

Priests and Synodality in Australia

ACCCR and Garratt Publishing
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Priests and Synodality

Brief Reflections on 35 Years of Priesthood

- *Ordained 1990*
- *Parish ministry*
- *Parish Councils, Finance Committees, Education Boards*
- *Looking to the Future in a consultative way*
- *Development of Deaneries*
- *Amalgamation of parishes – resetting directions*
- *Education Ministry*

Priests and Synodality

- Call to a Synodal Church in the midst of:
- Pastoring Multiple Parishes
- Responding to the Pastoral Demands of the Day
- Funerals, baptisms, School Chaplaincy, Hospital Chaplaincy, Aged Care Ministry
- Young People Engagement
- Planning for mission
- Administrative, HR, property, Finance and Infrastructure

Context and changes

- Call to a Synodal Church in the midst of:
- Pluralisation
- Dissafiliation
- Mass Attendance
- Processes of Pluralisation and Secularisation (colourful and relativistic institutions)

Looking towards the future

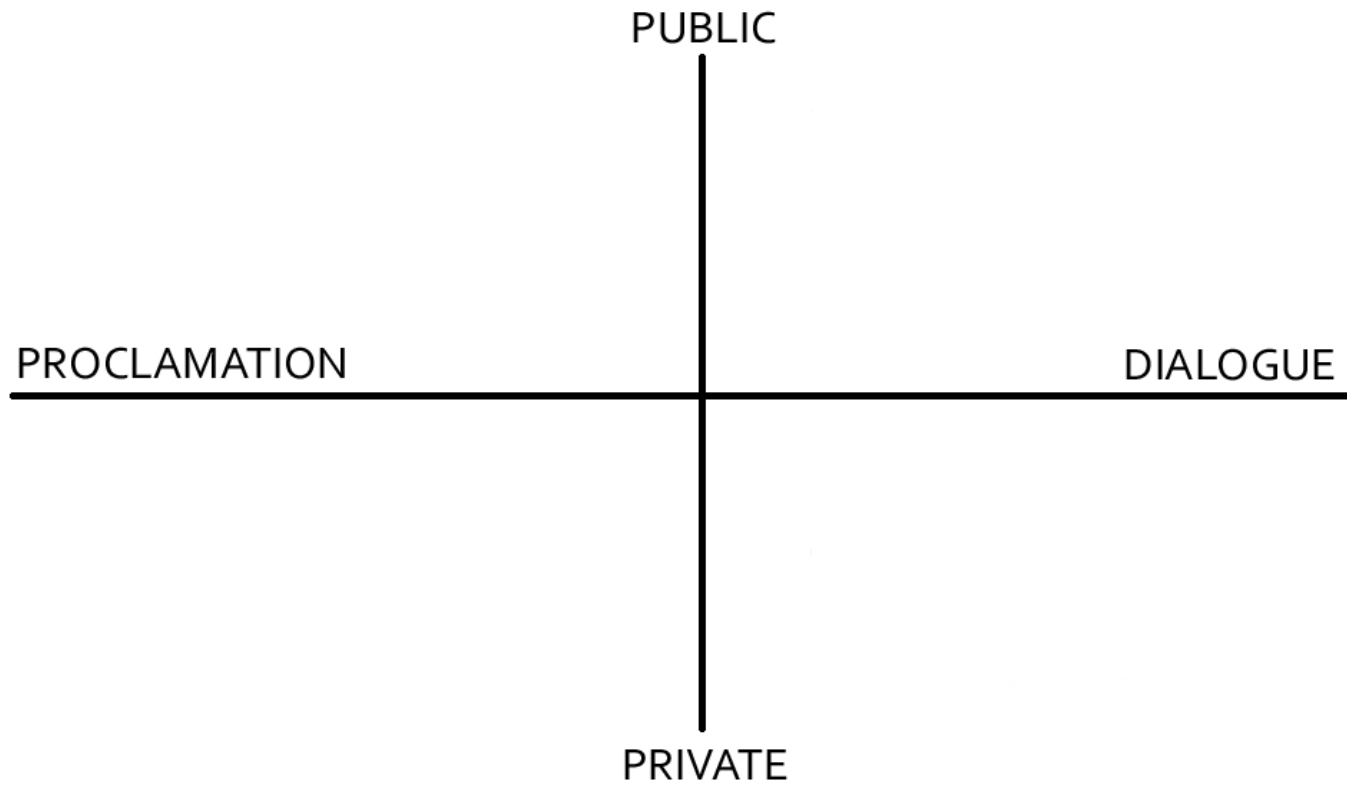
- 1. What is the impact on Catholic parishes (and priests) of the context of growing cultural pluralism and the societal shifts that have taken place in relation to religious affiliation and practice over the last twenty years?
- 2. How are Catholic parishioners (and priests) responding to this context and what is their desired future?
- 3. How can we, evaluate the self understanding and response of Catholic priests and parishioners from a theological point of view?
- 4. How can we support priests and parishes pastorally, so that their parish life, structures and activities remain both culturally plausible and theologically valid?

Parishes

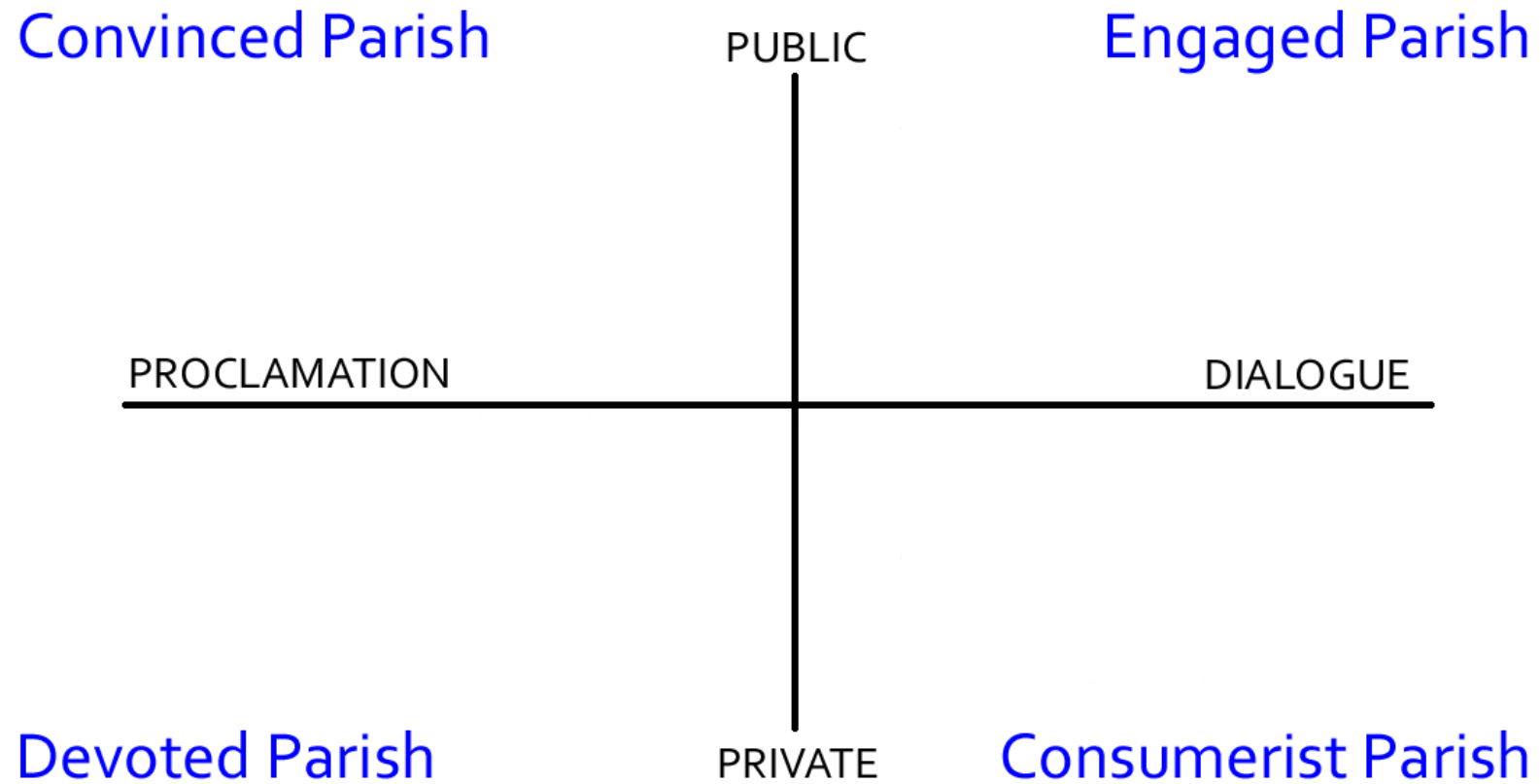
- Parishes and Synodality – today and tomorrow

Introducing SPES

Diagram



Introducing SPES



SPES – Four parish types

The Convinced parish

Actively promoting the Catholic faith for all, both inside and outside the parish.

The Engaged parish

Searching to be a parish through religiously inspired engagement in a pluralist environment.

The Consumerist parish (service parish)

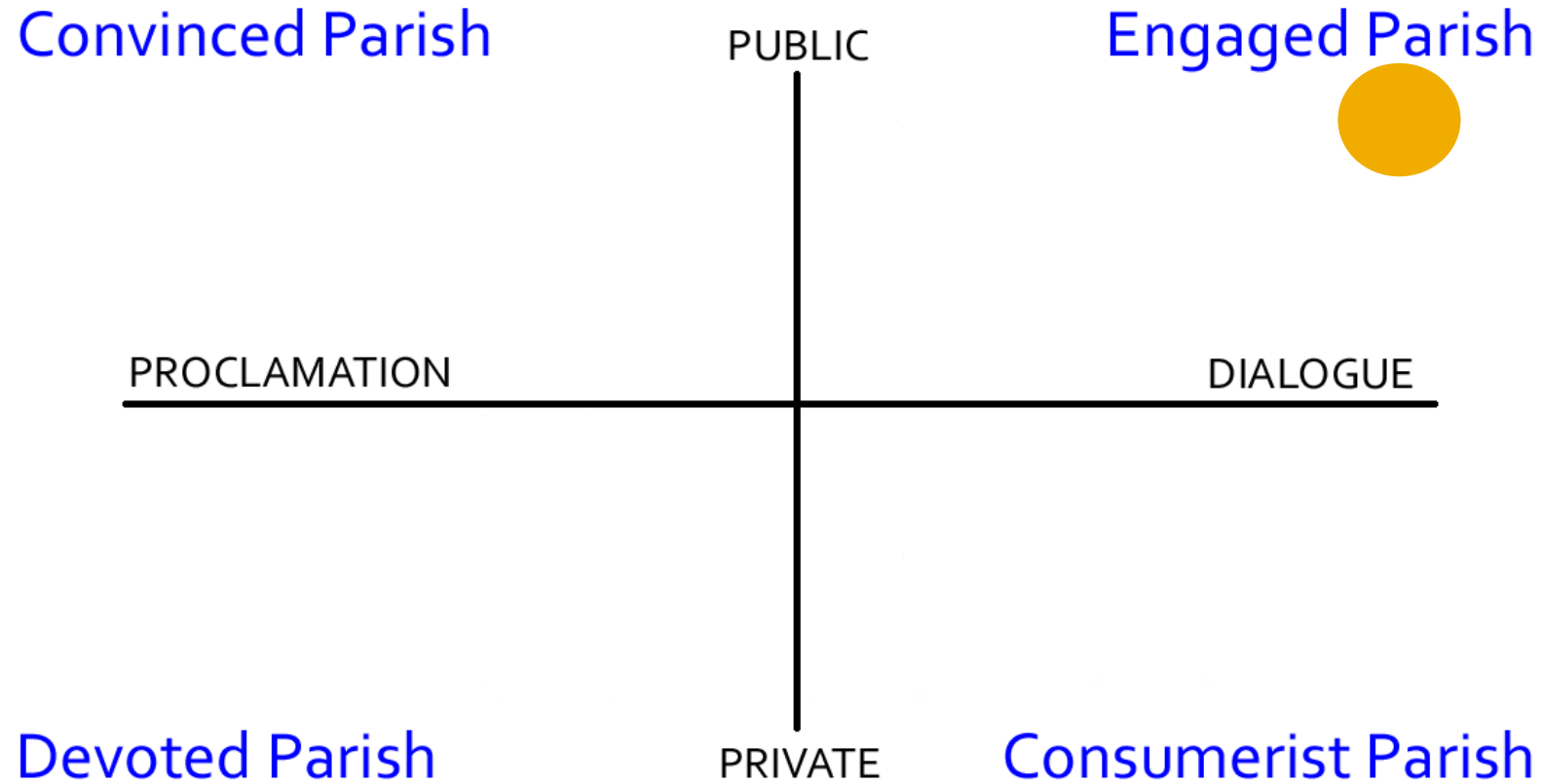
Seeking relevance by providing religious services for a variety of personal religious and spiritual needs.

The Devoted parish

Seeking to remain Catholic by endorsing the cultic and devotional practices of the Church together with the other parishioners.

Diagram SPES

Diagram



Convinced Parish

- Actively promoting the Catholic faith for all, both inside and outside the parish
- Desire
 - to make the Catholic expression of the Christian faith more explicit and stronger by means of an active proclamation
 - of the conversion of all people to Catholicism
- All the teachings of the Church are well known and followed
- Moral teachings of the Church: not optional but mandatory

Engaged Parish

- Searching for parish identity and engagement in a pluralist environment
- The parish actively engages in dialogue in a public and strategic way in order to strengthen the parish and the faith of its parishioners
- Humble in its claims for truth and certainty
- Approach the Bible and the dogmatic tradition in a hermeneutical way
- Parishioners are invited to (re)think their ideas and views about God in dialogue with other perspectives
- Catholicism = the interpretive key to understanding faith, but is always open to reflection, critique and ongoing development
- The experience of God is mediated

Consumerist Parish (service parish)

- Providing religious services for a variety of personal religious and spiritual needs
- Individual spirituality
- Religious desires and spirituality are not challenged but affirmed
- Dialogue consists of talking about what I believe and want for my own spiritual life (and for my children)
- Respond positively and immediately to requests for religious and spiritual support and services without demands being placed on parishioners
- Inclusive of all
- The parish remains in the private realm responding to individual and family religious requests. It does not seek to actively engage with and influence the public space.

Devoted Parish

- Seeking to remain Catholic by endorsing the cultic and devotional practices of the Church
- A place where inherited faith is received and lived out uncritically
- Strong devotional life with prayer and liturgical activity as ways of holding together a culturally similar community
- The faith of parishioners is reinforced by the liturgical cycle and the preaching of the ordained ministers
- The faith is viewed as part of the cultural identity of the group, it is not questioned or (overly) analysed
- This is our faith and culture

Parish types compared

22 characteristics

	Convinced Parish	Engaged Parish	Consumerist Parish	Devoted Parish
Basic Psychological value	Certainty	Challenge	Choice	Comfort
Experience of time	Urgency	Reflexivity	Immediacy	Continuity
Ethics	Objective morality	Social justice/ Structural sin	Private morality	Compliance
Revelation	Truth propositions	Dialogical, history of salvation	Construction of truth	Unquestioned mediation
Scope of Concern	Single issue	Public debate	Personal need	Coherence
Dialogue	Monologue (ad extra)	Dialogue (ad extra)	Dialogue (ad intra): all equal voices	Monologue (ad intra)
Approach to Authority	Dogma	Hermeneutic	Experience	Inherited

Parish types compared

22 characteristics



	Convinced Parish	Engaged Parish	Consumerist Parish	Devoted Parish
Approach to truth	Objective/ Uncompromising	Heuristic	Pluralism	Initiative
Learning Attitude	Instructive	Investigative	Comparative	Repetition
Prayer	Petition	Encounter	My concern	Piety
Concept of Tradition	Owning	Exploring	Instrumental	Belonging
Relationship to God	Immediate knowledge of God	Mediated knowledge of God	Instant fulfilment	Mediated knowledge of God
Meaning of Life	Reward	Responsibility	Fate	Gift
Catechesis	Teaching	Conversing	Selecting	Receiving

Parish types compared

22 characteristics



	Convinced Parish	Engaged Parish	Consumerist Parish	Devoted Parish
Bible	Bible as proof	Bible as hermeneutic	Stories from which to select	Inspired word of God
Children	Children to be taught	Children to contribute	Children choose and select	Children to be socialised
Leadership	Instructive	Distributive	Flexible and adaptive	Passive maintenance
Liturgy	Moralising	Participatory	Experiential	Traditional celebration
Christology	Universal king and law giver	Inaugurator of the kingdom	Christ a model of virtue and goodness	Shepherd of the flock
Spirit	Power of God	Mover	Blows where it will	Adopter
Approach to Politics	Convert	Advocate	Self-Interest	Avoid
Value of Economics	Influence	Common Good	Services	Security

Synodality and SPES

- **Convinced**
- Kerygmatic synodality
- **Engaged**
- Recontextualising synodality
- **Consumerist**
- Active plural synodality
- **Devoted**
- Formally tolerant

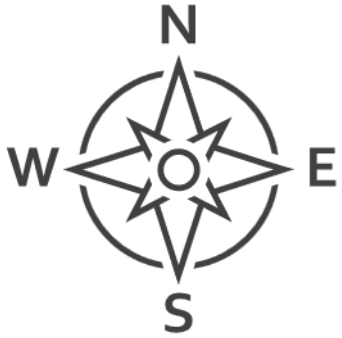
- Prof Didier Pollefeyt

Synodality and SPES

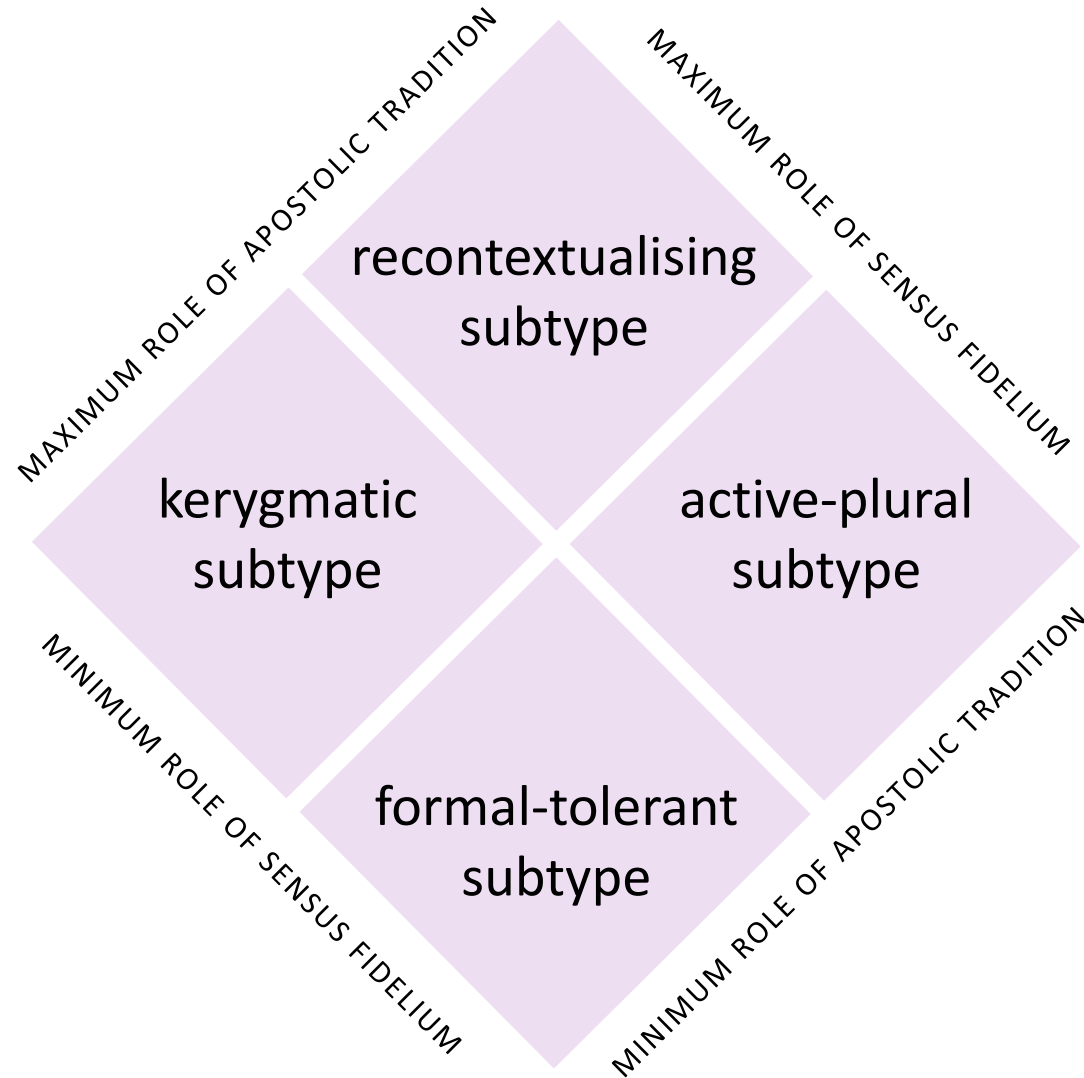
- **Convinced**
 - Kerygmatic synodality (proclaiming the faith in a monological way)
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- **Consumerist**
 - Active plural synodality (allowing for full diversity and ultimately creating a colourful institution)
- **Devoted**
 - Formally tolerant synodality (minimal engagement and resistance to change)

A compass of four subtypes

Realising synodality

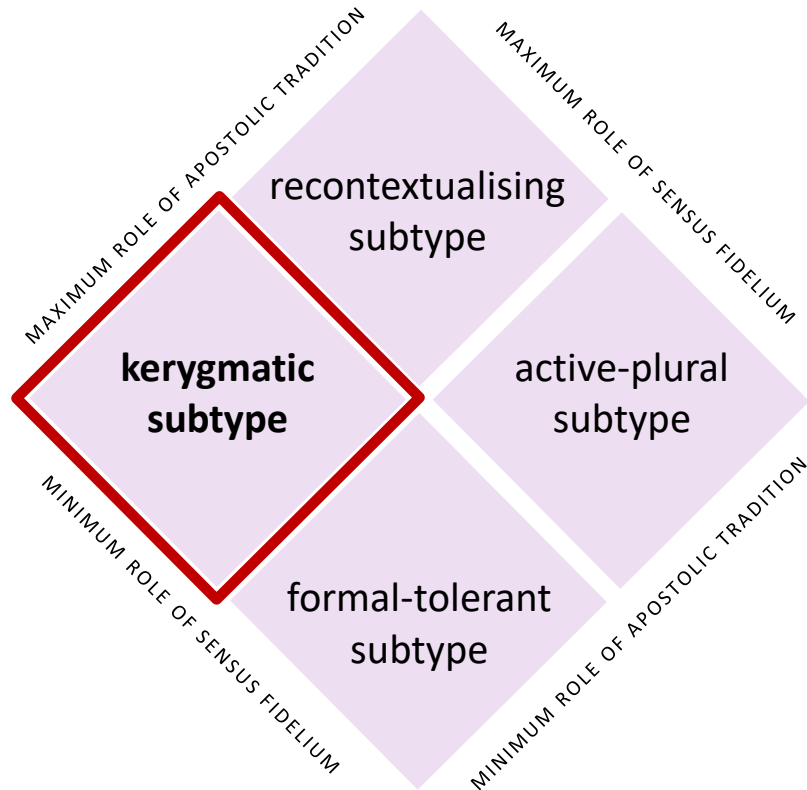


*Like a compass for
mapping our course*



Kerygmatic subtype

Description



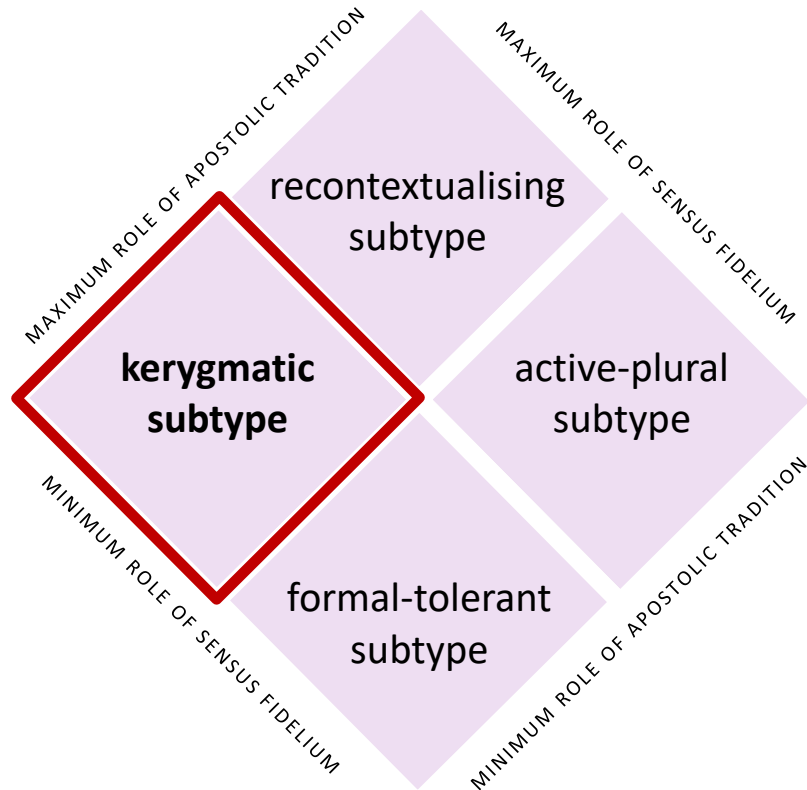
Maximal role for the apostolic tradition and minimal role for the *sensus fidelium*.

The **kerygmatic subtype** understands and practices a synodality centred on **fidelity to the apostolic tradition** and oriented towards **bold proclamation of the Gospel**, aimed ultimately at calling all the faithful to know Christ as proclaimed authoritatively through the magisterium and ecumenical councils.

In service to the Gospel, this subtype prioritises commitment to Catholic tradition over engaging with diversity.

Kerygmatic subtype

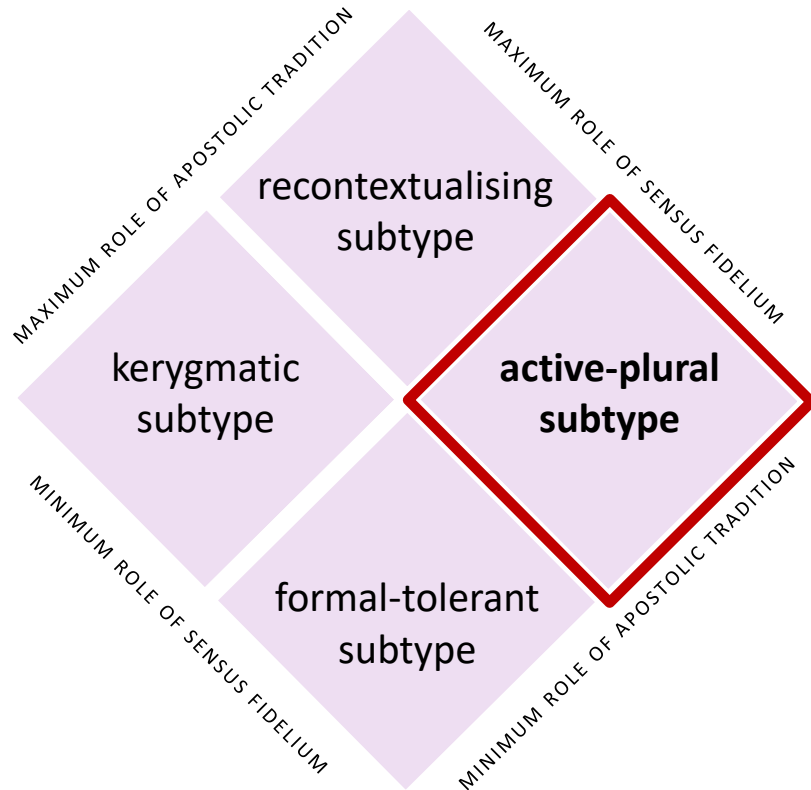
Examples



- Consultations to develop **more effective avenues for and methods of evangelisation**, with an emphasis on doctrines, moral teachings, and church praxis as strongholds for faithful Christian living in a secularising world.
- Collaborations with ecclesial movements and educational institutions that enthusiastically **promote orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and fidelity to the magisterium**.
- Resistance to those calling for pastoral and theological dialogue with lived experiences that challenge established teaching on controversial issues like sexual ethics, viewing such **dialogue as a risk to established Gospel truth**.

Active-plural subtype

Description



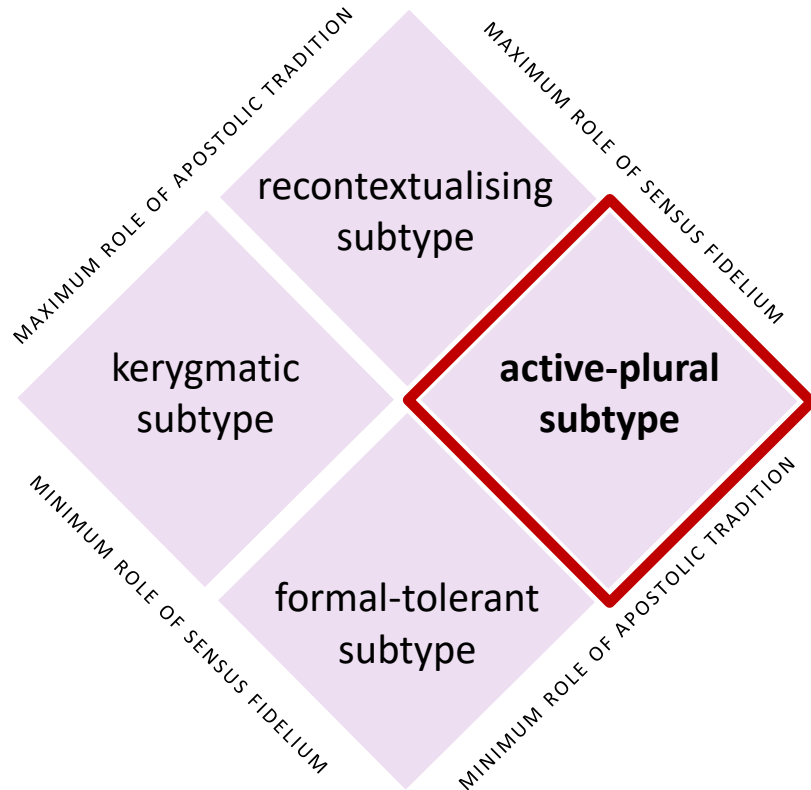
Maximal role for the *sensus fidelium* and minimal role for the apostolic tradition.

The **active-plural subtype** understands and practices a synodality focused on **decentralised participation, listening and patient dialogue towards consensus-building** among the diversity of viewpoints in the church. Emphasising the value of diversity and grounded in a sense of fundamental equality flowing from baptism, this type horizontalises collaboration.

Typologically the opposite of the kerygmatic subtype, this subtype prioritises engaging multilaterally with diversity over deference to privileged authority in the apostolic tradition.

Active-plural subtype

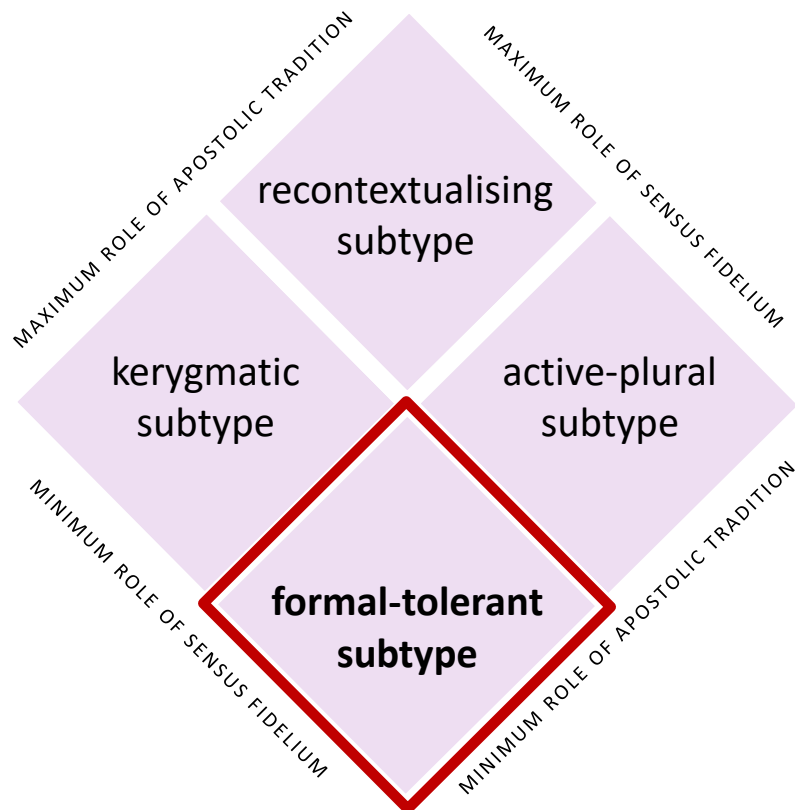
Examples



- Networking among grassroots church reform groups **lobbying for increased democratisation, transparency and accountability** in ecclesial governance.
- Collaboration with **ecumenical and interfaith partners on social issues**, at times downplaying Catholic theological distinctiveness in those efforts.
- Calls to **update Catholic moral teaching on social matters** such as contraception, homosexuality, divorce, bringing such teaching into closer dialogue with modern individual consciences.

Formal-tolerant subtype

Description

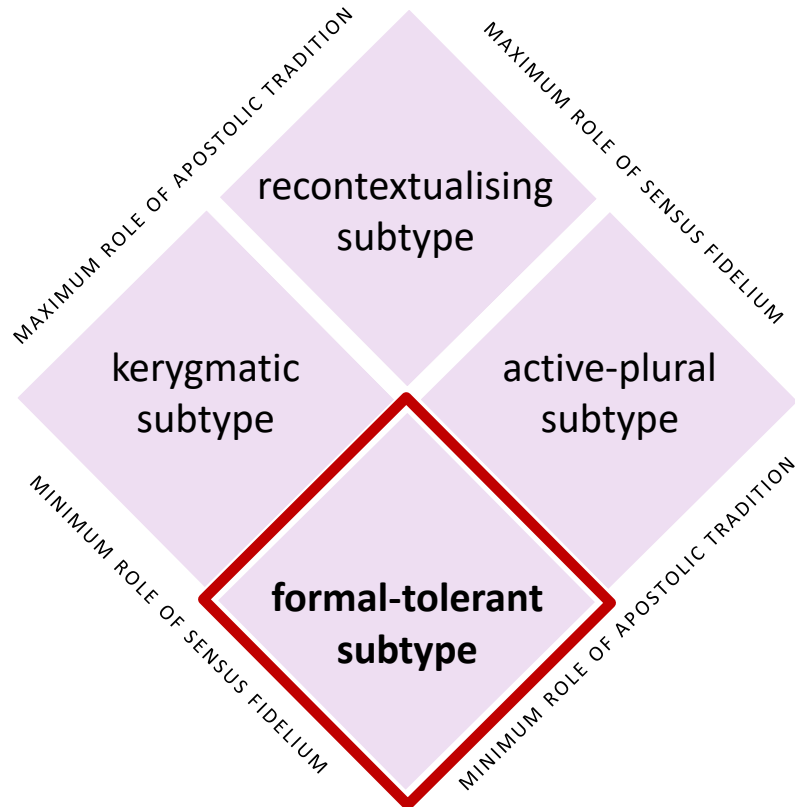


Minimal role for the apostolic tradition and minimal role for the *sensus fidelium*.

The **formal-tolerant subtype** understands and practices a synodality focused on **structural collaboration, transparent governance, and participative decision-making** through representative mechanisms, aimed at making the church an efficient, well-functioning institution tolerant of pluralism.

Formal-tolerant subtype

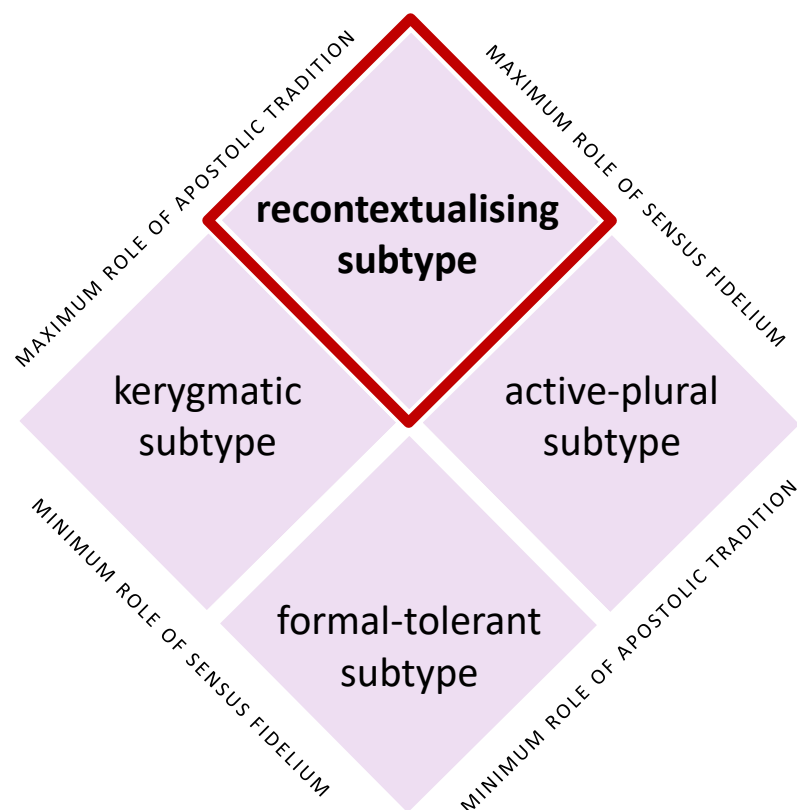
Examples



- Restructuring parishes into efficient mergers overseen by **parish management teams with CEO-pastors**.
- Bishops relying heavily on consultative **diocesan councils for administrative policies** but not doctrinal or pastoral discernment.
- Networks of **Catholic professionals advancing managerial best practices** for running churches as businesses.

Recontextualising subtype

Description

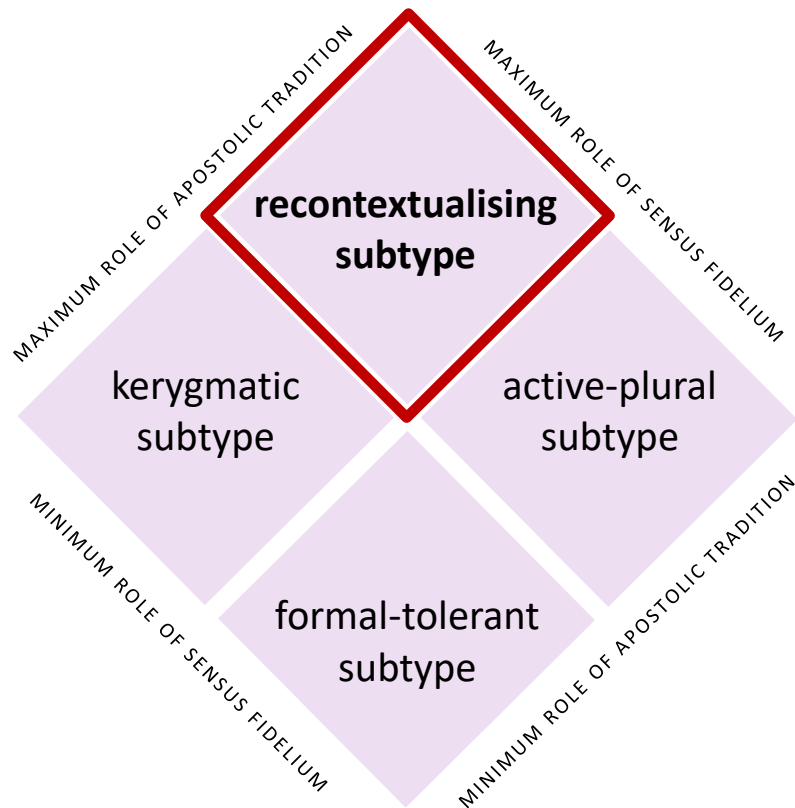


Maximal role for the apostolic tradition and maximal role for the *sensus fidelium*.

The **recontextualising subtype** understands and practices a synodality focused on the space, moment and process of **communal discernment towards creative (re)expressions of the millennia-rooted faith tradition in new cultural and social contexts**. This is achieved through co-responsible listening to the Holy Spirit, the wisdom of the episcopate and the *sensus fidelium*, resulting *a posteriori* in the development of mutually informed doctrine and pastoral practice within a hermeneutic of continuity.

Recontextualising subtype

Examples



- Efforts to engage insights from human sciences like psychology and sociology to **develop new pastoral approaches** on issues like divorce and remarriage.
- Theological debates weighing developments like female deacons or blessing persons in same-sex unions, seen as **potential new applications of pastoral ministry** in the Church.
- **Constructive dialogues between bishops and lay reform groups** advocating for decentralisation and women's leadership in the church.

Recontextualising orientation

In the vision of Pope Francis



“ Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always "new".

Francis (2013), *Evangelii gaudium: Apostolic exhortation on the proclamation of the gospel in today's world*






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Three respondent groups in parishes

Disproportional randomized stratified sample

	Regular parishioners	Parishioners, people belonging to the faith community without special function. Description: You belong to the parish and go to church (daily, weekly, monthly, occasionally ...). You have no further special function in the parish, neither paid nor voluntary.
	Active parishioners	People who work or are active in the parish / cluster, paid or voluntary. Description: You are an 'active parishioner' in your parish. For example, you have a specific function and are part of a group or ministry. This could be both either paid or voluntary. For example: school staff member, catechist, lector, acolyte, Liturgy group, children's liturgy of the word team, maintaining or decorating the church or chapel, Welcome group, marriage preparation, bereavement support, Scripture group, choir, cantor, organist, responsible for children's or family celebrations, etc.
	Parish priest and leadership	Option 3. Priest and other local leaders in the parish. Description: you belong to a small group of people who directs and takes the decisions in your parish. For example: parish priest, assistant priest, deacon, parish council member, member of parish team, member of coordinating team, member of parish finance committee, etc.

