

GOVERNANCE BOARDS AND PJPs - GOOD GRIEF !

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Changing modes of Governance

Boards of Governance or Trustees are familiar to members of religious congregations, and many congregations go about managing their various apostolic works through these Boards. The Boards are usually composed of members and non-members of a particular religious congregation. There will also probably be a Chief Executive Officer appointed who answers to the Board in regard to operations of a particular work. Together, members of the Board co-operate to ensure that a particular work of the religious congregation functions effectively. Usually the religious congregation retains some control over the Board to ensure that the ethos and spirit of the congregation continue in the work.. Such boards have been common for some time in works of education, hospitals, care of the sick, retirement villages, welfare, etc.

But now another type of entity seems to be appearing on the Catholic Church scene.

On May 6, 2013, a media release from Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) announced that after an application to Rome, EREA was granted *Public Juridic Person* status, with its own identity in the Catholic Church.¹ This entity transfers responsibility for a number of apostolic works from the Christian Brothers to the Public Juridic Person known as Edmund Rice Education Australia.

Public Juridic Person status was also granted by Rome to Mary Aikenhead Ministries on April 25, 2008, and celebrated in a formal transfer ceremony on July 1, 2009.² As a Public Juridic person, Mary Aikenhead Ministries assumed responsibility for furthering the ministries of health and aged care, education and some welfare works of the Sisters of Charity of Australia, and other ministries to be accepted later.³

¹ Edmund Rice Education Australia, *Media Release* May 6, 2013, Website accessed May 13, 2013 at: <http://www.cathnews.com/uploads/doc/2013/05/Edmund%20Rice%20Education%20takes%20responsibility%20of%20Christian%20Brothers%20schools.pdf>

² Mary Aikenhead Ministries, *About Mary Aikenhead Ministries*, Website accessed May 13, 2013 at: http://www.maryaikenheadministries.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=1

³ Mary Aikenhead Ministries, *Our Mission and Values*, Website accessed May 13, 2013 at: http://www.maryaikenheadministries.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=2

Public Juridic(al) Persons in the Church, or PJPs as they are sometimes called, are not as recent as we might think. Church Law has recognized them for some time:

*Public Juridical Persons are aggregates of persons or of things which are established by the competent ecclesiastical authority so that, within the limits allotted to them in the name of Church, and in accordance with the provisions of law, they might perform the specific task entrusted to them for the public good.*⁴

What has surprised us perhaps is that responsibility for the apostolic works of some religious congregations is being handed over to entities which will probably include a majority of people who are not members of that religious congregation, or eventually, no members of the religious congregation at all. What also may surprise us is that such bodies can be recognised at Pontifical level, that is, the Vatican. One of the main purposes, of course, for setting up such bodies is that it enables the apostolic works of a religious congregation to continue, with Catholic recognition, even when a religious congregation cannot itself supply the requisite members to conduct these works.

Some complications

Governance Boards and PJPs are enabling much apostolic work to continue, even though the personnel of religious congregations is not as plentiful as some might wish.. There are less religious involved formally in apostolic works such as education, hospitals, social work and welfare than previously, but many more lay people are now involved. Vatican II hoped that the laity would take their proper position in the work of the Church, and in many ways this has happened, though there is a way to go yet, especially in regard to the roles of women.

But there are some complications that can arise. People in leadership positions in religious congregations and who remain part of the Governance Boards and PJPs may find it difficult to take a step back from having full control over a particular work. Sometimes situations arise where leaders of religious congregations try to exercise the same detailed control over how things are done as when they themselves had full administrative control over a work.

Then, what happens to those members of a religious congregation not in leadership positions when the apostolic works they have been involved in are either gradually or suddenly taken over by Boards and PJPs ? Those in leadership positions may still have involvement, but many other members of a congregation may be left on the side-line, wondering, after years of going where they were sent and doing the work they were "asked" or "told" to do, what they will now do that is appropriate to the ethos and purposes of the congregation they joined.

All - leaders, and members who are not in leadership positions - may ask: are their religious congregations still relevant or even necessary ? Has handing over responsibility for apostolic works to a Board or PJP diminished their congregation in some way ?

And many may suffer from some sort of personal and collective grief about what is happening.

⁴ Code of Canon Law, 1983, Canon 116, par 1.

Grief

Grief is that sense of deep sorrow and regret which is felt when we someone close to us dies, or we lose something in which we have invested ourselves. Note that grief is felt not only when we lose someone, but also when something is no longer available to us. In relation to Boards and PJPs, it would include the loss of control over apostolic work, as well as the loss of meaningful involvement in that work..

Christian spirituality and theology tell us that there is always life after death, that grief is the path to resurrection - and this may encourage us and give meaning in our lives. But it does not stop the pain, hurt and anguish which are part of the process of grief, a process involving any, and often all, of disbelief, denial, anger, frustration, bargaining, numbness, fear, emptiness - and eventually and hopefully light at the end of the tunnel, peace, and "new meaning in life". This process goes through what are called phases, stages, or even "seasons" if the process moves forward in a cyclic or convoluted manner, Unfortunately, blocking this process of grief is likely to cause people to prolong, or even remain in, a state of denial, anger, bitterness, emptiness and lack of real meaning in life.

Good Grief !

Grief can be tough, but fruitful. At the heart of working through grief is the willingness, no matter how uncomfortable, to "let go" in order to move on. In respect to the above comments, it might mean the willingness to let go of the desire for control of, or involvement in, a particular work or ministry in order to let the work continue. This of course cannot be forced, but there are ways to encourage the process of grief to move forward. These might include:

1. Dialogue between all "stakeholders" with respect, empathy and compassion.
2. Providing some form of "What will the new situation look like ?" in order to lessen fear of the future.
3. Helping members of a congregation to look at new ways of being and doing in ministry which are consistent with the ethos and spirit of a congregation and which support finding meaning and focus - a reason to be and to do.
4. Allowing Boards and CEOs to do their work with encouragement and empowerment rather than hindrance and control.

Grief is part of many aspects of our lives, and is not something that can be avoided completely, though it can be alleviated and can be the prelude to finding a new meaning in life. Changing the mode of governance of a work is just one important aspect of our lives where the possibility of grief has to be taken into account .

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Are we willing to take a step back from control and involvement in a work to allow others to continue this work ?
2. As we let go of one way of way of doing and being, can we look at new ways of ministry associated with the ethos and spirit of our congregation ?
3. How can we be involved in dialogue, or offer support, empathy, and compassion, to those who are suffering grief because of who is now carrying out what was once "their" ministry ?
4. Is there any grief occurring in our own lives at the moment ?