



February 27, 2020

His Eminence  
Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz  
Palazzo Delle Congregazioni  
Piazzo Pio X11, 3  
00193 Roma  
Italy

Your Eminence

This letter accompanies a submission to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) from Catholic Religious Australia (CRA).

The submission is a request to CICLSAL, as the Ecclesial Authority, to appoint the CRA Council to the canonical role of Commissary if this is requested by a diminishing Religious Institute of Pontifical Right.

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) is the recognised Conference of Religious Leaders in Australia.

CRA is established in terms of Canon 708:

Can. 708 Major superiors can be associated usefully in conferences or councils so that by common efforts they work to achieve more fully the purpose of the individual institutes, always without prejudice to their autonomy, character, and proper spirit, or to transact common affairs, or to establish appropriate coordination and cooperation with the conferences of bishops and also with individual bishops.

CRA's Establishment and Purpose are set out in Section A of the CRA Statute:

**1.0 Title**

- 1 This Conference is the formal association of Leaders of Religious Institutes in Australia.
- 2 The name of the organisation is Catholic Religious Australia abbreviated to CRA.
- 3 This association is established by the authority of the Holy See (cf Canon 709). It has the status of a public juridical person.

## **2.0 Purpose**

The purpose of the Conference is to promote and support religious life in the Australian Church. By combined effort, it works to achieve more fully the purpose of each institute, while respecting the autonomy, nature and spirit of each. It deals with affairs which are common to all and works to establish suitable co-ordination and co-operation with Episcopal conferences and with individual Bishops (cf Canon 708).

This request is being made in order to address the growing requirement for, and diminishing number of, suitable religious to take the responsibility of Commissary.

Furthermore, this submission follows extensive planning work already undertaken by CRA in collaboration with diminishing Religious Institutes to ensure their future requirements are understood and met.

The submission is accompanied by a letter of support from Archbishop Mark Coleridge, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and a letter of support from Sr Carol Zinn csj, Executive Director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the United States.

The request is enclosed for your consideration.

Br. Peter Carroll FMS  
President  
Catholic Religious Australia

**Submission**  
**from**  
**Catholic Religious Australia (CRA)**  
**to**  
**Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL)**  
**regarding**  
**the appointment of CRA Council to hold the canonical role of Commissary**

**1. Request**

This submission requests CICLSAL, acting in its capacity as Ecclesial Authority, to agree to appoint the elected Council of CRA to hold the canonical role of Commissary for Religious Institutes resident in Australia which request this.

**2. Request endorsed by Religious Institutes in Australia**

The request is endorsed by the Religious Institutes within Australia.

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA), as the recognised representative body for Leaders of Religious Institutes resident in Australia, established a Committee of its Council known as the *Emerging Futures Committee* to “focus on the emerging issues for the living and governance of Religious life as it is evolving in Australia”. One of the Committee’s delegated priorities is “to re-imagine what could be possible for the shared governance of congregations and be suitable to different needs” (CRA Emerging Futures Committee Statement of Intent).

The Committee undertook extensive consultation and planning work which led to the proposal that the CRA Council offer leadership to diminishing Religious Institutes as they move towards completion.

This proposal has been met with significant support from Leaders.

Within one month of calling for expressions of interest to participate in this proposal, thirty nine (39) Religious Institutes had committed to participate in and to finance the initiative. This number is expected to grow as other Religious Institutes consider this matter in their forthcoming decision-making forums.

### **3. Rationale for CRA Council to be appointed as Commissary**

This request for CRA Council to be appointed to the role of Commissary, when requested, is a response to current circumstances and trends within Religious life in Australia which need to be acknowledged, addressed and planned for.

#### *3.1. The numbers of suitable religious to take the responsibility of Commissary are diminishing whilst the projected need will grow rapidly over the next 3 – 10 years*

The vast majority (87%) of professed religious are 60 years or older and almost three quarters (72%) are 70 years or older, whilst only 8% are under 50 years of age (see attachment 3). As a result, some Religious Institutes no longer have members who are suitable to constitute Canonical leadership and many more expect to be in the position within the next 3 to 10 years.

#### *3.2. Larger Religious Institutes will be unable to take on this responsibility as the need grows and they themselves diminish*

Larger Religious Institutes have already taken the additional canonical responsibility for those Institutes currently in need of an appointed Commissary, but will be unable to continue taking on this responsibility for two reasons: firstly the larger congregations are diminishing at the same pace as the smaller ones; and secondly the need for suitable religious to undertake the role of Commissary will grow rapidly over the next decade.

#### *3.3. This is the preferred arrangement for many Religious Institutes*

Many Religious Institutes who will require a Commissary within the foreseeable future have indicated that the proposal for CRA to be appointed as Commissary would be their preferred arrangement. For this reason, thirty nine (39) Religious Institutes committed to participate in and to finance the initiative within a month of the call for Expressions of Interest.

#### *3.4. The establishment of a centralised Commissary is best suited to the Australian situation which comprises religious communities spread across a large geographical area*

Australia is the sixth largest country in the world, whilst its population ranks 55<sup>th</sup>. Australia's landmass is almost as big as Europe's whilst the European population is 18 times larger than Australia's. As a result, Australian religious communities are spread across a very large geographical area. The best and most sustainable model which addresses the reality of thinly spread communities over a large geographical area is one which centralises the limited number of people who are able to perform the role of Commissary for the benefit of all religious across the country.

#### **4. Benefits of CRA Council as appointed Commissary**

Some of the benefits of the proposal for CRA Council to be appointed as Commissary, are outlined in the section below.

*4.1. As an established public juridical person( PJP) and recognised representative body CRA's purpose is to promote and support religious life in the Australian Church*

CRA Statutes establish CRA as the “formal association of Leaders of Religious Institutes in Australia” which is “established by the authority of the Holy See (cf Canon 709)” and “has the status of a public juridical person”. Its purpose is “to promote and support religious life in the Australian Church”. (See Attachment 4 ; Catholic Religious Australia : Statutes)

CRA is recognised and supported in this role by Religious Institutes within Australia as evidenced by its active Committees, diverse Council and membership of leaders from 149 Religious Institutes. (see Attachment 3; Catholic Religious Australia: Religious Institute membership profile)

*4.2. The appointment of suitable Commissaries is understood as a Leadership Conference issue as it addresses an underlying challenge of common concern*

According to its Purpose (See Attachment 4; CRA Statutes) CRA “deals with affairs which are common to all and works to establish suitable co-ordination and co-operation with Episcopal conferences and with individual Bishops (cf Canon 708).”

Religious Leaders in Australia take the view that ensuring there are suitable religious in place to be appointed to the role of Commissary is a Leadership Conference issue as it addresses an underlying challenge of common concern that impacts all Religious Institutes.

*4.3. CRA has established governance and administration capacity and processes to ensure the highest standards of accountability and probity*

CRA can demonstrate that it has good governance processes and practices in place. Its representative and administrative structures operate in full compliance with its statutes, and with canonical and civil law requirements. Its structures and Offices (including National Assembly, President, Executive, Council, Committees and Executive Secretariat) are all in place and fully operational and accountable. As Commissary, CRA will be able to fulfil all its obligations in regard to the accountability required by CICALSAL.

*4.4. CRA will provide standardised planning and governance guidelines and processes for diminishing Religious Institutes*

CRA will adopt planning and governance guidelines which meet the highest standards of governance and stewardship when diminishing Religious Institutes set out their plans and requirements for the future. This includes provisions to ensure the wellbeing and care of every Religious Institute member and to ensure that the Religious Institute receives

appropriate advice and professional assistance in the management of their assets in the service of God's mission in accordance with the charism.

*4.5. CRA has begun to work with diminishing Religious Institutes and has a plan to address the needs of each individual institute*

Through its work on addressing the future requirements of diminishing Religious Institutes CRA has begun to explore needs and to offer support. CRA therefore has a practical understanding of the supports and advice required and a plan to ensure these support needs are met.

This would involve CRA (in its role of Commissary, and only at the request of participating institutes) appointing a central commission of experts, with the responsibility to ensure that suitable spiritual, pastoral and practical assistance is provided to each institute and its members, in conformity to the institute's own constitutions, charism and identity.

## **Attachments**

Attachment 1 Catholic Religious Australia: Background

Attachment 2 Catholic Religious Australia: Religious Institute membership profile

Attachment 3 Catholic Religious Australia: Statutes

## **Accompaniments**

Accompaniment 1 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Letter of Support

Accompaniment 2 Leadership Conference of Women Religious (USA) Letter of Support

## **Catholic Religious Australia: Background**

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) is the recognised representative body for Catholic Leaders of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life in Australia.

Its origins stem back to December 1950 when Pope Pius XII convened the first general Congress of the states of perfection (consecrated life) and invited religious institutes and secular institutes, male and female from each nation to join in federations, conferences or councils of major superiors. While no Australian major superior attended the Congress, momentum was built. In 1954 the Conference of Major Superiors of Clerical Religious of Australia was formed in response to the 1950 Congress and in 1955 the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious Brothers was formed, again in response to the 1950 Congress.

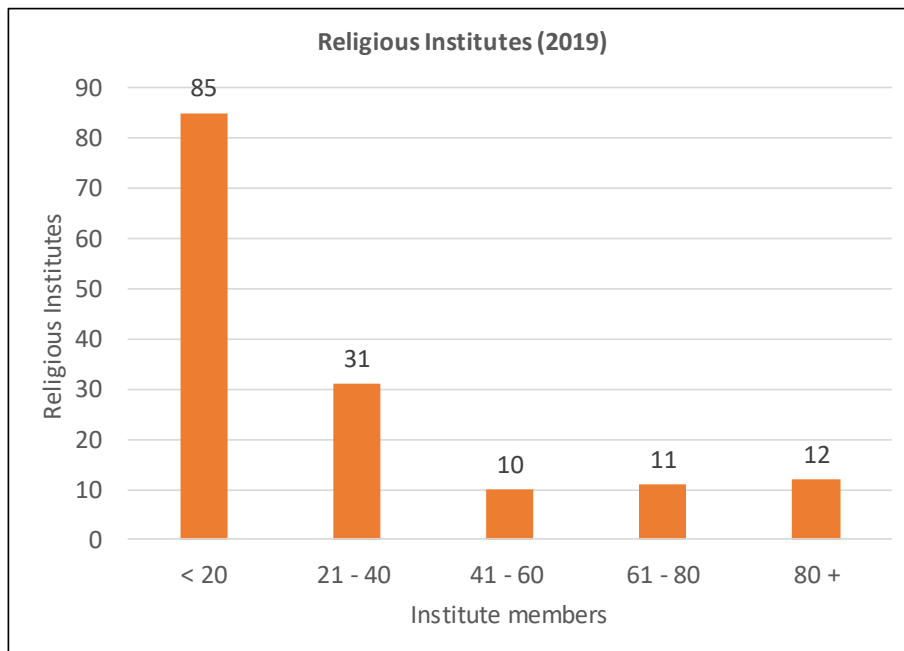
At the time of Vatican II and at the urging of the Vatican, discussions were held among leaders of Women Religious Institutes in Australia. The first Conference of Women Religious was held in October 1963. At the third Conference in 1965 the National Conference of Major Superiors was established with Mother St Agnes Skewes of the Sisters of Charity of Australia, elected as President. She was appointed also as the first Australian Delegate to the newly formed International Union of Superiors General.

In 1990 by the authority of the Holy See, the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (ACLRI) was established to include both male and female Religious Institutes. The Statutes were approved by Rome in 1992 and later, in 2006 the ACLRI Council made the decision to change the working name from ACLRI to Catholic Religious Australia (CRA).

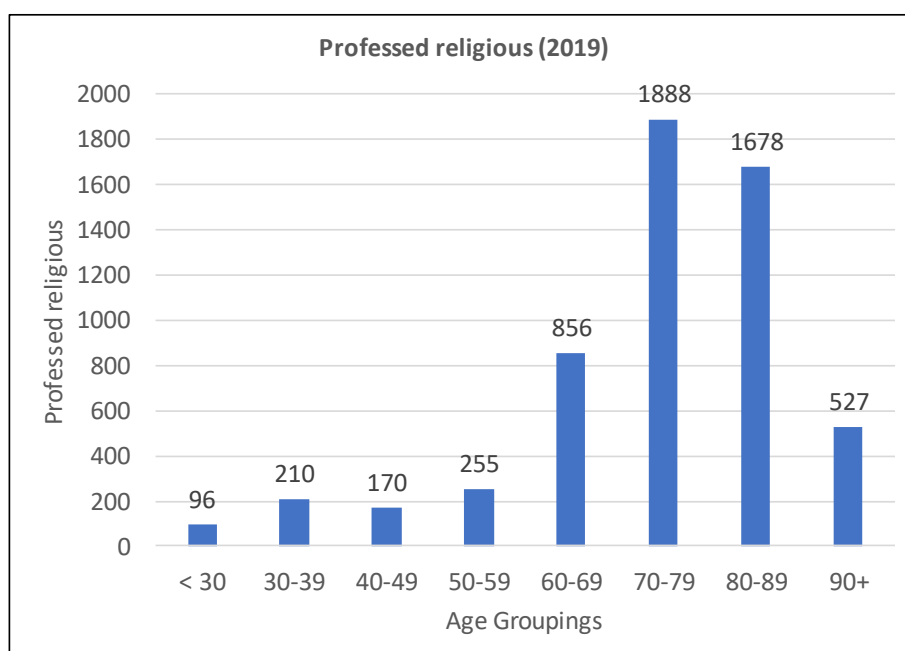


## Catholic Religious Australia : Religious Institute membership profile

Currently (2019) there are 149 member Religious Institutes within Catholic Religious Australia comprising approximately 5,680 professed religious living in Australia. 85 of these 149 Religious Institutes have fewer than 20 professed religious, living in Australia.



The vast majority (87%) of professed religious are 60 years or older and almost three quarters (72%) are 70 years or older, whilst only 8% are under 50 years of age.



## STATUTES OF CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS AUSTRALIA

### A Establishment and Purpose

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### B Registration of the name

- 3.0 **CRA** is an Incorporated Body under the name of the **Trustees of the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes ACLRI** and is listed in the NSW Government Gazette of 8th November 1995 as part of the "Roman Catholic Church Communities' Lands Act 1942 - Proclamation".

### C Members

#### 4.0 Membership is open to:

- 4.1 All leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life who are resident in Australia.
- 4.2 Those leaders who are authorised by their Institute or Society to exercise at least some of the principal functions of a major superior.
- 4.3 For religious institutes and societies of apostolic life which do not have their Religious Leader resident in Australia, membership of CRA is accorded to that person specifically designated by the competent authority of such institute or society.

- 5.0 A Conference Member ceasing to hold office in her/his own institute or society ceases to be a member of the Conference. Should such a member be currently on the Council, s\he retains the Council position until the election of a successor on the Council or until a substitute has been appointed.

## **D Organisation**

### **6.0 The Assembly**

- 6.1 The Assembly of CRA is the meeting of all members.
- 6.2 The Assembly normally meets at least annually at a time arranged by the Council.
- 6.3 The CRA Council will invite the Apostolic Nuncio to attend the opening session of the Assembly. A copy of the agenda will be sent to the Apostolic Nuncio prior to the Assembly and a copy of the Acts after the Assembly for information and for transmission to the Holy See.
- 6.4 In accordance with the practice of the mutual exchange of Delegates between the two Conferences, delegates are invited from the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference to attend the open sessions of Assembly.
- 6.5 The Assembly receives the reports of the activities of the Council and of any special committees; it makes recommendations for any joint activity or enterprise under its auspices and it sets the rates for financial contributions to the Conference.

### **7.0 Delegates to the Assembly**

- 7.1 A member of Conference who is unable to attend an Assembly may send a delegate in his/her stead with the same voting rights.
- 7.2 The CRA Council has the authority, as it deems appropriate, to invite religious sisters and brothers, priests and lay people to attend the Assembly. Non-members do not have voting rights.

### **8.0 Composition of the Council**

- 8.1 The CRA Council will consist of at least eleven (11) members of Conference: the President, elected by secret ballot and by an absolute majority and nine (9) members elected by the Assembly and at least one member co-opted by the Council
- 8.2 Of the elected members there must be at least one and preferably two representatives of women's religious Institutes or Societies of Apostolic Life, at least one and preferably two representatives of non-clerical men's religious Institutes or Societies of Apostolic Life and at least one and preferably two representatives of clerical men's religious Institutes or Societies of Apostolic Life.

- 8.3 Each of the six (6) State bodies, where possible, nominates, a State representative.

Three (3) members are elected by the Assembly; one (1) member is co-opted by the Council, with the option to co-opt other members, and ensuring that there is at least one and preferably two representatives from women's religious institutes or societies of apostolic life; at least one and preferably two representatives from non-clerical men's religious institutes or societies of apostolic life; and at least one and preferably two representatives from clerical religious institutes or societies of apostolic life.

- 8.4 The term of office for a member of the Council is two (2) years. A member may be re-elected or co-opted again. However, a member may not be re-elected or co-opted for more than six (6) consecutive years.

## **9.0 Procedure for forming the Council**

- 9.1 Nominations for office of President are called early in the Assembly. Voting for the President is held before the remainder of the Council is formed.

- 9.2 Names of the members nominated by the respective State bodies as State representatives, (by the members of Conference resident in a particular State) are to be submitted to the President and announced at least 12 hours before the ballot for the other (3) elected members of the Council.

- 9.3 Nominations for election to the Council are to be called from the Assembly: three (3) members are elected from these nominations by the following process; all members present at the Assembly vote by secret ballot for up to three (3) members from the list of nominations; three (3) receiving the highest number of votes are declared elected,

Provided that this ensures there is at least one representative from women from religious institutes or societies of apostolic life; at least one representative from men of non-clerical religious institutes or societies of apostolic life; and at least one representative from members of clerical religious institutes or societies of apostolic life among the six (6) state elected and the three (3) Assembly elected members.

If this provision has not been fulfilled in the three (3) nominees with the highest number of votes, then it is necessary to go in order down the list to satisfy this provision.

In the case of a tied vote for the final place, there is to be another ballot by a relative majority. For this final place, the only eligible candidates will be those who have tied numbers of votes.

- 9.4 After the elected members have been determined the Council then co-opts one (1) further member with the option to co-opt other members.

- 9.5 Casual vacancies among elected or co-opted members are filled by the Council co-opting a member of the conference until the next Elections. In the case of members elected by members of the Conference resident in a particular State, casual vacancies are filled by the members of Conference resident in that State. This election is to be effective until the next Assembly when the Elections take place.

## **10.0 Role of the Council**

Under the direction of the President, the Council has the task of organising the activities of the conference and in particular:

- of co-ordinating co-operative planning and national endeavours of religious;
- of liaising with church, government and community bodies;
- of initiating enterprises and ideas at a national level;
- of communicating with and via members of Conference resident in each State;

- of organising the annual Assembly of the CRA and if necessary, calling an Extraordinary Assembly;
- of selecting CRA representatives for various committees and commissions;
- of supervising the administration of Catholic Religious Australia

### **11.0 Council Meetings**

- 11.1 The Council shall meet at least three (3) times each year.
- 11.2 The quorum for a meeting of the Council is more than half the number of members.

### **12.0 Officers of the Council**

- 12.1 The Officers of the Council shall consist of the President, a Vice-President and the Treasurer. These Officers form the Executive of CRA. As the Conference is composed of representatives of both men's and women's Institutes and Societies at least one member of the Executive should be a member of a women's Religious Institute or Society of Apostolic Life, at least one should be a member of a clerical or non-clerical men's Religious Institute or Society of Apostolic Life. The Vice President shall be a member of the opposite sex to the President.
- 12.2 The finance committee of CRA will comprise the Treasurer and one other member of the Executive along with one or more co-opted members. (Cf Canon 1280).
- 12.3 With the exception of the President, all officers, excluding the co-opted members of the finance committee, shall be elected by the Council from its own membership.
- 12.4 If a vacancy occurs, a replacement shall be elected at the next meeting of the Council.

### **13.0 Executive Director**

- 13.1 An Executive Director may be appointed by the Council from outside membership of the Conference. Such position will have a contract period, normally of three (3) years.
- 13.2 The function of the Executive Director is to co-ordinate and implement the initiatives of the President and the Council, provide services to the membership which promote their ministry of leadership and extend the profile and influence of the CRA in church and public arenas. The Executive Director will liaise closely with the Council and particularly with the President.
- 13.3 The Executive Director will attend all Council Meetings, the annual Assembly and any other meetings as requested by the Council. The Executive Director does not have voting rights on the Council or at the Assembly.
- 13.4 The Executive Director is responsible for the proper functioning of the Executive Secretariat.

#### **14.0 Sub Committees**

The Council or the Assembly may establish sub-committees whose membership is not restricted to members of CRA. These sub-committees carry out their task in accordance with the mandate given to them.

### **E Modification of Statutes**

- 15.0** The articles provided by these Statutes may be altered, rescinded or added to by a special resolution of the Conference, requiring a two-thirds majority of those present at an Assembly and approved by the Holy See.

**Approved by the Decree of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life- *Given in Rome 16<sup>th</sup> Day of October 2014***



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE  
THE PRESIDENT

5 February 2020

Cardinal João Braz de Aviz  
Prefect, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life  
Piazza Pio XII, 3  
00193 ROME

Your Eminence,

As President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, I write to support the proposal presented to you from the Conference of Religious in Australia (Catholic Religious Australia).

The Church in Australia has been greatly enriched by the presence and ministry of a wide variety of religious institutes throughout its history. However, over many years the diminishment in numbers, and the increasing age of religious members has led to a lack of capacity for leadership at every level in many institutes. The great majority of these institutes are of pontifical right.

Some of these congregations have merged with larger groups with which they shared a common charism. For many, however, this option is not possible or desirable. In some cases, the superior general of a larger institute has been appointed the commissary of a very small diocesan institute. While this option for the care of a diminishing group may be feasible in one or two cases, the challenges presented by Australia's particular geography and demography have made it clear that this option cannot be extended to most of the institutes in need of assistance.

Recently the Conference of Religious in Australia, known as Catholic Religious Australia, has proposed an innovative way forward which appears to meet these urgent challenges. Together with all my fellow bishops I have a deep concern for the future welfare of all religious in Australia, and I welcome this initiative as a safe, effective and enduring solution to what is an urgent and increasing need.

Thank you in anticipation for your attention to this important proposal.

With every good wish, I remain  
Yours sincerely in Christ,

✠ Mark Coleridge  
Archbishop of Brisbane  
President



10 February 2020

His Eminence Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz

*Prefect*

Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

Palazzo delle Congregazioni

Piazza Pio XII, 3 00193 Roma, Italia

Your Eminence,

Peace and all good! Hope all is well with you as we prepare to enter the holy season of Lent.

I am honored to offer this letter of support in the name of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) to demonstrate our solidarity with our Sisters and Brothers of the Catholic Religious Australia (CRA). The CRA and LCWR share the experience of the ministry of serving the leaders of religious institutes in our respective countries. As such we are each public juridical persons according to Canon 709 and take very seriously the importance of this role and our service to the duly elected/appointed leaders of religious institutes.

Like CRA, LCWR is established in terms of Canon 708:

Can. 708 Major superiors can be associated usefully in conferences or councils so that by common efforts they work to achieve more fully the purpose of the individual institutes, always without prejudice to their autonomy, character, and proper spirit, or to transact common affairs, or to establish appropriate coordination and cooperation with the conferences of bishops and also with individual bishops.

And like CRA, LCWR realizes that at this moment in the history of religious life in our respective countries, there are realities arising for which new and creative responses are needed. The autonomy of each religious institute and the integrity of each religious institute's charism remains paramount to the CRA and LCWR. In deep respect for that autonomy and integrity, the CRA sees the emerging path of individual religious institutes relative to their capacity for self-governance and it sees that the usual path for religious institutes in need of governance assistance is less than viable for the women and men religious of Australia.

LCWR stands in support of CRA's profound care and concern for religious life in Australia and for the scope of work the CRA has done in order to discern how they might be of most service to



their members, to religious life in Australia and to the church of Australia. Their careful consideration of feasible options in strong collaboration with their members, and studious attention to the complexities of demographic imperatives and geographical realities in their country leads them to submit this proposal as their response to the rapidly accelerating situation among their members.

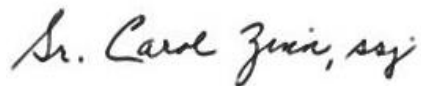
The CRA's proposal that the Conference Council be appointed the commissary for the religious institutes of Australia resonates with the awareness that LCWR perceives among its members, also. The CRA very carefully, prayerfully and professionally reflected on their reality, included their members in the processes and determined that their proposal is the most faithful and meaningful way for them to move forward as they provide resources to their members who are moving through unprecedented shifts in the presence of religious life in Australia.

LCWR offers its prayerful support and loving solidarity to our Sisters and Brothers of the CRA as they submit their proposal to the Congregation for Consecrated Life and Institutes of Apostolic Life in requesting that their Council be appointed the Commissary for the Religious Institutes of Australia. It is clear to LCWR that the CRA has developed a carefully considered plan, sought the appropriate civil and canonical consult and engaged their members who are living the reality of the sustainability of their institutes with each passing day. The foresight, fidelity and creativity generated by the CRA are testimony to the movement of the Spirit who breathes charisms into our world and guides the work of those institutes throughout their lifetime.

LCWR is confident that the CRA is exercising its due diligence as a conference serving leaders of religious institutes as they present this proposal for consideration by you and your office. And LCWR sincerely hopes that this very important request receives support and approval so that the women and men religious of Australia might continue to witness to the presence of God, the mission of the Church and the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

May the wisdom of the Spirit abound as you discern this proposal and engage in dialogue with the CRA to determine the movement of that same Spirit in new and transforming ways for the life of the world.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Carol Zinn, SSJ".

Sister Carol Zinn, SSJ  
Executive Director of LCWR  
Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
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