**MISSION: ONE HEART MANY VOICES**

Catholics received various “take-out” messages from the *Royal Commission into Institution Responses to Child Abuse* including failures by church leadership to recognize and deal adequately with complaints, failures to understand the risk of re-appointing offenders, failures to appreciate the harm to victims, and failures to put other interests before the protection of the church’s reputation.

In a certain sense all of this has been reduced to a general failure in ecclesial governance. Accordingly, it is not surprising that among the recommendations of the Royal Commission was the recommendation for a review of governance (16.7):[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference should conduct a national review of the governance and management structures of dioceses and parishes, including in relation to issues of transparency, accountability, consultation and the participation of lay men and women. This review should draw from the approaches to governance of Catholic health, community services and education agencies.

One might read into this recommendation the suggestion that “approaches to governance of Catholic health, community services and education agencies” (which are largely lay led) are good and to be drawn on to fix defects in “the governance and management structures of dioceses and parishes” (which are largely clerically led). However, it is too simplistic to set the laity against the clergy in this way.

Church governance is complex, and the following are some example of different models:

* **Governance by Individuals according to Canon Law**
  + Bishop for the Diocese; Parish Priest for the Parish
* **Governance by Individuals by canonical appointment**
  + National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies
* **Governance by Individuals according to canonical election**
  + Congregational Leader of a Religious Institute
* **Governance by a College according to statutes**
  + Trustees of Public Juridical Persons
* **Governance by an elected Management Committee according to statutes**
  + Clerical Fund of an Archdiocese
* **Governance by a board of directors of an incorporated entity**
  + Catholic Church Insurance Limited

Fr Brian Lucas

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1. https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final\_report\_-\_recommendations.pdf at p 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)