Church and pursued ordination in another Christian denomination.

Opposition to women's inclusion in the diaconate and/or their ordination of women was sometimes linked with clericalism and the problems associated with adding women to a flawed hierarchical system of authority. For example, these respondents noted:

The current model of monarchical leadership being held by the ordained should be reformed. The current diocesan model is flawed. The ordination of women into these flawed structures would go some way to balance but would not address the flawed monarchical model (41 to 55 years).

Advocating for women to be priests is a form of clericalism which suggests that woman's role in the Church is insufficient and that they should be able to be 'elevated' to the role as priest. Under the eyes of God, we are all already equally loved. (26 to 40 years).

A few respondents suggested that further dialogue was needed. A respondent wrote:

Women are amazing - we do need to support one another, and the Church needs to recognise this. There is an anger that arises in some sections of the community when it is mentioned that women are able to be in leadership positions and the priesthood. This anger needs to be listened

to so that the concerns can be addressed. The Church also needs to properly look at the theological reasons it asserts for a male only priesthood. At the moment I keep hearing about the priesthood as servant leadership. This is frightening - servants do not hold all the power. Jesus was a servant leader; the high priests and Pharisees held the power. This needs to be addressed (41 to 55 years).

Some respondents, however, objected to women priests based on church teaching which reserves ordination for men alone. For example, a respondent stated:

Christ instigated an all-male priesthood and we do not have to understand His reasons but be faithful. If women were to be included, he would have included his own mother - the most perfect creature ever to have walked the earth. The Catholic Church is not a democracy it is a theocracy and patriarchy. If people cannot accept that, they are in the wrong church (56 to 70 years).

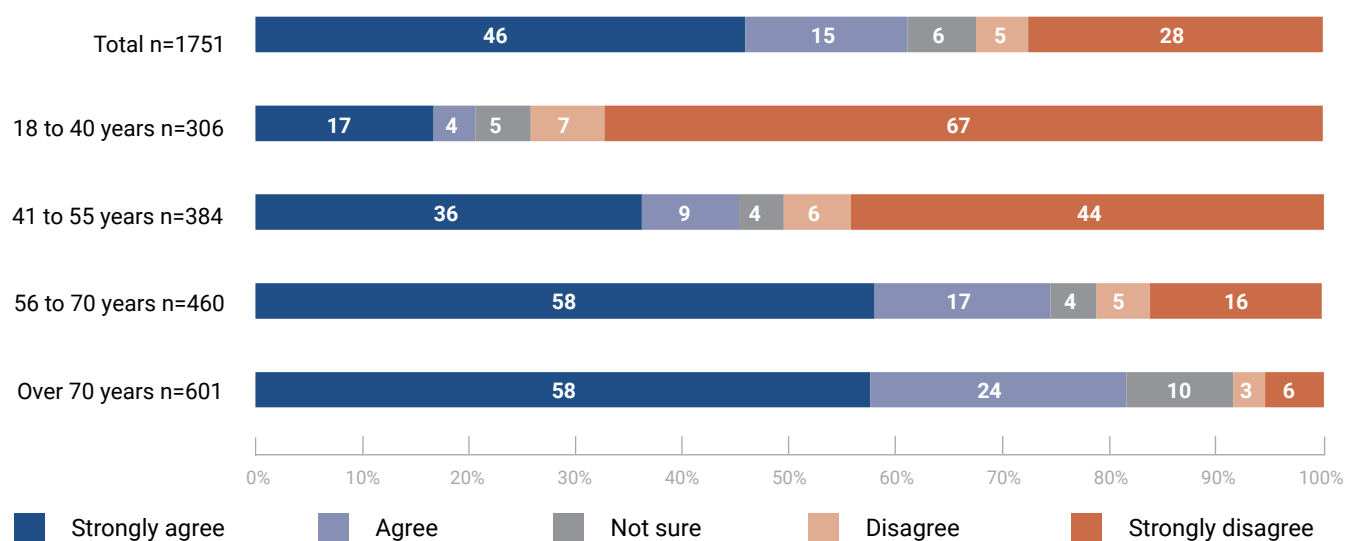
## 9.1.4 Summary

There was strong support in closed responses for women's inclusion in leadership at all levels of the Church, their preaching the homily during Mass, and their ordination to the priesthood. However, there were notable differences in levels of support between age groupings.

A significant proportion of open responses were supportive of women's inclusion at all levels of the Church, including as ordained members. Responses frequently expressed anger and frustration at women's exclusions from leadership and ministry

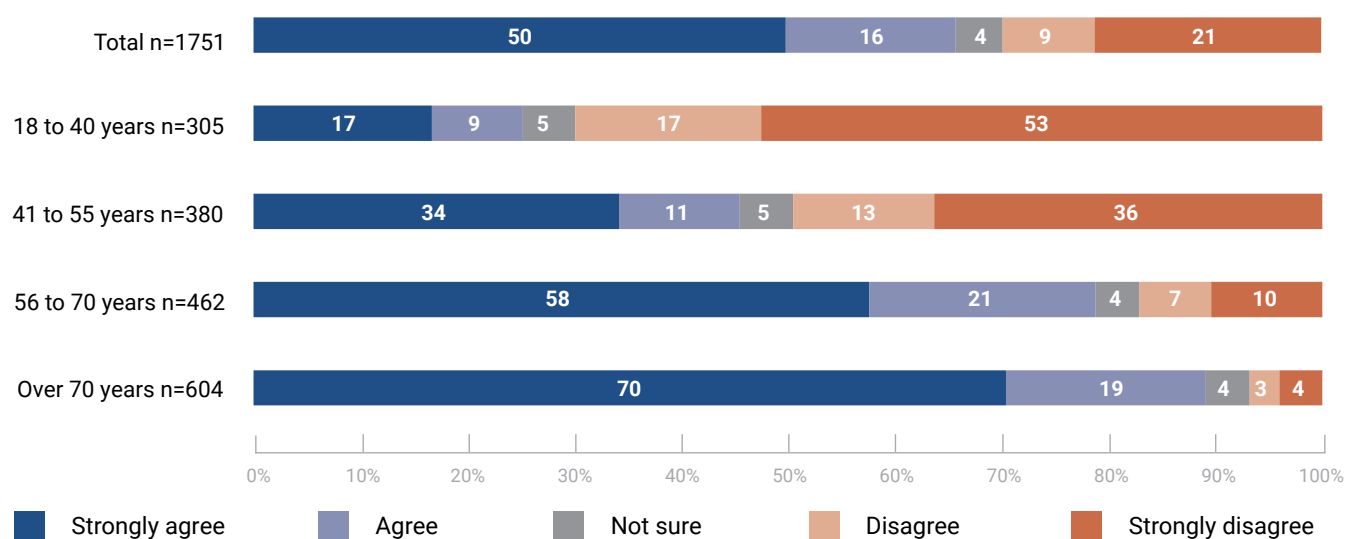
roles in parishes, dioceses, and Catholic organisations. Yet, while responses often maintained women were undervalued and silenced in church settings, some respondents, from primarily younger cohorts, emphasised women were already fully included and valued in their feminine role complementary to men. These responses tended to mention support for Theology of the Body and/or feminine genius theology; some asserted feminism devalued motherhood and femininity and caused harm to women in church settings.

**Figure 17: Percentage by age ‘Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 18: Percentage by age ‘Language used in liturgy and church documents should be gender inclusive’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 9.2 Liturgical reforms

Respondents were asked a closed question associated with the issue of gender inclusive language in liturgy, which asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that 'language used

in liturgy and church documents should be gender inclusive.' Open responses positioned liturgy as a central issue to be addressed by church leadership.

### 9.2.1 Gender-inclusive language in liturgy

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: 'Language used in liturgy and church documents should be gender inclusive'. Again, younger age groupings were a lot less likely to strongly agree or agree with the use of inclusive language than older respondents. Less than half of respondents aged 18 to 40 years (25%) and 41 to 55 years (46%) strongly agreed or agreed. However, there was high majority agreement among respondents aged 56 to 70 years (79%) and over 70 years (89%) (Figure 18).

Open responses that mentioned liturgy were mostly supportive of gender inclusive language in church documents and liturgies, including an inclusive lectionary. For example, one respondent wrote:

Until the Church can change the language of the readings and liturgy to be both gender inclusive, and acknowledge God beyond gender, it isolates and silences more than half of humanity (41 to 55 years).

For some respondents the lack of inclusive language added to their feelings of distance and the silencing of women. For instance, one respondent noted:

I feel overlooked and disenfranchised!  
The lack of any awareness of inclusive

language is one of many aspects of liturgy and church that leaves me isolated and floundering for identity (56 to 70 years).

A respondent who identified as a religious sister maintained:

Liturgical language is alienating in Australia. I've been a Religious Sister for over 55 years and been treated as an uneducated, second-rate person by the Church (over 70 years).

Respondents also raised other forms of liturgical inclusivity. One such respondent stated:

The language of the liturgy needs to be not only gender inclusive but transformative. We need to balance all the monarchical language with God's equally important all-vulnerable nature (41 to 55 years).

A few respondents used open responses to reject any change of gendered language in liturgies. This group often affirmed a return to the TLM, and sometimes held concerns about feminism in church settings. One such respondent declared:

I am deeply offended by removal of male pronouns from the liturgy as I interpret it as a victory for feminists who have made my life a misery (56 to 70 years).

### 9.2.2 Renewal of liturgy

Liturgical renewal was a key theme of open responses. Many respondents, predominantly from older age groupings, expressed support for liturgical renewal and modernisation of the liturgy. Responses mentioned adapting

liturgy to reflect contemporary contexts, an end to liturgical fundamentalism, improved preaching, a greater role for women, and more creative and inclusive rituals. For instance, one such respondent noted:

Meaningful inclusive liturgy which engages spirit and heart and is related to the lives of the members of the community is vital (over 70 years).

Several respondents expressed how disengaging liturgy was a cause of distress and separation from the Church. For instance, a respondent wrote:

Liturgy has tremendous value for me but not when presented under the cloak of patriarchal narrow-minded dogmatism. Looking for a fresh liberating context that speaks to the vast opportunities for personal and communal spiritual growth of our times. Personally, I have a sense of being suffocated or gagged at local Mass (56 to 70 years).

By contrast, a smaller, younger cohort claimed to support greater respect for 'tradition', including the continuation of the TLM, Eucharist adoration, and more reverent liturgy. Some young respondents spoke passionately about the importance of traditional practices and the impact of the TLM on their faith. One such respondent wrote:

I am a practising Catholic. Been Catholic all my life. Lapsed practice in early twenties but came back to faithful practice when I was introduced to Traditional Latin mass (26 to 40 years).

There were responses that expressed concern that church leaders needed to do more to address deviations from the current translation of the Mass and Eucharistic irreverence. Eucharistic irreverence was mainly associated with a failure to show or treat the Eucharist with adequate respect during the Mass. For example, respondents mentioned: women on the altar, postures during Mass, and music choices. A few respondents mentioned restoring pre-Vatican II liturgies and disagreement with the 2021 restrictions on the celebration of the TLM (TC 2021). For example, a respondent stated:

The Church needs to re-introduce the missal of 1962 and the Traditional Latin Mass and rites and rituals (26 to 40 years).

### 9.2.3 Summary

There was strong support among respondents for liturgical renewal, including gender inclusive language in liturgy. There were however significant variations in

viewpoints between age groupings. Younger cohorts tended to be less supportive of liturgical reform and in the open questions advocated for the TLM.

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## 9.3 LGBTIQ+ inclusion

Respondents were asked 2 closed questions regarding the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people. These questions asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: (1) LGBTIQ persons must be fully included and

respected in all church activities; and (2) The sacrament of marriage should be extended to same sex couples. Open responses included comments on LGBTIQ+ inclusion in church activities and same sex marriage.



## 9.3.1 Inclusion in church activities

Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that 'LGBTIQ persons must be fully included and respected in all church activities'. Older respondents were significantly more likely to support the full inclusion and respect of LGBTIQ+ persons than younger respondents. Strong agreement/agreement ranged from 40% for respondents aged 18 to 40 years to 92% for respondents aged over 70 years (Figure 19).

The inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people in church activities was a common theme of open responses. Many respondents were highly supportive of the full inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people, emphasising the need for acceptance and empowerment. For example, one respondent stated:

The governance of the Church needs to get tougher on huge sins like capitalism and exploitation and get out of women's bodies ... There should be an acknowledgement that God made LGBTIQ+ people and God is neither mistaken nor cruel in doing this, therefore we are called to love and include (41 to 55 years).

Respondents who were supportive of the full inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people tended to reject church teachings on homosexuality. Some respondents wrote that they had reduced participation because of church teachings on gender and sexuality. For instance, this respondent recalled:

I am grateful for growing up Catholic. My faith was nurtured in family and parish. This love of my church makes it somewhat painful to walk away from, but I can't abide by positions on gender and sexuality (41 to 55 years).

By contrast, there was a smaller group of respondents that opposed or placed restrictions on the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people in church activities. Some of this cohort maintained that LGBTIQ+ people should be included, but that their inclusion should be dependent on their celibacy. For example, one respondent wrote:

LGBTIQ [people] should be very warmly welcomed to attend Mass, catechesis, and social events. As with any other Catholic who is not abiding by church Teaching, whether single or married, that may only participate in the Sacraments that accord with their lifestyle and the state of their soul (e.g., may not receive Communion unless baptised and in the state of grace) (26 to 40 years)

Respondents who identified as LGBTIQ+ or as having LGBTIQ+ family members tended to recount stories of harm and/or exclusion that adversely impacted their lives and faith participation. Two such respondents declared:

I feel as though I am not welcome as a woman and as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community (18 to 25 years).

The Church needs to be about love and accepting all of God's people, but when it ... discriminates against my sister, who is lesbian, then I feel excluded too. I can't be a part of something that does not accept all people the way that God made them (41 to 55 years).

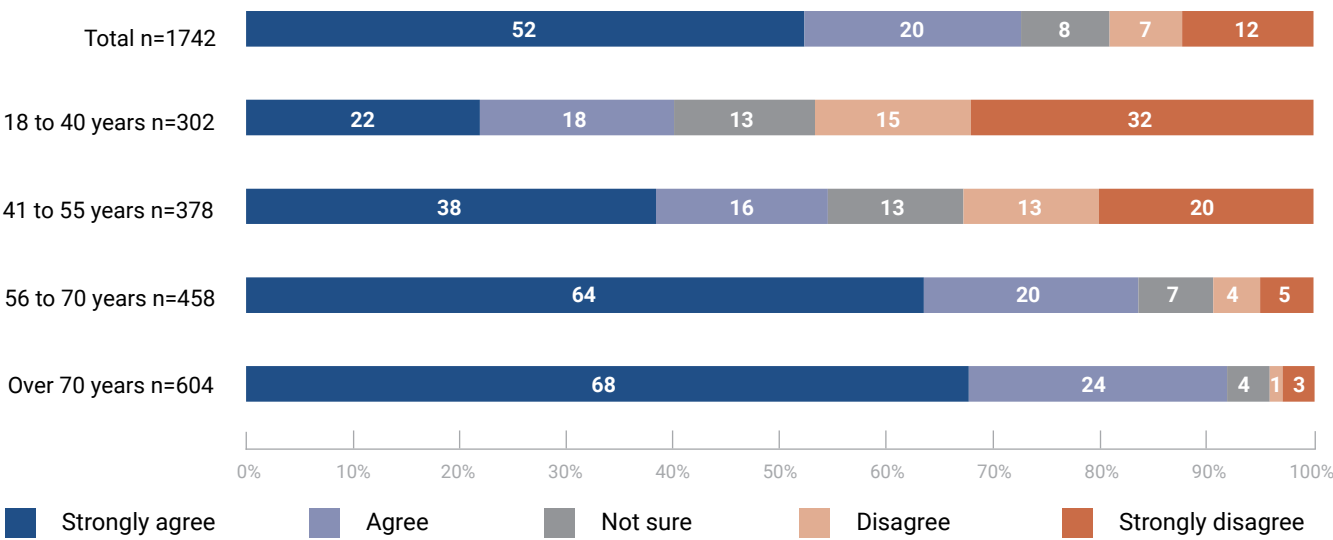
## 9.3.2 Support for same sex marriage

There was a lot less support for LGBTIQ+ people to be included in the sacrament of marriage than for their inclusion more generally. Less than half (48%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'The sacrament of marriage should be extended to same sex couples'.

Strong agreement/agreement varied with age, ranging from 18% of respondents aged 18 to 40 years to 61% of respondents aged over 70 years (Figure 20).

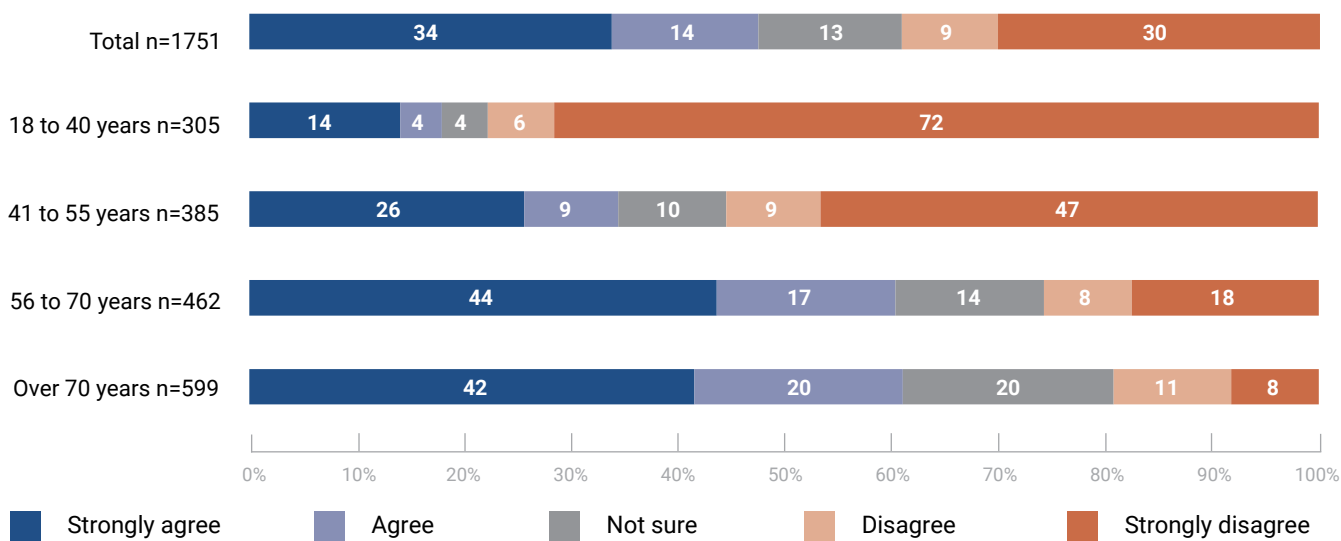
In open responses there was support for church teachings to be changed and

**Figure 19: Percentage by age ‘LGBTIQ persons must be fully included and respected in all church activities’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 20: Percentage by age ‘The sacrament of marriage should be extended to same sex couples’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

for LGBTIQ+ people to be included in the sacrament of marriage. For example, a respondent said:

I identify as a Catholic however I rarely attend Mass and disagree with many of the Church's teaching, particularly on the role of women in the Church, birth control, same-sex marriage and people who identify as LGBTQI (56 to 70 years).

A few respondents who identified as LGBTIQ+ wrote about the harm they experienced because of their exclusion from the sacrament of marriage. One such respondent noted:

The abuse and effects that I suffered and continue to suffer as a lesbian ... God has never abandoned me, yet this church has damaged me greatly and abandoned me over and over. My own children question the laws of this church and wonder why I am excluded from the sacrament of marriage due to my love for another human being. I pray that the Holy Spirit will find a way to rebuild this church and start again in a

more accepting climate where all people are treated equal in every way (41 to 55 years).

Several respondents used open responses to express opposition to the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people in the sacrament of marriage. One such respondent wrote:

I think women advocating for reform in the Church's teachings on reproductive "rights", priestly ordination and same-sex marriage are deeply misguided and misinformed about what the Church's teachings are (26 to 40 years).

Respondents who expressed this viewpoint tended to advocate for a return to what they understood as traditional values and/or biblical truth. For instance, a respondent stated:

Catholic Church needs to go through a radical reform, but a reform to fully traditional values (man + woman= only form of marriage blessed by God) as it is described in the Bible and as it was before (41 to 55 years).

### 9.3.3 Summary

There was majority support for the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people in church activities. However, there was less support for their inclusion in the sacrament of marriage. Strong age cohort trends meant younger respondents were significantly less likely to support LGBTIQ+ inclusion than older respondents.

Open responses frequently reported the negative impact of church teachings on

gender and sexuality on their church participation. This included respondents who identified as being LGBTIQ+ who recounted stories of harm and/or exclusion.

Respondents who rejected the idea of including LGBTIQ+ people tended to be supportive of church teachings and advocated for a return to traditional values and/or biblical truth.

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## 9.4 Marriage, reproductive decisions, and family

Respondents were asked 2 closed questions concerning issues associated with family life. These questions asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: (1) 'women need to have freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions'; and (2) 'remarriage

after civil divorce should be allowed'. Respondents also wrote about these issues in their open responses. Other matters concerning family life, namely the involvement and inclusion of children, young people, and families in the Church, were a further theme in open responses.

## 9.4.1 Sexual and reproductive health and freedom of conscience

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that 'Women need to have freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions'. 7 in 10 (69%) of respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed. Agreement with the statement increased strongly with age. At least 8 in 10 respondents aged over 56 years strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, however only 1 in 3 (33%) respondents aged 18 to 40 years agreed (Figure 21).

The issue of sexual and reproductive health was a significant theme of open responses. There were, however, diverse interpretations of what freedom or use of conscience meant in terms of decision-making. Many respondents mentioned supporting women's right to freedom of conscience with regard to sexual and reproductive health outside the restrictions of church doctrine. In these responses personal experience tended to be used to explain conscience as an individual's process of discernment and judgement. For instance, one respondent expounded:

Reproductive issues are such a challenge for us – I can now see the point of the Church's view, but I never followed it myself, I used contraception and could never judge a current-day woman for doing the same (56 to 70 years).

Several respondents mentioned the need for church teachings to better reflect the complex reality of women's lives, as well as the situations women negotiate in life decision-making. Some respondents referred

to grappling with concerns associated with family planning, especially methods of contraception. For example, a respondent noted:

I am a woman in her late 40's who feels unable to physically or financially cope with more children. I believe that women at this age or who feel like they can't manage more children should be able to make the decision to prevent more children. I have a sister in her mid-40's with 8 children who is unable to cope with more children but doesn't want to go against church teaching. I wish that there was an option for her that would be supported by the Church (41 to 55 years).

There were responses that interpreted freedom of conscience as a choice within the parameters set out in Catholic teachings. For instance, one respondent wrote:

Freedom of conscience is not freedom to do whatever you feel like, it's freedom to seek and follow God's will in your life. All people should be able to participate in Mass, however we are required to be in a state of grace to receive holy communion – a baseline would be following the Ten Commandments – Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. Clearly many people are not aware of this, the Church needs to be much better at teaching the truth and assisting people to live it (56 to 70 years).

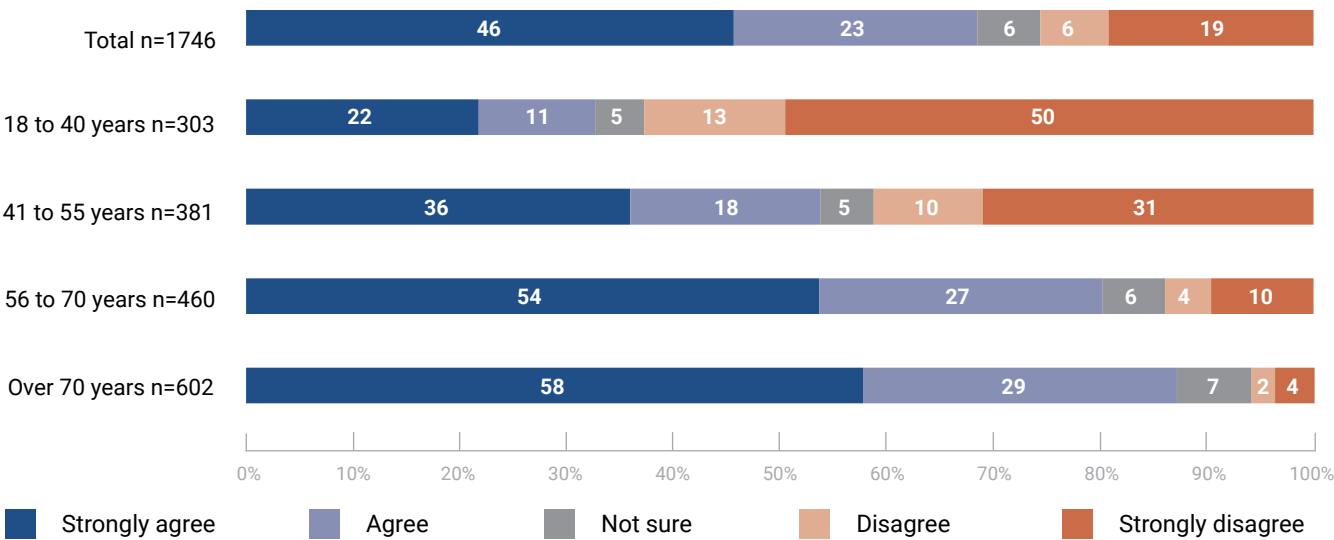
## 9.4.2 Remarriage after civil divorce

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Remarriage after civil divorce should be allowed'. Results varied strongly by age grouping. Older respondents were a lot more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than younger respondents. Indeed, fewer than half of respondents aged 18 to

40 years (25%) and 41 to 55 years (47%) strongly agreed or agreed, with strong agreement among respondents aged 56 to 70 years (79%) and over 70 years (91%). (Figure 22).

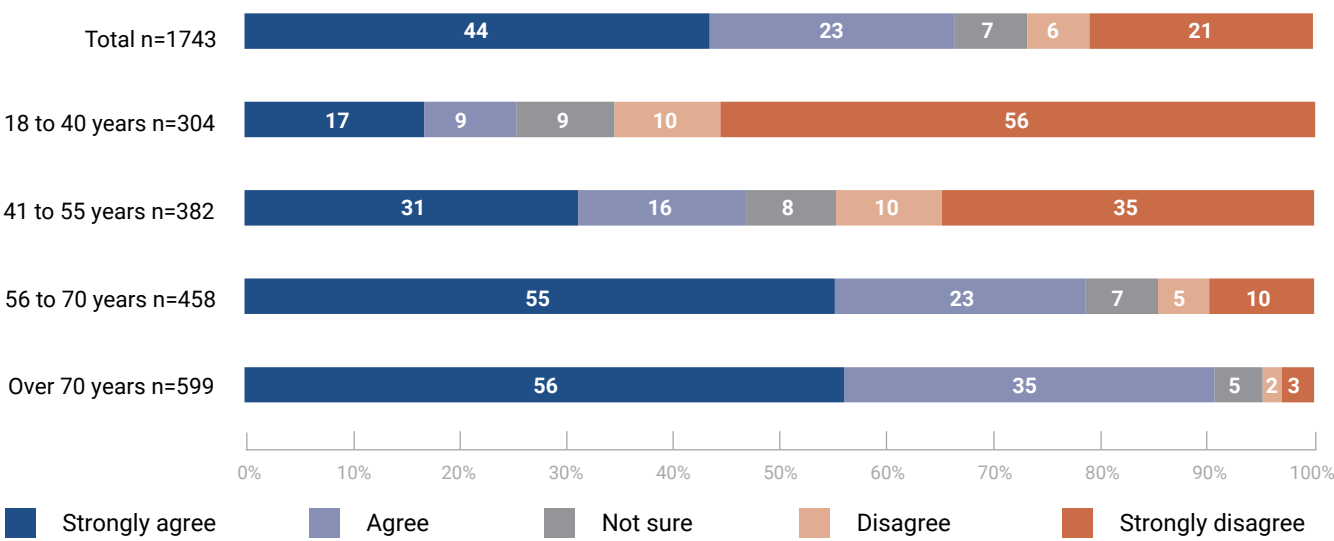
Many open responses which mentioned teachings associated with remarriage after divorce supported reform,

**Figure 21: Percentage by age ‘Women need to have freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 22: Percentage by age ‘Remarriage after civil divorce should be allowed’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

particularly in situations of gender violence, including domestic and family violence. For instance, one respondent wrote:

Regular Mass attendee but I struggle with the Church's ... judgemental attitudes towards women who are divorced because of varying forms of violence, who then re partner and are denied full rights of the Church (over 70 years).

Some respondents recounted personal experiences of being shunned as divorced women. One such respondent wrote about her experience when trying to escape domestic violence in her marriage:

When trying to find community after a domestic violence relationship the homily was on the evils of divorce. Around the same time a newspaper article by a prominent cleric blamed the woman for the breakdown of a marriage, which further traumatised me. The Church abandoned me in my greatest hour of need (56 to 70 years).

Another respondent shared her situation and mentioned not feeling she belonged in her parish:

I haven't attended Mass for a few years. After my husband left me, I didn't feel I belonged anymore. It was hard to keep taking my young children to Mass on my own and also knowing I was in a failed marriage. I felt like I didn't fit in. I have a higher education degree in theology / religious education ... I feel connected to

the Catholic social service mission but entering into parish liturgy feels like an anachronism ... it just seems that so much about Catholicism seems disconnected from life. I might go back to Mass sometime. I miss it a bit. I'm still not sure I'd fit in to any community though (41 to 55 years).

A few open responses mentioned the need for greater availability and flexibility regarding the process of marriage annulment, particularly in situations of domestic violence. For example:

Annulment should be accessible not only to the wealthy and should be available to survivors of domestic violence (41 to 55 years).

A smaller group of respondents expressed opposition to remarriage after divorce and used open responses to emphasise church teachings on marriage as an unbreakable union between a man and a woman. For example, one respondent asserted:

Divorce can destroy the family and the Church needs to help people get through difficult times in marriage as most are people who think they have fallen out of love, and they just don't want to do the hard stuff that makes a marriage ... We need more prayer, more priests that love God ... Jesus never took the easy way ... Stop with the easy, life is difficult and that is what makes strong faithful men and woman (56 to 70 years).

### 9.4.3 Children, young people, and families

The involvement and inclusion of children, young people and families in church activities was a central theme of open responses. Many respondents expressed significant concerns regarding the relationship between young people, children, families, and the Church. Unlike other issues raised, there was a high level of agreement that the Church needs to do more to be relevant for children, families, and young people. For example, one respondent wrote:

Children and teenagers [are] the future of the Church. This is my biggest concern about the Church. This is the number one issue that the Church needs to focus on. As much Resources as possible need to be put into children's ministries and making children/teens/young adults welcome/included/valued. We send our children to a Christian school because the kids are practicing Christians unlike Catholic schools. There are very few children at Mass, what are we going to do about this?? (26 to 40 years).

Several respondents wrote from personal experience regarding challenges involved with raising young people in the contemporary Church. This respondent noted the lack of support for motherhood, and family ministry and formation in parish life:

We have only had one stream of pastoral support through the nuns who were attached to our Parish. Unfortunately, they have since been moved. Our pastoral care services in the Parish are now non-existent. I have been turning to other Christian churches with fantastic resources to support mothers in their vocation. My children have zero faith formation support from the Parish (children's liturgy has been suspended, there never was Sunday school). As a Catholic mum, I have never felt so isolated and alone. I do not believe the Church understands the needs of mothers nor is there interest to support mothers in raising the next generation of Catholics who live their faith with fervour (26 to 40 years).

A few respondents noted that clergy could present a barrier to family participation. Respondents who identified as single parents frequently reported finding parish life fraught. For example, a respondent stated:

The Catholic churches near me are inaccessible. Nearly every lay-person

activity advertised in the newsletter is held in business hours and presumes we all live in two parent families. Single parents who need to work full-time cannot join in (41 to 55 years).

A few respondents noted the importance of intergenerational dialogue and transmission of faith. One such respondent raised the concern that a lack of gender equality and adequate role models was turning girls and young women away from the Church.

Sometimes I choose to attend a women and justice-focused Uniting Church community rather than a Catholic Church gathering on a Sunday morning. I really like their gender inclusivity and that makes me more confident to include my little granddaughters, who otherwise experience a constant denial of gender inclusiveness in the Catholic Church. How sad for little Australian girls growing up in the 21st century in Australia ... the Church that is a strong part of their cultural heritage, denies gender equality – this church promotes the misconception that God is a man, that only a man can say Mass or preach. What are we teaching our little girls by including them in these gender-biased ceremonies? (56 to 70 years).

## 9.4.4 Summary

There was majority support among respondents for women having freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions and a change of church teaching to allow remarriage after civil divorce.

Open responses called for church leaders to better recognise diversity and the complexity of life decision-making. They expressed support for freedom of conscience and remarriage after civil divorce, particularly in situations of domestic and family violence.

However, some respondents rejected any suggestion of change or compromise when it came to church doctrine.

A key theme was the inclusion of children, young people, and families in church activities. Open responses highlighted that the Church needs to do more to be relevant for children, particularly girls, for families, and young people, including offering pastoral and practical support for mothers, family ministry, and formation in parish life.



## 9.5 Misuse of power

Respondents were asked 3 closed questions about clericalism and the adequacy of church leaders' responses to abuse. These questions asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: (1) 'Clericalism (the misuse of authority and power by male clerics) is damaging the Catholic Church'; (2) 'Church leaders are not doing enough

to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse'; and (3) 'Church leaders need to address other forms of abuse, including abuse of power and spiritual harm'. A significant number of open responses commented on abuses and misuses of power and authority and their impacts.

### 9.5.1 Clericalism

Most respondents in Australia (79%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Clericalism (the misuse of authority and power by male clerics) is damaging the Catholic Church'. Older respondents were significantly more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than younger respondents. Agreement ranged from about half (52%) of those aged 18 to 40 years to 94% of respondents aged over 70 years (Figure 23).

Open responses were highly critical of clericalism. Many respondents, mostly from older cohorts, used open responses to comment on clericalism and related impacts. For instance, one such respondent asserted:

*Clericalism is the scourge of the Catholic Church and must be broken down in order to rebuild a church with a sustainable, relevant, and inclusive future (56 to 70 years).*

Several respondents referred to the destructive impact of clericalism on faith, participation, and communities. For example:

*Priests seem to be able to say whatever they like, be it unkind, unjust, hurtful, ill-informed, or downright rude - without any consequences at all. This is the cause of many good people leaving churches. One would expect a higher standard of interpersonal human behaviour from someone whose job is pastoral and sacramental ministry (over 70 years).*

The outward trappings of clericalism were understood to compound power imbalances between laity and clerics. Responses criticised practices such as kissing bishops' rings, lavish robes, bishop's crook and mitre, and incense. Some called for honorifics and titles such as "father" to be removed from use. One such respondent proposed:

*Priestly robes should go. They are ancient symbols that put up a barrier in the modern context of the Church today. It separates the priest from the people (41 to 55 years).*

A few respondents that mentioned autocratic clerical governance mentioned parish priests. These responses frequently called for greater accountability for parish priests, with robust reporting structures when problems occur. For example, a respondent wrote:

*Parish priests should be mentored and held accountable for their actions. Parishioners must be listened to when they have doubts or serious issues with their parish priest (56 to 70 years).*

Open responses repeatedly stated that cultural change was urgently needed to address clericalism. They proposed better education and professional supervision for clergy, structural change, and more transparent and accountable governance practices. For example, a respondent suggested:

*Every ordained man needs to be required to engage in regular spiritual direction as professional supervision. Parish and archdiocesan finances need to be transparent. Overseas clergy need to be appropriately enculturated. Parishioners need to be listened to and taken seriously and supported, especially women in ministry and leadership positions, when issues are raised regarding inappropriate clerical behaviour, be it bullying, misogyny, clericalism. Formation for the priesthood and the diaconate needs to be addressed. Many seminarians on their pastoral placement and many newly ordained priests and deacons come to parishes with a sense of entitlement (56 to 70 years).*

Respondents repeatedly linked clericalism with women's marginalisation in the Church. One such respondent stated:

The lack of any change in paternalistic, clerical decision making and control, even at a local parish level is disheartening and made me re-evaluate how my experience of the Catholic faith belittles, dismisses, diminishes, and excludes women. I am at a point of disassociating from the church and my faith, which causes me considerable sadness. Misogyny must come to an end (41 to 55 years).

The survey instrument defined clericalism as 'the misuse of authority and power by male clerics', but some respondents suggested a broader definition was needed. These responses typically argued that the problem of clericalism was situated in the theological understanding that ordained clerics are set apart from the laity as unique, superior, and closer to God than non-clerics. This positioned clericalism as a broader damaging culture among the laity as well as male clerics. For instance, one respondent noted:

A recognition that we are all on this journey of faith together as equals, so that undue pressure is not placed on the laity to fulfil the wishes of the clergy or for that matter of anyone in authority in the Church. We need to recognise that there is clericalism too among the laity (over 70 years).

There were a few responses that asserted clericalism was not a problem. Some of these responses blamed feminism for power abuses in the Church and/or called for more masculine priests. One such respondent wrote:

The Church needs to affirm God's beautiful plan for motherhood and fatherhood and stop trying to follow the dark ideology of feminism which is destroying women's lives ... Women want holy masculine priests; we and our husbands want to be shepherded - we hate having to search far and wide for good holy priests (41 to 55 years).

## 9.5.2 Sexual and spiritual abuse

Exactly 7 in 10 (70%) respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Church leaders are not doing enough to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse'. There were strong variations in responses by age cohort. Less than half (46%) of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed, increasing to 58% of respondents aged 41 to 55 years, 78% of respondents aged 56 to 70 years, and 82% of respondents aged over 70 years (Figure 24).

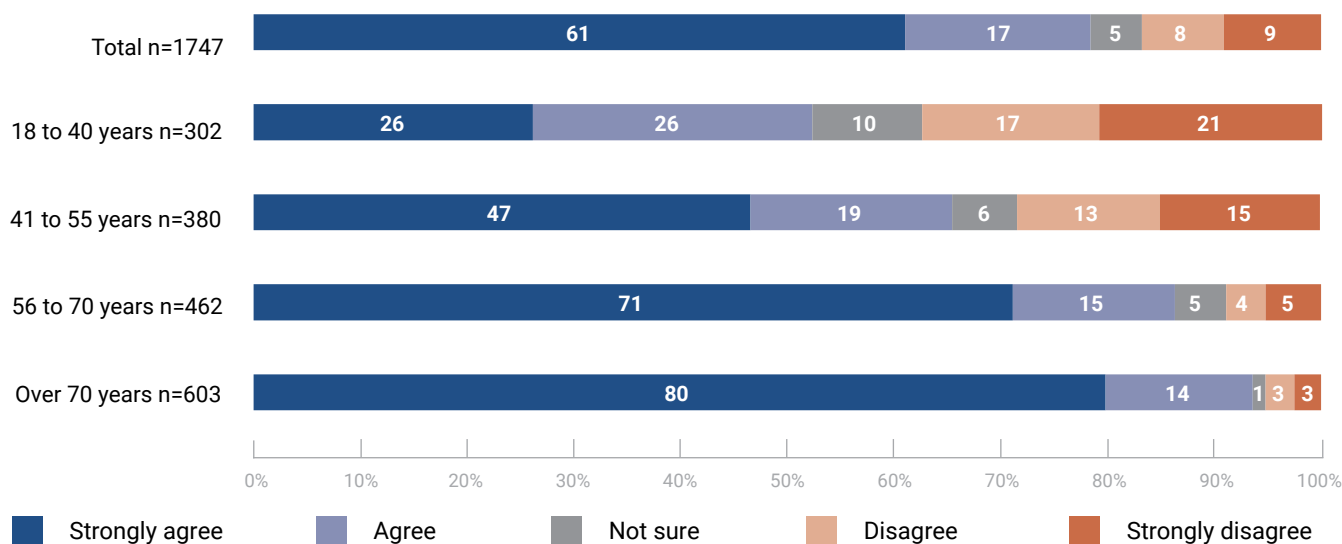
There was stronger agreement when respondents were asked about other forms of abuse, including abuses of power and spiritual harm. More than 8 out of 10 (82%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Church leaders need to do more to address other forms of abuse, including abuses of power and spiritual harm'. There was increasing strong agreement/agreement with age. Some 59%

of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, compared with 95% of respondents aged over 70 years (Figure 25).

Open responses were frequently used to express disappointment and frustration at the lack of action regarding the crisis of clergy perpetrated child sexual abuse (CPCSA) in the Catholic Church and associated cover-up. For example, these respondents wrote:

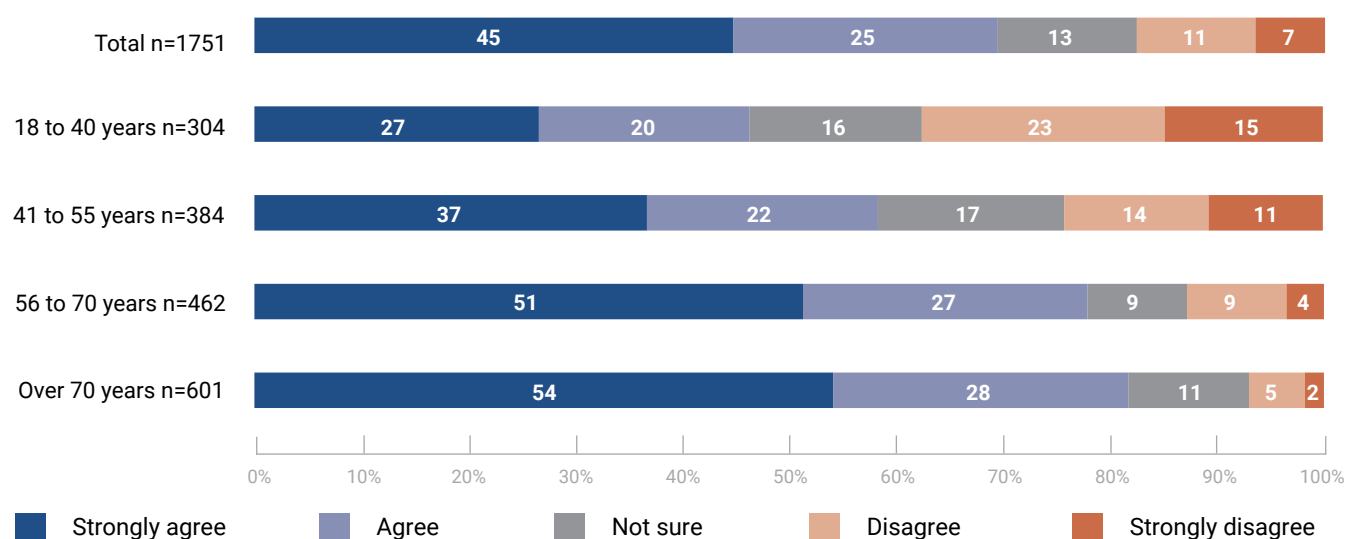
The Church visible has done disgustingly little to deal with sexual abuse in the Church. This needs to be radically dealt with. Men in positions of power who abuse vulnerable people are despicable, but it is made worse by the fact that these men represent God. Shame on them and all those who covered up the abuse (18 to 25 years).

**Figure 23: Percentage by age ‘Clericalism (the misuse of authority and power by male clerics) is damaging the Catholic Church’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 24: Percentage by age ‘Church leaders are not doing enough to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

I feel as if I am “enabling” or ignoring or even pretending the Church is not guilty of these crimes, by attending church. I am aware that not ALL Priests are involved in the abuse of children over the years and may be tarred with the same brush, but considering the Church has not made a statement to admit its cover up and moving around of guilty priests, I do find it hard to be a part of the Catholic Community (41 to 55 years).

There were a small group of respondents who directly linked their decision to stop attending Mass with the crisis of CPCS. For instance, one respondent stated:

No longer attending due to the sexual abuse of children and the response to the Royal Commission in Australia (over 70 years).

In some cases, open responses were used for disclosures of physical, sexual, spiritual, and/or psychological abuse by church leaders, including bishops, priests, nuns, and teachers in Catholic schools. For example, one such respondent reported:

I am active, attend mass each week, actively involved in ministry within the parish even though I and my family have been psychologically abused by a priest and like sexual abuse victims my allegations have been dismissed without thorough investigation. Perspective of priest taken over mine. Priest behaviour protected (56 to 70 years).

A few respondents recounted personal experiences of harm related to vicarious trauma. For example:

Broken. I'm so disappointed in the hierarchy of the Church ... I have worked alongside a dozen priests and some of the issues that I've dealt with are - grooming, paedophilia, ego, power, mind-games, an unwillingness to work with the wonderful parishioners, selfishness, clericalism (41 to 55 years).

Some respondents shared the experience of knowing a perpetrator. One such respondent recalled:

I recently had a Catholic friend arrested for misconduct with a child. That's the

third time its happened that someone I know is arrested. So now I feel a lot of hesitation about being involved in the Church. But I think the Eucharist is important. I think the community is important too but when this keeps happening it makes me doubt the community (26 to 40 years).

Many respondents highlighted that the way in which abuse is dealt with in the Church is highly problematic. Some mentioned that the reporting of abuse was still being hampered by inadequate resources, misuses of power and authority, and a lack of transparency. For instance, one respondent wrote:

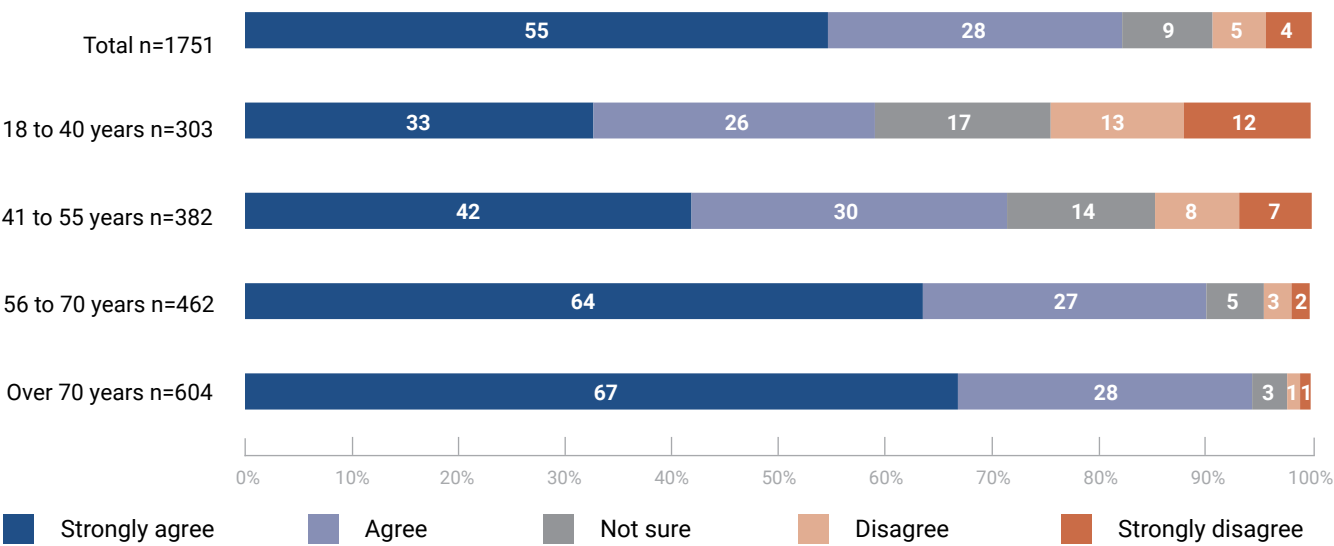
Male patriarchy and domination that led to fundamental, monetary, and historical violence against women and parishioners as well as the flourishing of child violence and child sexual abuse in the Catholic system. There has been no adequate and trustworthy apology and the same structures, laws, policies, and culture still exist ... This still leads to disrespect and disregard in the Catholic diaspora towards women and equality of outcomes including recognition, equal pay, and equal say (41 to 55 years).

Responses that mentioned the crisis of abuse in the Church often asserted that church leaders needed to do much more to address the resultant harm. These responses called for the provision of assistance for people who have experienced harm, timely removal of perpetrators, compensation for victim/survivors, and help for those suffering for vicarious trauma. For example, a respondent noted:

I feel strongly about the bishops needing to more practically assist whole parishes that have been wrecked by clergy sexual abuse. Generations of people have lost faith and belief in the church hierarchy and have walked away hurt and injured (over 70 years).

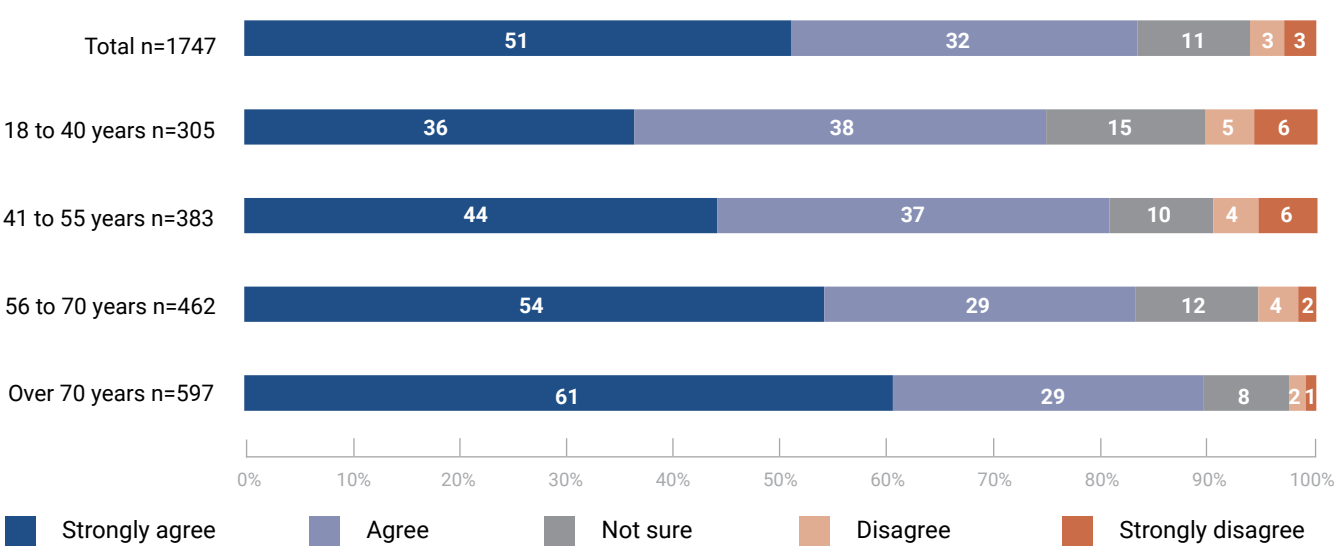
A very small proportion of responses that mentioned abuse maintained it had been dealt with or never truly existed in church contexts.

**Figure 25: Percentage by age ‘Church leaders need to do more to address other forms of abuse, including abuses of power and spiritual harm’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

**Figure 26: Percentage by age ‘Catholic social teaching is a good resource for social justice action’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

### 9.5.3 Summary

There was strong agreement among respondents that clericalism is damaging the Church, and church leaders are not doing enough to respond and address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse and other forms of harm, including abuses of power and spiritual harm. However, there were strong age cohort differences which indicated that respondents from younger cohorts were less likely to agree than older respondents.

Open responses also commented on clericalism, misuses of power and authority, sexual abuse, and other forms of abuse, including abuses of power and spiritual harm and associated impacts. Several respondents

used open responses to disclose experiences of harm and vicarious trauma.

There was a consistent call for church leaders to do more to address misuses of power, including the implementation of transparent and accountable reporting practices and better provision of assistance for people who have experienced harm. There were a very small number of open responses that mentioned that clericalism, sexual abuse, and other forms of harm were not present in church settings. Some of these responses claimed feminism and feminist women were the primary cause of harm in the Church.

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## 9.6 Catholic social teaching

Respondents were asked a closed question related to the utility of Catholic social teaching. The question asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed that 'Catholic social teaching is a good resource for social justice action'. This and other topics related to social justice were a key theme of open responses.

More than 8 in 10 (83%) of respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Catholic social teaching is a good resource for social justice action'. A very small portion of respondents (6%) disagreed/strongly disagreed. Older respondents were more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than younger respondents, with three-quarter (75%) of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreeing or agreeing, compared to 9 in 10 (90%) of respondents aged over 70 (Figure 26).

Although, in open responses, there was a consistent call for greater action and commitment from church leadership regarding issues related to ecology, economic justice, and poverty, only a few responses directly linked social justice commitment with Catholic social teaching. One such respondent wrote:

I am a discerning Catholic whose whole professional life has been involved in Catholic education and adult formation in Australia. I do not participate in parish life as I am opposed to male-only leadership roles within the liturgical life of the Church. I consider myself a leader within the Church and have led funerals, anointing of the sick and baptisms of stillborn infants. I am a big fan of Catholic Social Teaching and have been involved in advocacy and action my whole life. I keep updated with study, reflection, and prayer (56 to 70 years).

A group of mainly older respondents expressed the notion that the Church and its leaders needed to engage more effectively with wider society and better advocate and act on issues of social justice. For instance, one respondent reported:

The Church needs to become a movement again rather than a monument. This involves the hierarchy loosening the reins and the laity stepping up to take on action and responsibility. Some of the problems stem from the outsourcing of religious responsibilities for teaching, worship, and social action (56 to 70 years).

By contrast, there were some, mostly younger respondents, that criticised Catholic social teaching and action as a politicisation of faith and doctrinal teaching. For instance, a respondent stated:

If by Catholic social teaching you mean climate change, sexual liberalism and woke

values then NO, the Church doesn't need these things. In fact, these things are an abuse of the faith and are used to abuse the faithful in the name of women (usually) who are usurping power to themselves. The abuse that continues in the Church today is not only sexual but moral and doctrinal (26 to 40 years).

## 9.6.1 Summary

There was strong support for Catholic social teaching as a good resource for social justice. Some open responses raised issues related to ecology, economic justice, and poverty; however, few directly linked social justice

commitment with Catholic social teaching. A small group of predominantly younger respondents criticised Catholic social teaching and action as a politicisation of faith and doctrinal teaching.

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## 9.7 Climate action

Respondents were asked a closed question about whether climate action should be addressed by the Church. The question asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed that 'climate change is an urgent challenge that the whole church must address'.

Almost 7 in 10 (68%) respondents in Australia strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Climate change is an urgent challenge that the whole church must address'. Strong agreement/agreement increased with age. About a third (35%) of respondents aged 18 to 40 strongly agreed or agreed, compared to half (50%) of respondents aged 41 to 55 years and 8 in 10 (79%) of those aged 56 to 70 years. Almost 9 in 10 (88%) of respondents aged over 70 agreed or strongly agreed that climate change should be addressed by the Church (Figure 27).

Climate action was an important theme of open responses, but respondents were divided when

it came to ecological challenges. On one hand, several respondents emphasised the need for the Church, including parishes and church organisations, to urgently address ecological issues. For example, a respondent said:

I think Pope Francis' document *Laudato Si'* is very important, and it has prompted our parish to register as an Earthcare Parish and I strongly believe in ecological conversion (56 to 70 years).

On the other hand, a group of mostly younger respondents expressed opposition to the idea that climate and ecological concerns should be addressed by the Church. For example:

We as a church have forgotten the supernatural elements of our faith. We are not a social justice or climate change church. We must hold fast the truth no matter how unpopular (26 to 40 years).

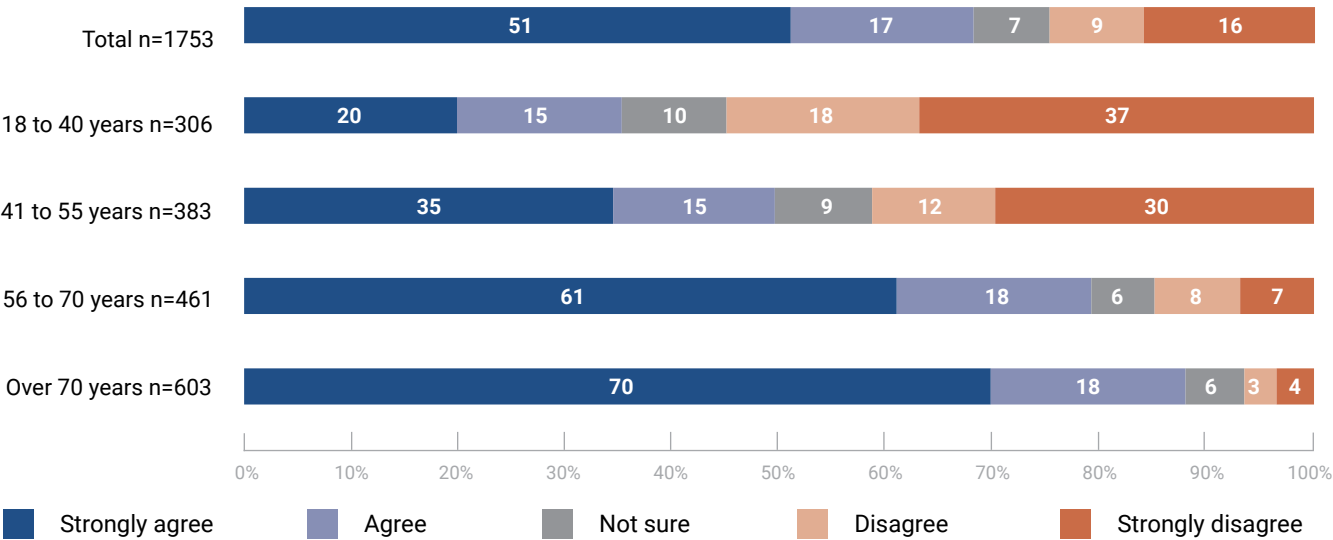


### 9.7.1 Summary

There was majority agreement among respondents that climate action should be addressed by the Church. Support however varied dramatically, with younger respondents a lot less likely to agree than older age groupings.

Open responses were split when it came to the challenge of climate change. While many respondents were supportive of action by individuals, church organisations, and parishes, a cohort of predominantly young respondents opposed the notion that climate change should be addressed by the Church.

**Figure 27: Percentage by age ‘Climate change is an urgent challenge that the whole church must address’.**



Source: International Survey of Catholic Women (McEwan et al. 2022).

## 9.8 A humanitarian approach

There was no closed question that addressed humanitarian issues. However, open responses frequently highlighted humanitarian concerns, including the need for Catholic faith practices to be explicitly linked with a humanitarian approach. Many responses raised the issue of ministry to marginalised groups, especially those impacted by poverty. For instance, one young respondent stated:

I believe we absolutely need a church of the poor, for the poor (26 to 40 years).

There were several respondents that referred to a need to prioritise parish-based ministry for the more vulnerable members of society. For example:

The Church should focus on bringing people together to build both the community within the parish and extend support to the local community through socially supporting vulnerable members of society e.g., elderly, isolated, poor (26 to 40 years).

Some respondents mentioned the good work that the Church was already doing in this area. A respondent explained:

Sometimes we can be very critical of the Church, but the people who minister to those in prisons; visit hospitals and the elderly in their homes; work in St Vincent de Paul shops; look after refugees; fight for the rights of the oppressed; and do so much good behind the scene especially when there is no one to be the voice of the vulnerable etc, then I see such goodness at work, and I feel heartened. They are the hands, feet, voice, and heart of Christ (over 70 years).

A few respondents who drew attention to poverty and humanitarian issues understood the Church as having an important and strategic role to play related to food security, homelessness, domestic and family violence, human rights advocacy, refugees and asylum seekers advocacy, and situations of war and conflict such as in Ukraine. For instance, a respondent wrote:

Addressing colonial structures in churches, advocating for refugees and asylum seekers (especially those who already have UN refugee status), addressing homelessness in their local areas, and speaking out against the invasion of Ukraine (41 to 55 years).

Conversely, there were a small number of open responses that were very critical of priests and bishops engaging with humanitarian issues or political agendas. A cohort of predominantly younger respondents advocated for the Church to be separated from the world, with church leaders more strongly affirming church teachings instead of engaging with humanitarian issues, social justice, climate change, or gender inequality. For example, one such respondent wrote:

The Church is more interested in worldly social justice causes than spiritual works. So many topics of spiritual importance are no longer preached, yet climate change, gender theory, medical choices around vaccines, wars in other countries, feminists' causes are often preached about. The Church is there to save souls, not lead them to hell, which is exactly what is happening (41 to 55 years).

### 9.8.1 Summary

Open responses raised the issue of linking Catholic faith practices with a humanitarian approach and ministry to marginalised groups, especially those impacted by poverty. However, a small group of predominantly younger respondents supported the notion

of the Church as separate from the secular world. In open responses they distinguished a boundary for church leaders to be strong advocates of church teachings and not to express support for humanitarian issues.

## 9.9 Inclusion of marginalised people

Open responses addressed the theme of the inclusion of marginalised people in church communities and activities.

Many open responses raised the issue of including and ministering to people on the edges of the Church and society, especially those marginalised by gender, sexuality, ability, race, and age. For example, these respondents raised the issue of:

Inclusiveness at parish level of those with disabilities, the very poor, the mentally ill (26 to 40 years).

More work to make our parishes more inclusive (i.e., poor and marginalised people, mentally ill people, etc.) (56 to 70 years).

Racism, sexism, misogyny, poverty, clericalism, and ableism were identified as barriers to inclusivity. These respondents wrote:

Racism and sexism are a big problem for the Catholic Church and if we don't address this, we will have no church (41 to 55 years).

The Church should be more vocal in speaking out against wealth inequality, racism, and sexism (56 to 70 years).

A few responses mentioned that those caring for others should also be included and supported by church ministries. For instance, a respondent noted:

There are an increasing number of people within the Church who are full-time carers, either for elderly parents, spouses, or children with special needs. The Church as a whole, not just its leadership, needs to find ways to minister to carers (26 to 40 years).

This respondent reported how not being included impacted their sense of belonging:

My neurodivergent children have been failed by the Catholic education system, which has also affected my feeling of belonging in the Catholic Church (26 to 40 years).

Some respondents connected the need for inclusivity with the message of the gospel. For example, a respondent stated:

I am a 'rusted-on' Catholic: still attending mass a few times a week. I am unhappy with the male dominated church leadership and am praying for change that would see a more inclusive welcoming church based on the example of Christ (56 to 70 years).

There were open responses that directly addressed the issue of the inclusion of First Nations people in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A few respondents identified themselves as First Nations people and one respondent wrote:

We need more resources, and we need to be recognised by the Church and not just in a corner. The Church in Australia will not be the church Jesus wants until Aboriginal people have made their contribution and until that contribution has been JOYFULLY received - are we being Joyfully received I don't think so (41 to 55 years).

Some open responses highlighted the need to learn from First Nations people, while others mentioned reconciliation and continued acknowledgement that the land now called Australia was never ceded. These respondents raised the issues of:

Apologising for the Catholic Church's role in colonialism especially of our First Nations people in Australia (26 to 40 years).

Reconciliation with and Inclusion of First Nations people at all levels of church life and leadership (over 70 years).

Many respondents mentioned the need to include groups impacted by church teachings on sexual and reproductive health and marriage. One such respondent wrote:

I am in a heterosexual marriage with two children. My faith and church participation has not been a place of exclusion in any way and hence I have a healthy relationship of receiving and service. However, unless our Catholic Church actively includes all it will continue to be a place perceived as one where you must tick the boxes first before you fully belong (41 to 55 years).

A smaller group of respondents used open responses to express their resistance to a church inclusive of groups for those marginalised by church teachings on sexual and reproductive health and marriage. They called for the Church to be set apart from secular society and closed off from those not strictly committed to church teachings. One respondent explained:

Being a member of the Catholic Church is optional, if the church's teachings don't 'suit' someone that doesn't mean the Church has to change to suit them. They have the choice to stay and obey or leave - we were all given free will. And we all know about having cake and eating it too; it just doesn't work! (26 to 40 years).

## 9.9.1 Summary

The issue of inclusion was an important theme of open responses. Responses tended to highlight the need for inclusion in church communities and ministries of those marginalised by gender, sexuality, ability, race, and age, as well as groups who feel excluded

by church teachings. Some respondents, however, expressed that the Church needed to be set apart from secular society and closed off from those not strictly committed to church teachings.

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## 9.10 Formation of laity

Open responses mentioned the formation of laity as a significant issue to be addressed by church leadership. However, there were different views expressed on the content and delivery of formative experiences.

A group of respondents claimed church leadership needed to provide formative experiences that prioritised catechesis on Eucharistic reverence, sin, and the "truth" of Catholic doctrine. For example, these respondents wrote:

They need to address the lack of catechesis of the true Catholic Faith as founded by Jesus Christ. The infiltration of our church by wolves in sheep's clothing are damaging the eternal souls of the precious children of Christ (41 to 55 years).

The lack of preaching on sin, fornication, contraception is a mortal sin. Church leadership needs to address the lack of moral courage to preach the truth, the lack of silence in the Church, the lack of beauty in our churches and reverence of the Blessed Sacrament. The Holy sacrifice of the Mass has been butchered (41 to 55 years).

More respondents, however, expressed a need for sound formation in homilies and parish settings. These respondents wrote:

I am active in my parish ... I run discussion groups in the parish, but I am often choosing not to go to Sunday Liturgy as I find some of the priest's homilies do not reflect a sufficient knowledge of Biblical interpretation (over 70 years).

How about we start with proper adult formation and Catechesis, access to regular ongoing marriage support and formation, including Catechesis of the Good Shepherd as a priority to form children in the faith as they undertake their Sacramental journeys (26 to 40 years).

A few respondents highlighted the need for women to be included in theological and seminary training, as teachers and students. A respondent mentioned the need for:

Equitable access to adult theological learning opportunities (41 to 55 years).

The education of children and young people was understood as a priority. For example, a respondent wrote:

The encouragement of young people to take active roles in the Church community. Ongoing knowledge of theology, liturgy, music to be provided and encouraged at parish level (over 70 years).

The type of education provided in Catholic schools was raised by a few respondents. Consistent with other issues, the views expressed were somewhat divergent. Some respondents mentioned appealed for Catholic education to be grounded in the principles of Catholic social teaching. For example:

My grandchildren are about to embark on a Catholic education. My fear is that

the dumbing down that characterises the newer fundamentalist form of Catholicism, and the loss of genuine social conscience that I associated with the Church, will mean a very poor experience (over 70 years).

In contrast, another group of responses proposed that Catholic doctrinal teaching, Sacraments, and rituals be prioritised. For instance:

Catholic schools are Catholic in name only. They need to go back to being Christ centred, with weekly adoration and Mass. Not enough is being done to support the role of parents and the Church at these education centres (18 to 25 years).

## 9.10.1 Summary

A significant theme of open responses was the need for improved lay formation. Responses mentioned a need for more robust homilies, better access to theological

education, and the catechism to be taught in parishes and in Catholic schools. Opinions on how formation should be structured varied between responses.

## 9.11 Church leadership and governance

A key theme of open responses was the organisation and culture of leadership and governance in the Church. Concerns raised included: clergy leadership; co-responsibility

in governance and decision-making; transparency and accountability; economic management; and employment reform.

### 9.11.1 Clergy leadership

The ministry, leadership, and formation of clergy leadership, including deacons, priests, and bishops in parishes and dioceses was a common theme of open responses. Concerns were raised about the way power and authority is exercised by clergy leaders in the global and Australian Catholic Church.

Respondents repeatedly critiqued the hierarchical structure of the Church, using terms such as 'misogynistic', 'patriarchal', 'clerical', and 'authoritarian' to describe clergy leadership. Even when respondents

supported the TLM and Catholic doctrine, clergy leadership was identified as an issue of concern. For instance, one respondent stated:

I attend mass regularly and have a greater desire to engage in the Traditional Latin Mass as I am more and more turned off by the constant modernisation of the Novus Ordo. I am quite disenfranchised by both the decisions of the Vatican and those of my local Archbishop (26 to 40 years).

Open responses frequently noted the need for improved clergy selection methods, more robust formation, and ongoing training for ordained members of the Church.

Respondents asserted that initial and ongoing clergy formation and training should not be ideological or closed off from broader society. For instance, these respondents observed:

The formation of clergy is currently very ideological. Men emerge from the seminary often unable to relate to women or people on the margins (26 to 40 years).

Support of priests - ongoing formation, fellowship beyond the priesthood, seminary training modified to allow those preparing for priesthood to live in small communities or other households rather than all together in a seminary and separated from everyday life of ordinary people (56 to 70 years).

Some respondents expressed frustration that priests were being appointed from overseas without language and cultural training. One such respondent noted:

In our diocese we are reliant on overseas priests to make up the number of priests ... This is not a solution to the shortage of priests. They are not from missionary orders and often are not well trained theologically or liturgically. They are not given an adequate induction to work in Australian parishes (over 70 years).

There were several responses that acknowledged the good work of individual priests and bishops. These “good” clergy however were recognised as a fortunate blessing or exception rather than the norm. One such response said:

I continue to attend Mass most Sundays and occasionally weekdays. I love the Eucharist and we in my Parish are very fortunate to have a Priest who gives inspiring homilies (56 to 70 years).

Many open responses mentioned concerns with theological divisions in the Church. Some

respondents suggested clergy should more strongly teach and pastor in-line with the Catechism and Catholic doctrine.

For example:

Church leadership is failing to uphold and teach the faith, particularly where it comes to church teaching on sexual morality (41 to 55 years).

However, more noted that it was important for ordained men to practice dialogue and a servant style of leadership when pastorally serving the Church and parish communities. One such respondent wrote:

The leaders of the Church need to listen to the voice of all, not just the voices they want to hear. Being open to the Spirit at work in our world is being open to the voice of challenge and of change. We cannot shift away from our root purpose, living out the gospel of love in our world, but we must be open to new ways of doing that (26 to 40 years).

Open responses that mentioned clerical leadership often raised the concern that priests and bishops were out of touch with quotidian concerns of laity, especially women. For example:

Many Catholic priests have no idea of what happens behind closed doors in a marriage and lead women to despair by their sermons and lack of empathy in the confessional (56 to 70 years).

This gap was frequently linked with compulsory celibacy and the inability of priests to marry. Several responses simply said: ‘end clergy celibacy’ or ‘priests should be able to marry’. A young respondent wrote church leadership needed to address:

The ordination of married men. There is no place for celibacy anymore. It creates clericalism (18 to 25 years).



## 9.11.2 Co-responsibility in governance and decision-making

In addition to raising concerns related to clergy leadership, open responses consistently demanded a re-conceptualisation of the way power and authority are exercised in the Church. Many open responses mentioned the need for greater role of the laity, especially women and young people, in leadership, governance, and decision-making. A key point raised was the importance of modelling diversity in church decision-making structures and processes. For instance, one respondent stated:

Church decisions are made by a select few of middle-aged men who have very similar life experience and beliefs. Decision making should include input from a broader range of Catholics with varying ages and life experience. The majority of Catholics attending church in Australia are women, yet we have the least opportunity to make meaningful change in the Church, our voices are the least likely to be heard, and when they are heard, they are disregarded for the most part ... We need radical change in the Church if it is to survive beyond this century as a church and not a corporation (41 to 55 years).

Respondents repeatedly noted how women were excluded and diminished in a hierarchical-clerical model of church governance. For example, a respondent wrote:

The lack of any change in paternalistic, clerical decision making and control, even at a local parish level is disheartening and made me re-evaluate how my experience of the Catholic faith belittles, dismisses, diminishes, and excludes women. I am at a point of disassociating from the Church and my faith, which causes me considerable sadness (41 to 55 years).

Rather than suggesting women and others be placed within the existing leadership structure, most respondents called for a new model of governance. For example, one respondent proposed:

A major restructure of administration and decision-making procedures, or women

who could be appointed to significant positions will find themselves working in a “male, hierarchical” model for decision making (over 70 years).

For many respondents the incorporation of the gospel values in church governance and decision-making processes was highly important. Responses often included terms such as ‘inclusive’, ‘shared’, and ‘synodal’. For instance, these respondents wrote:

The fundamental teachings of Christ should be the basis of structures and actions. This includes not shielding abusers and welcoming women into all positions (56 to 70 years).

Leadership is about service and empowerment, it is not about power and decision making as if the Church were a worldly corporation. Many radical people conceive of leadership without any real reference to Jesus and the notion of tradition as something passed on by parents, clergy, and all the baptised in different ways (26 to 40 years).

Open responses repeatedly mentioned that administrative and management appointments should be made based on skills and qualifications rather than maleness and ordination. One such respondent wrote:

Leadership roles at parish, diocese and global levels need to be separated from ordained ministry as the latter is a sacramental role and does not qualify a person for leadership or governance. It also excludes many talented people from these roles (41 to 55 years).

There were a few open responses that strongly asserted that governance and decision-making should be the sole responsibility of male, clerical leadership. For example, a respondent stated:

Leadership needs to steer the Church away from the culture of the world and stick to the central tenets of our faith as clearly explained in the Catechism and the Bible. Men are priests. Women can be nuns. Men have been given the role of headship by God (26 to 40 years).



## 9.11.3 Transparency and accountability

A significant theme of open responses was necessity for church leaders and organisations to be honest, transparent, and accountable in all matters. Respondents frequently raised concerns regarding the need for transparent and accountable governance at all levels of the Church: parish, diocese and in the Holy See. For example, these respondents wrote:

Much greater transparency is needed. I do not regard the Church organisational structure as being trustworthy (26 to 40 years).

I love Jesus in the Gospels; this is what keeps my faith strong. I am not keen at all of clericalism and lack of transparency in the Church (41 to 55 years).

Transparency and accountability in church processes and decision-making was often connected with financial management and the Church's actions regarding the crisis of sexual and spiritual abuse in the Church. For instance, a respondent noted:

There needs to be more done to restore the Church in the eyes of the community after the continual revelations of abuse. I personally find it distressing and have had a difficult time reconciling my faith with the lack of transparency and action from the Church leadership (56 to 70 years).

Transparency and accountability are further addressed in the following sections.

## 9.11.4 Economic management

Open responses consistently raised the issue of accountability and transparency in economic management. Respondents referred to a need for transparent financial administration at a global, diocesan, and parish level. Some noted the harm caused by financial misconduct and corruption. For example, these respondents said:

The financial mismanagement of church funds needs to be properly addressed (18 to 25 years).

The Catholic Church is an incredibly wealthy institution that invests very little of its funds supporting parishes and parishioners. It's out of date and out of touch and rapidly losing relevance. Women have always been critical to its success, and they are losing patience with hierarchical hypocrisy! (41 to 55 years).

While several respondents acknowledged the importance of financial resources for the Church's social mission, there were expressions of anger and disillusionment about the misdirection of funds toward material goods. Some condemned overt displays of power and wealth associated

with clergy lifestyles as counter-witness to the Church's mission to live the gospel. For instance, one respondent stated:

There is a hole where my dedicated faith once was. However, I feel the Church needs to return to a community church as in the days of the apostles. The pomp and glory are very distasteful ... The wealth around St. Peter's in Rome extremely off putting almost crude in a way. Christ was a sincere, uncomplicated person. The Church needs to return to this (over 70 years).

The call for stronger oversight in addressing economic mismanagement and misconduct was strong and consistent. One respondent stated:

During the pandemic the bishop here submitted plans for a \$4,000,000 restoration of the Cathedral, a shocking proposed misuse of money during a catastrophic crisis especially for women - there should be oversight of the use of church finances and power of veto (56 to 70 years).

Open responses that mentioned financial misconduct often connected it with other

forms of abuse and marginalisation. For example, these respondents wrote:

No longer practicing. Cannot reconcile the damage caused by the Church with my beliefs. This includes vast fortune held, abuse, and role of women (41 to 55 years).

Some respondents commented on the distribution of the Church's wealth between parishes, ministries, and other church entities. One such respondent highlighted:

The Church relies too heavily on the unpaid work of women parishioners. The Church needs to provide clergy and parishes with a better income. It is not okay that the Church

is so wealthy, that schools are so wealthy, and yet parishes cannot afford a decent computer (56 to 70 years).

A few respondents noted their concern that church leadership and Catholic organisations were perpetuating injustices caused by inequitable wealth distribution and cultural separation. For example, a respondent mentioned that:

The Church's role in private schools which build in social disparity. The division caused by children educated separately, different ethnicities, religions, and income groups are now educated apart, so don't get to meet, let alone, love our neighbours(over 70 years).

## 9.11.5 Employment reform

Open responses commented on the need for church leadership to address the unfair and inequitable employment of lay and consecrated persons in liturgical, ministry, and pastoral positions in Catholic organisations and parishes. For instance, one respondent raised the issue of:

Standards of behaviour by leaders in some Catholic Organisations that would not be tolerated in many corporate cultures - bullying, discrimination, ego-driven behaviours (56 to 70 years).

Another wrote:

The leadership needs to better look after its employees. I know a number of faithful Catholics that have lost their jobs in restructures without any care for their wellbeing (41 to 55 years).

Several respondents commented on the need for Catholic workplaces to address gender discrimination, including equal pay, volunteerism, and access to theological training. These respondents mentioned:

Better institutional support for women employed by the Catholic Church, i.e., parental leave and part time working arrangements to encourage openness to life (26 to 40 years).

The unconscious bias of priests on gender needs to be addressed - patching over the issue with a brief platitude in thanks for volunteering is disingenuous (41 to 55 years).

Financial support for women leaders in the Church commensurate with monies expended on training of seminarians (56 to 70 years).

A few respondents referred to jobs "for the boys", particularly in Catholic education. One respondent stated:

Some Catholic institutions such as systemic education systems are giving jobs "for the boys". These same institutions are employing educational leaders who are not worthy educators because they do not respect women in leadership roles. There appears to be a double standard (56 to 70 years).

There were some respondents who expressed satisfaction with their employment in the Church, particularly in Catholic schools, pointing out that their workplace was a safe and inclusive place to "be church". Several open responses, however, pointed out that church positions were often unstable, with poor working conditions. One respondent commented:

Worked in leadership roles in the Church for over 50 years but employment depended on priests and ended with a change of priest or when priest was charged with sexual abuse (over 70 years).

A few respondents disclosed incidences of workplace harassment and abuse. For example, these respondents wrote:

I am slowly and hesitantly stepping back into the Church after approximately 4 years distancing, due to burn out in my role as pastoral associate. I was bullied by a small group of parishioners ... and was not supported by my parish priests ... I sit on the edges (56 to 70 years).

The powers that be ... continue to cover up bullying, nepotism, and sexism at the last Catholic school I will ever teach at (41 to 55 years).

There were a small number of open responses that conveyed concern about the exploitation of nuns and consecrated persons in church workplaces. One such respondent asserted:

The work of the nuns is undervalued and underappreciated. For me they have been some of the most inspiring people I have encountered through the Church (41 to 55 years).

## 9.11.6 Summary

Open responses often mentioned that the way power and authority is exercised in the global and Australian Catholic Church is highly problematic. The many responses which raised issues related to clergy leadership, co-responsibility in governance

and decision-making, transparency and accountability, economic management, and employment reform expressed an urgent need for reform in church leadership and governance. Unlike in other issues there was little disagreement.

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## 9.12 Processes for listening and dialogue

Many open responses put forward that there needed to be better processes and avenues for genuine dialogue and listening in the Church. For example, a respondent wrote:

Church leaders be open to being challenged and to change. To listen to people, especially women, to explore more inclusive structures and involvement (56 to 70 years).

Respondents tended to use words such as 'respect', 'meaningful', 'courage', and 'open' when they wrote about listening and dialogue.

Several mentioned the need for better formation of clergy and laity to allow informed dialogue around divisive issues.

The Synod on Synodality and the Fifth Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia were identified by many respondents in older age cohorts as important processes of listening and dialogue. Younger respondents tended not to mention the synod, synodality, or the Plenary Council. A few respondents identified themselves as members of the Plenary Council or people involved in the synodal process. For example, a respondent stated:

I volunteer dozens of hours per week to help with the diocesan response to the Synod of Bishops 2021-2023. I am also a member of the Plenary Council in Australia. I practise my faith as an ordinary parishioner and also study postgrad theology ... I have raised ... practising adult Catholics (56 to 70 years).

Many respondents that mentioned the Plenary Council, however, conveyed disillusionment. Most viewed the Plenary Council as a lost opportunity for dialogue with laity and reform. These respondents maintained:

Our Australian official church does not have the life experience beyond the Church. This shapes a world view that is enclosed, narrow, biased, and so all they can do is try to find ways to reinforce what they know. I have no faith in the bishop's capacity to engage with the Spirit with our Plenary or the Synod. Submissions contrary to their worldview will be diluted or syphoned out altogether. This continues to create distance between bishops and people. I feel very sad (56 to 70 years).

I am disappointed that in our own Plenary Council presently the Bishops seem to have too much veto so it is not as fully inclusive as I had hoped it would be. Many are feeling disheartened as a result (over 70 years).

Mentions of processes of synodality were more nuanced. There were expressions of tentative hope for a more inclusive, listening church, with greater co-responsibility and engagement with laity, especially women. For example, a respondent who identified as a religious sister noted:

I am a religious Sister and am happy to be involved in studying the Synod and am involved in a group who is passionate in supporting Pope Francis' intention and dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people's hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another build bridges, enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength for our common mission (over 70 years).

By contrast, there was a small cohort who were strongly dismissive of the Synod and synodality and contended they shifted focus away from magisterial authority and the practice of Catholic faith. These respondents explained:

The whole synod on synodality is diabolic and anyone and everyone who promotes/ contributes to the diabolic activity and anyone who attempts to destroy the Catholic Church will go to hell unless they repent (41 to 55 years).

They need to get back to prayer, centring on the Mass and stop focusing on synodality (41 to 55 years).

A further group of respondents were hesitant to hope for dialogue and reform. For instance, one respondent said:

I sincerely hope that the synodal exercise is not yet another case of the hierarchy ignoring the experience and the voice of the baptized. I was really heartened by Vatican II and became very active in the Church. But initiatives petered out to insignificance under John Paul II and Benedict XVI. We must get back on track (over 70 years).

## 9.12.1 Summary

The inclusion of processes of listening and dialogue in church communities and organisations was highly important to many respondents. The *Synod on Synodality* and the *Fifth Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia* were identified as important events in the life of the Church. There were, however,

reservations regarding the ability of church leaders to hear and concretely address concerns raised in such forums. There was a small group of respondents that strongly opposed synodal processes as a distraction from magisterial authority and faith practice.

## 10. Discussion of key findings

The International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW) was undertaken in response to the call for submissions to the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops. It explored the concerns, insights, and experiences of Catholic women involving church reform and the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses from 1,769 women in Australia who completed the ISCW during March and April in 2022 were analysed for the present report.

The ISCW was intended to be completed by women who actively participate in parishes and dioceses, as well as those on the peripheries of the Catholic Church. The survey link was shared widely in Australia through social media, parishes, Catholic organisations, media outlets and the Vatican's Synod Resources webpage. The characteristics of the sample indicate that the ISCW mostly attracted women in Australia who were closely connected with the Church. The age distribution of the Australian sample is more closely aligned with that of Mass attenders than with the Catholic census population.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, participation in parish life and faith in Jesus Christ and the gospel featured heavily in open responses in the ISCW. By contrast, only a small proportion of those who identify as Catholic in Australia attend Mass in a typical week (NCPR 2020). Almost 9 in 10 ISCW respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their Catholic identity was important to them.

In Australia, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant disruption to church life. Government restrictions on places of worship resulted in many parishes and dioceses switching to online worship, including livestreamed Masses. Perspectives on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on faith and participation were divided. Most respondents reported that they valued the opportunity to take part in online forms of worship and discovered new ways of sharing their faith. By contrast, some respondents used the open questions to communicate anger and betrayal at compulsory church closures and vaccine mandates.

In general, most respondents in Australia supported reform in the Church, including radical reform. There was also majority agreement with specific issues of reform canvassed in closed questions across areas of:

- Misuse of power (clericalism is damaging the Church, church leaders are not doing enough to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse, church leaders need to address other forms of abuse)
- Full inclusion and respect for LGBTIQ+ people in all church activities
- Women's inclusion in leadership (at all levels of the church, preaching, ordination to the priesthood)
- Climate action
- Freedom of conscience with regard to women's sexual and reproductive decisions
- Allowing remarriage after civil divorce
- Gender inclusive language in liturgy.

There was one issue that did not receive majority support – the extension of the sacrament of marriage to same-sex couples.

11. Some 34% of the Australian ISCW sample was aged over 70 years and 61% was over 55. In comparison, some 18% of adult (aged 15+) Catholic women in Australia in 2021 were at least 70 years of age and 50% were at least 50 (NCPR 2023), whereas the equivalent figures for Mass attenders in 2016 were 34% and 70% respectively (Powell et al. 2017).

The Australian sample comprised approximately one tenth of the total international ISCW sample. In comparison with the international sample, levels of agreement in Australia with the various issues of reform presented in the closed questions were slightly lower (McEwan, McPhillips and Pepper 2023), indicating greater conservatism in the Australian sample. Here we define “conservatism” in terms of doctrinal orthodoxy, lower agreement with statements of reform, and a commitment to liturgical and devotional traditionalism.

Views about church-based reforms varied between age cohorts with support increasing strongly with age. Among the youngest respondents (aged 18-40 years), supporters for reform were in the minority across all issues canvassed in closed questions except for the assertions that clericalism is damaging the Catholic Church and that church leaders need to do more to address other forms of abuse (beyond sexual abuse) including misuses of power and spiritual harm. There was also majority support across all age cohorts for Catholic social teaching as a good resource for social justice.

The age pattern observed in the Australian data was similar to that observed in the ISCW across Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK, and the US. In contrast, this age pattern was generally weaker or not present in the international ISCW sample when responses from these English-speaking countries were omitted (McEwan, McPhillips and Pepper 2023).

Analysis of the open responses yielded dominant narratives that were more supportive of reform and change and less common narratives that conveyed conservatism. This paradigm was sometimes connected with an age pattern similar to what was found in the analysis of closed questions.

The following issues observed an age pattern where older respondents were more supportive of reform and change and younger respondents tended to convey conservatism:

- A large group of mostly older respondents prioritised the Church and its teachings being reformed via engagement with ordinary Catholics and the secular world. By contrast, a smaller, younger cohort tended to reject renewal of the Church and understood reform as a return to orthodoxy and tradition, including the TLM.
- Many open responses reported women were undervalued and silenced in church settings. However, a group of mainly younger respondents emphasised women were valued in their feminine role complementary to men.
- Open responses prioritised a humanitarian approach and advocacy and action to issues of poverty, economic justice, and ecology. A smaller group of predominantly younger respondents supported the notion of the Church as separate from the secular world and criticised social and ecological action as a politicisation of faith and doctrinal teaching.



In these issues there was no age pattern observed:

- Open responses commonly called for church leaders to better recognise diversity and the complexity of life decision-making. They expressed support for freedom of conscience and remarriage after civil divorce, particularly in situations of domestic and family violence. However, some respondents rejected any change when it came to church doctrine.
- Open responses raised the issue of inclusion in church communities and ministries for those marginalised by gender, sexuality, ability, race, and age, as well as groups who feel excluded by church teachings. However, a small group expressed that the Church needed to be set apart from secular society, resulting in the exclusion of particular cohorts.
- A key theme of open responses was the importance of the inclusion of processes of listening and dialogue in church communities and organisations. However, there were reservations expressed regarding the ability of church leaders to hear and concretely address concerns raised in such forums. By contrast, there was a small group of respondents that strongly opposed synodal processes as a distraction from magisterial authority and faith practice.
- Many open responses supported ecumenism. However, there were reservations expressed and a few respondents understood Christian unity as compromising Catholic doctrine.

One possible reason for the paradigm of dominant narratives versus less common narratives, is the tension between Catholic feminisms and New Feminism in Australia. On the one hand, Catholic feminisms seek to engage with inclusive and egalitarian ways of thinking to challenge oppressive structures and patriarchal theologies with the goal of gender inequality in the Church and society (Hunt 2020). By contrast, New Feminism contests claims of women's subordination and instead encourages women to exercise their talents and rights via their feminine, complementary role, "equal but different" to men, while also promoting a more traditionalist view of church life (Beattie 2006; Ross 2013). This may foster a polarisation of Catholic women around what feminism is and how it is defined, with a possible flow on effect to the diverse and divergent perspectives as expressed in the above findings.

There are several possible reasons for the conservatism expressed by younger respondents (those aged 18 to 40 years). One hypothesis is that, although there was diversity among respondents in younger age groupings, most young women who completed the survey were part of a highly committed subgroup of young Catholics. Other research surveys on the views and practices of Catholic Mass-attending women have found evidence of religious conservatism in younger age cohorts (Martyr 2023; McEwan 2018; Reid and Dantis 2019).

A second hypothesis is that levels of conservatism are related to a combination of generational and life-stage effects. The notion of generation as an explanation for dissimilarities between age groupings relies on the understanding that attitudes and behaviours are derived from shared formative experiences (McEwan 2018; Smith et al. 2014). For example, Vatican II and *Humanae Vitae* could have been impactful for older generations of Catholic women. Younger Catholic women may have been influenced by events such as



World Youth Day. Life stage as an explanation of differences between age cohorts is based on the idea that attitudes and behaviours change through different phases of the life course (Dillon and Wink 2007; McEwan 2018). In this instance, life-stage patterns suggest as Catholic women travel through the life course they gain lived experience of the complexities of faith practice, doctrine, and of life more generally. For example, older respondents' higher level of agreement for reform may be related to a greater sense of frustration after many years of service and working for change in church and parish life.

Other issues raised in open responses were:

- The relevance of the Church for children, families, and young people, including their inclusion in church activities, pastoral and practical support for mothers, family ministry, and formation in parish life.
- Church leaders should do more to address misuses of power, including the implementation of transparent and accountable reporting practices, and better provision of assistance for people who have experienced harm.
- The need for improved lay formation including better access to catechesis and theological study.
- The way power and authority are exercised in the global and Australian Catholic Church is highly problematic.
- Leadership and governance are in urgent need of reform in areas of clergy leadership, co-responsibility in governance and decision-making, transparency and accountability, economic management, and employment reform.

Finally, respondents' disclosures of sexual, spiritual, financial, and psychological harm, abuse, workplace harassment, and trauma in church settings, remain a concern and mirror the findings from the larger ISCW data set (McEwan, McPhillips and Pepper 2023). Experiences of harm, abuse, and trauma tended to be most often reported when the diverse and complex reality of women's lives was not respected or recognised, particularly in regard to the role of women in church leadership, and Catholic teachings on gender, sexuality, and remarriage after civil divorce. Further research and community action is urgently needed in this area.

In conclusion, this report and analysis of the Australian data set of the ISCW provides valuable insights into the experiences of women in the Australian Catholic Church in their diversity and complexity. The call for change and reform across multiple areas of church life came through clearly and indicates the need for church leaders and communities to address these issues in a timely and inclusive manner.

Catholicism is Australia's largest religious grouping, and the Catholic Church is one of Australia's largest non-government employers and property owners (ABS 2022; Dixon et al. 2017; Millar, Schneiders, and Vedelago 2018). Women make up the majority of Catholic adherents and constitute most members of the Catholic workforce and religious institutes (ACBC 2021; Dixon et al. 2017; NCPR 2023). The strong participation and well-being of women is critical to the future prosperity of the Catholic Church as a key Australian institution.

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## 11.1 Vatican documents

|     |                             |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CCC | <i>Catechism</i>            | 1993 | The catechism of the Catholic Church<br><a href="https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTML">https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTML</a><br>(accessed 13 February 2023)                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| CCL | <i>Code of canon law</i>    | 2021 | Code of canon law<br><a href="https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html">https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html</a><br>(accessed 13 February 2023)                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| HV  | <i>Humane Vitae</i>         | 1968 | Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI on the Regulation of Birth<br><a href="https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html">https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html</a><br>(accessed 13 February 2023)                                                         |
| MD  | <i>Mulieris Dignitatem</i>  | 1988 | Apostolic Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the dignity and vocation of women on the occasion of the Marian year<br><a href="https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html">https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html</a> |
| TC  | <i>Traditionis Custodes</i> | 2021 | Apostolic letter issued motu proprio by Pope Francis, <i>Traditionis Custodes</i><br><a href="https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20210716-motu-proprio-traditionis-custodes.html">https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20210716-motu-proprio-traditionis-custodes.html</a><br>(accessed 25 July 2023)                                 |

## 12. Appendices

### 12.1 Appendix A: Abbreviations

|              |                                        |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ABS</b>   | Australian Bureau of Statistics        | <b>NCPR</b>     | National Centre for Pastoral Research                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>ACBC</b>  | Australian Catholic Bishops Conference | <b>LGBTIQA+</b> | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning, asexual, plus. The '+' sign is used as "plus" in order to describe all the other gender and sexual orientations that don't fit into the letters. |
| <b>CPCSA</b> | Clergy perpetrated child sexual abuse  |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>CSA</b>   | Child sexual abuse                     |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>CWC</b>   | Catholic Women's Council               | <b>REDCap</b>   | Research Electronic Data Capture                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>CWS</b>   | Catholic Women Speak                   | <b>RCIA</b>     | Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>ISCW</b>  | International Survey of Catholic Women | <b>TLM</b>      | Traditional Latin Mass                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>NCLS</b>  | National Church Life Survey            | <b>VoF</b>      | Voices of Faith                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## 12.2 Appendix B: Glossary

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ableism</b>            | Discrimination in favour of able-bodied people.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Acolyte</b>            | A minister appointed to assist at liturgical celebrations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Baptism</b>            | A sacrament of Christian initiation through which a person receives remission of sin and embarks on a new life in Jesus Christ (CCC, para. 1213 ff.).                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Bishop</b>             | A priest who has an episcopal ordination through the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He is designated as a successor of Jesus Christ and is the leader of a particular church or diocese entrusted to him (CCC, para. 1557).                                                 |
| <b>Catechesis</b>         | The education of children, young people, and adults in the faith of the Catholic Church through the teaching of doctrine (CCC, para. 426-229). The Catechism of the Catholic Church is a compendium of Catholic doctrine intended for use in catechesis.                               |
| <b>Catechist</b>          | The formal term given to a person engaged in catechesis.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Clericalism</b>        | The misappropriation of male, clerical authority which functions to set ordained clerics apart as unique, superior, and closer to God than non-clerics.                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Canon law</b>          | The canons or rules which provide the norms for the good order of the Catholic Church in society. The canon laws that apply universally are included in the Codes of Canon Law.                                                                                                        |
| <b>Consecrated person</b> | Individuals and members of religious institutes who make a life-long commitment and consecrate their life to God via a public profession of vows including poverty, chastity, and obedience (CCC, para. 944). Members of religious institutes can be required to take additional vows. |
| <b>Council</b>            | See synod.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Diaconate</b>          | A third degree of hierarchy of the Sacrament of Holy Orders that follows bishop and priest. A deacon is ordained to the diaconate as a ministry of service (not priesthood) (CCC, para. 1569, 1571).                                                                                   |
| <b>Diocese</b>            | A particular church or faith community under the care of a bishop. A diocese is generally a geographic area or a group of people of the same rite or language.                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Ecumenical</b>         | Relating to or representing Christian unity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Ecumenism</b>          | Promoting the unity among all Christian Churches.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |



|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Eucharist</b>                              | A sacrament of Christian initiation and the sacramental action of thanksgiving to God that represents the liturgical celebration of the pascal mystery of Christ, known as the Mass (CCC, para. 1322).                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Feminine genius theology</b>               | A particular theology that claims womanhood involves the embodiment of certain qualities, which include receptivity, sensitivity, generosity, and physical and spiritual maternity.                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Gender complementarity</b>                 | A theological anthropology that describes men and women as embodying contrasting human natures, social roles, and responsibilities that corresponds with physical sexuality.                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Lector</b>                                 | A person instituted to proclaim the readings from Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Magisterium</b>                            | The official teaching office of the Catholic Church, which is exercised by the pope and bishops.                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Mass</b>                                   | The principal communal ritual of the Catholic Church.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Misogyny</b>                               | An ideology and social practice where women face hostility in social systems or institutions dominated by a culture of masculinity simply because they are women. Misogyny upholds the moral or social order employing hostile or adverse consequences on women and girls as norm enforcement mechanisms (Manne 2017). |
| <b>Nun</b>                                    | Consecrated women who take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience (CCC, para. 914). In this report, the terms religious sister and nun are used interchangeably.                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Ordination</b>                             | The rite of the Sacrament of Holy Orders which confers the order of bishop, priest, or deacon (CCC, para. 1538).                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Parish</b>                                 | A community of Catholic adherents who are established within a particular diocese and whose pastoral care is delegated (by the diocesan bishop) to a pastor, typically a parish priest.                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Plenary Council</b>                        | A Plenary Council is an official meeting of the bishops and other delegates of all the dioceses and eparchies of the Catholic Church in Australia. Plenary Councils have the authority to produce church laws based on the results of a discernment process (ACBC 2019b).                                              |
| <b>Priest</b>                                 | The second degree of hierarchy of the Sacrament of Holy Orders that follows bishop. Catholic priests are the most common clerical position and generally located at Parish level.                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Racism</b>                                 | Prejudice or discrimination by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group.                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</b> | Often referred to as RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a process of formation offered to people who seek to become Catholic.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Religious woman</b>                        | See nun.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sacrament</b>                    | A sign or instrument of grace, instituted by Jesus Christ and dispensed to humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit (CCC, para. 774).                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Second Vatican Council</b>       | An ecumenical council of the whole Catholic Church held from 1962 to 1965; it is typically referred to as Vatican II.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Sexism</b>                       | Prejudice or discrimination of an individual or community on the basis of their sex.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Synod</b>                        | A meeting of bishops and other delegates of an ecclesiastical province, patriarchate, or from the global church (e.g., Synod of Bishops) to discuss the pastoral and doctrinal needs of the Catholic Church. The words “council” and “synod” can be used interchangeably (CCC, para. 887, 911). |
| <b>Synodality</b>                   | A term used to express a process of collaboration and discernment.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Theology of the Body</b>         | Theological analysis on human sexuality produced by Pope John Paul II and disseminated during his Wednesday audiences between 1979 and 1984.                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Traditional Latin Mass (TLM)</b> | The Traditional Latin Mass (TLM) also known as the Tridentine Mass or the Traditional Rite is the liturgy in the Roman Missal of St Pius V which was revised in 1962, prior to Vatican II. The 2021 motu proprio <i>Traditionis Custodes</i> placed restrictions on its celebration.            |
| <b>Vatican II</b>                   | See Second Vatican Council.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>World Youth Day</b>              | A worldwide event for young people in the Catholic Church which occurs three years in a different country. It was initiated by Pope John Paul II in 1985.                                                                                                                                       |

# 12.3 Appendix C: Survey instrument

## Catholic Women Speak International Survey

To begin the survey, please answer the following screening questions:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                              |                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Do you self-identify as a woman?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do you currently self-identify or have you previously self-identified as Catholic?                                                                                                                                                                               | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are you aged 18 years or over?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some of the questions in this survey deal with potentially sensitive issues and there is a small risk of psychological harm. All questions are optional, and you can skip a question if it causes you distress. Do you still want to participate in this survey? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Section 1: Women and the Church

| Question 1: Thinking about your identity, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                                                                                                                  | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Not Sure                 | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
| My Catholic identity is important to me.                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I identify as an ecumenical Christian.                                                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I no longer identify as Catholic.                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Question 2: In a couple of sentences please describe your current relationship with the Catholic Church. (Open Response)

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## Section 2: Women and the Church: Do we need change?

**Question 3: Thinking about the possible need for reform in the Catholic Church, to what extent do you agree or disagree with following statements?**

|                                                                 | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Not Sure                 | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I support reform in the Catholic Church.                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| There is no need for any reform in the Catholic Church.         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Radical reform is needed in the Catholic Church.                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Without reform there is no place for me in the Catholic Church. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Section 3: Women and the Church: What are the issues?

**Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

|                                                                                                  | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Not Sure                 | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Clericalism (the misuse of authority and power by male clerics) is damaging the Catholic Church. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Catholic social teaching is a good resource for social justice action.                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Climate change is an urgent challenge that the whole church must address.                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Language used in liturgy and church documents should be gender inclusive.                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Women need to have freedom of conscience with regard to their sexual and reproductive decisions. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LGBTIQ persons must be fully included and respected in all church activities.                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The sacrament of marriage should be extended to same sex couples.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remarriage after civil divorce should be allowed.                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|                                                                                                   | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Not Sure                 | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Women preachers should be able to give the homily during Mass.                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood.                                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Church leaders are not doing enough to address the perpetration and cover-up of sexual abuse.     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Church leaders need to address other forms of abuse, including abuse of power and spiritual harm. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Question 5: Are there any other issues that church leadership needs to address? (Open response)**

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## Section 4: Women and the Church: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

**Question 6: Thinking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your participation in the Catholic Church, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

|                                                                                | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Not Sure                 | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I was affected by not being able to attend Mass in person during the pandemic. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My personal faith was deepened during the pandemic.                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I appreciated the opportunity to participate in worship online.                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I do not intend to return to regular Mass attendance.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I found new ways to engage with my community during the pandemic.              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Section 5: Women and the Church: Please tell us a little about yourself

### Question 7: What is your age range?

|                         | Under<br>25 years        | 26-40<br>years           | 41-55<br>years           | 56-70<br>years           | Over<br>70 years         |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| What is your age range? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Question 8: What geographic region of the world are you currently residing in?

|                                               |                                             |                                              |                                              |                                                       |                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Afghanistan <input type="checkbox"/>          | Albania <input type="checkbox"/>            | Algeria <input type="checkbox"/>             | Andorra <input type="checkbox"/>             | Angola <input type="checkbox"/>                       | Antigua & Deps <input type="checkbox"/>                 |
| Argentina <input type="checkbox"/>            | Armenia <input type="checkbox"/>            | Australia <input type="checkbox"/>           | Austria <input type="checkbox"/>             | Azerbaijan <input type="checkbox"/>                   | Bahamas <input type="checkbox"/>                        |
| Bahrain <input type="checkbox"/>              | Bangladesh <input type="checkbox"/>         | Barbados <input type="checkbox"/>            | Belarus <input type="checkbox"/>             | Belgium <input type="checkbox"/>                      | Belize <input type="checkbox"/>                         |
| Benin <input type="checkbox"/>                | Bhutan <input type="checkbox"/>             | Bolivia <input type="checkbox"/>             | Bosnia <input type="checkbox"/>              | Herzegovina <input type="checkbox"/>                  | Botswana <input type="checkbox"/>                       |
| Brazil <input type="checkbox"/>               | Brunei <input type="checkbox"/>             | Bulgaria <input type="checkbox"/>            | Burkina <input type="checkbox"/>             | Burundi <input type="checkbox"/>                      | Cambodia <input type="checkbox"/>                       |
| Cameroon <input type="checkbox"/>             | Canada <input type="checkbox"/>             | Cape Verde <input type="checkbox"/>          | Central African Rep <input type="checkbox"/> | Chad <input type="checkbox"/>                         | Chile <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| China <input type="checkbox"/>                | Colombia <input type="checkbox"/>           | Comoros <input type="checkbox"/>             | Congo <input type="checkbox"/>               | Democratic Republic of Congo <input type="checkbox"/> | Costa Rica <input type="checkbox"/>                     |
| Croatia <input type="checkbox"/>              | Cuba <input type="checkbox"/>               | Cyprus <input type="checkbox"/>              | Czech Republic <input type="checkbox"/>      | Denmark <input type="checkbox"/>                      | Djibouti <input type="checkbox"/>                       |
| Dominica <input type="checkbox"/>             | Dominican Republic <input type="checkbox"/> | East Timor <input type="checkbox"/>          | Ecuador <input type="checkbox"/>             | Egypt <input type="checkbox"/>                        | El Salvador <input type="checkbox"/>                    |
| France <input type="checkbox"/>               | Gabon <input type="checkbox"/>              | Gambia <input type="checkbox"/>              | Georgia <input type="checkbox"/>             | Germany <input type="checkbox"/>                      | Ghana <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Greece <input type="checkbox"/>               | Grenada <input type="checkbox"/>            | Guatemala <input type="checkbox"/>           | Guinea <input type="checkbox"/>              | Guinea-Bissau <input type="checkbox"/>                | Guyana <input type="checkbox"/>                         |
| Haiti <input type="checkbox"/>                | Honduras <input type="checkbox"/>           | Hungary <input type="checkbox"/>             | Iceland <input type="checkbox"/>             | India <input type="checkbox"/>                        | Indonesia <input type="checkbox"/>                      |
| Iran <input type="checkbox"/>                 | Iraq <input type="checkbox"/>               | Ireland <input type="checkbox"/>             | Israel <input type="checkbox"/>              | Italy <input type="checkbox"/>                        | Ivory Coast <input type="checkbox"/>                    |
| Jamaica <input type="checkbox"/>              | Japan <input type="checkbox"/>              | Jordan <input type="checkbox"/>              | Kazakhstan <input type="checkbox"/>          | Kenya <input type="checkbox"/>                        | Kiribati <input type="checkbox"/>                       |
| Korea North <input type="checkbox"/>          | Korea South <input type="checkbox"/>        | Kosovo <input type="checkbox"/>              | Kuwait <input type="checkbox"/>              | Kyrgyzstan <input type="checkbox"/>                   | Laos <input type="checkbox"/>                           |
| Latvia <input type="checkbox"/>               | Lebanon <input type="checkbox"/>            | Lesotho <input type="checkbox"/>             | Liberia <input type="checkbox"/>             | Libya <input type="checkbox"/>                        | Liechtenstein <input type="checkbox"/>                  |
| Lithuania <input type="checkbox"/>            | Luxembourg <input type="checkbox"/>         | Macedonia <input type="checkbox"/>           | Madagascar <input type="checkbox"/>          | Malawi <input type="checkbox"/>                       | Malaysia <input type="checkbox"/>                       |
| Maldives <input type="checkbox"/>             | Mali <input type="checkbox"/>               | Malta <input type="checkbox"/>               | Marshall Islands <input type="checkbox"/>    | Mauritania <input type="checkbox"/>                   | Mauritius <input type="checkbox"/>                      |
| Mexico <input type="checkbox"/>               | Micronesia <input type="checkbox"/>         | Moldova <input type="checkbox"/>             | Monaco <input type="checkbox"/>              | Mongolia <input type="checkbox"/>                     | Montenegro <input type="checkbox"/>                     |
| Morocco <input type="checkbox"/>              | Mozambique <input type="checkbox"/>         | Myanmar <input type="checkbox"/>             | Namibia <input type="checkbox"/>             | Nauru <input type="checkbox"/>                        | Nepal <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Netherlands <input type="checkbox"/>          | New Zealand <input type="checkbox"/>        | Nicaragua <input type="checkbox"/>           | Niger <input type="checkbox"/>               | Nigeria <input type="checkbox"/>                      | Norway <input type="checkbox"/>                         |
| Oman <input type="checkbox"/>                 | Pakistan <input type="checkbox"/>           | Palau <input type="checkbox"/>               | Palestine <input type="checkbox"/>           | Panama <input type="checkbox"/>                       | Papua New Guinea <input type="checkbox"/>               |
| Paraguay <input type="checkbox"/>             | Peru <input type="checkbox"/>               | Philippines <input type="checkbox"/>         | Poland <input type="checkbox"/>              | Portugal <input type="checkbox"/>                     | Qatar <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Romania <input type="checkbox"/>              | Russian Federation <input type="checkbox"/> | Rwanda <input type="checkbox"/>              | St Kitts & Nevis <input type="checkbox"/>    | St Lucia <input type="checkbox"/>                     | Saint Vincent & the Grenadines <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Samoa <input type="checkbox"/>                | San Marino <input type="checkbox"/>         | Sao Tome & Principe <input type="checkbox"/> | Saudi Arabia <input type="checkbox"/>        | Senegal <input type="checkbox"/>                      | Serbia <input type="checkbox"/>                         |
| Seychelles <input type="checkbox"/>           | Sierra Leone <input type="checkbox"/>       | Singapore <input type="checkbox"/>           | Slovakia <input type="checkbox"/>            | Slovenia <input type="checkbox"/>                     | Solomon Islands <input type="checkbox"/>                |
| Somalia <input type="checkbox"/>              | South Africa <input type="checkbox"/>       | South Sudan <input type="checkbox"/>         | Spain <input type="checkbox"/>               | Sri Lanka <input type="checkbox"/>                    | Sudan <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Suriname <input type="checkbox"/>             | Swaziland <input type="checkbox"/>          | Sweden <input type="checkbox"/>              | Switzerland <input type="checkbox"/>         | Syria <input type="checkbox"/>                        | Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/>                         |
| Tajikistan <input type="checkbox"/>           | Tanzania <input type="checkbox"/>           | Thailand <input type="checkbox"/>            | Togo <input type="checkbox"/>                | Tonga <input type="checkbox"/>                        | Trinidad & Tobago <input type="checkbox"/>              |
| Tunisia <input type="checkbox"/>              | Turkey <input type="checkbox"/>             | Turkmenistan <input type="checkbox"/>        | Tuvalu <input type="checkbox"/>              | Uganda <input type="checkbox"/>                       | Ukraine <input type="checkbox"/>                        |
| United Arab Emirates <input type="checkbox"/> | United Kingdom <input type="checkbox"/>     | United States <input type="checkbox"/>       | Uruguay <input type="checkbox"/>             | Uzbekistan <input type="checkbox"/>                   | Vanuatu <input type="checkbox"/>                        |
| Vatican City <input type="checkbox"/>         | Venezuela <input type="checkbox"/>          | Vietnam <input type="checkbox"/>             | Yemen <input type="checkbox"/>               | Zambia <input type="checkbox"/>                       | Zimbabwe <input type="checkbox"/>                       |

### Question 9: Is there anything else you would like to add? (Open Response)

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