

So You're Working for the Catholic Church

A FRIENDLY GUIDE TO
THE CATHOLIC TRADITION



TONY DOHERTY

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PREFACE

This book has been written for people working in the wide range of employment offered by the Catholic Church.

You may be:

- ❖ a nurse or administrator in a Catholic hospital
- ❖ a teacher in a Catholic school
- ❖ a parish secretary, or office administrator
- ❖ a medical practitioner working in a Catholic hospital
- ❖ a carer in an Aged Care facility
- ❖ a nurse or counsellor in a Catholic hospice
- ❖ one of the vast number of non-medical workers in Catholic health care
- ❖ an administrator in a Social Justice office
- ❖ a worker in a homeless shelter or working with kids on the street
- ❖ a worker in a St Vincent de Paul store...

... or dozens of other ministries and occupations within the Church. It is important to have some idea of the broad culture that has motivated the establishment of the place where you work. Nearly all of these organisations have been started by people of great vision and energy inspired by the Gospel and the impulse arising from their Catholic faith.

This book has been designed to help you, the reader, appreciate a little better the culture you are working in, and to learn something of the reasons that caused the place where you work to exist in the first place.

The Catholic tradition discussed in this book has come from a long and colourful history, being influenced by the stories and traditions and religious practices of a huge variety of peoples from around the world. This small book in no way attempts to cover completely the

extraordinary richness and depth of Catholic belief; there are libraries of books which have been written about such questions as... Who is Jesus? What is the mystery of the Church? How do we make healthy moral choices today? ... and dozens of other central questions of faith. Instead, *So You're Working for the Catholic Church* is designed to be a friendly and gentle introduction to a few of the beliefs and values which make Catholics tick. It is a modest overview for people coming in touch with the Church, perhaps for the first time, or refreshing their acquaintance. For a significant and more in-depth summary of Catholic teachings, see *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994).

Our hope with this book is that it may pique your interest, spark your curiosity, and help you find in this, your workplace, a warm welcome and a very satisfying occupation.

**But Catholic is my language;
Catholic is the coat I wear,
Catholic is the house in which I live.
It is a house that needs cleaning,
a house in which savagery and cowardice thrived,
where evil has a room with a view,
where foolishness and greed have prominent places at the table.
But it is also a house where hope lives, and hope is the greatest of mercies,
the most enduring of gifts, the most nutritious of foods.
hope is what we drink from the odd story of the carpenter's odd stepson.
When we eat his body in the ludicrous miracle of the mass,
we hope in him, and with him,
forever and ever,
world without end,
amen, amen, amen.**

Brian Doyle: Leaping, Revelations and Epiphanies, Loyola Press, Chicago, 2003

INTRODUCTION

Coming into contact with the Catholic Church — for the first time, for many — can be something of a baffling experience.

You may be working in a Catholic school or hospital, or in one of the dozens of Catholic organisations dedicated to social welfare and family care. Or you may be someone who is considering employment in such an organisation for the first time and have questions about the Catholic faith. If so, this book has been written for you.

It has been said that this generation is *not simply an era of change, but a significant change of era*. These are the words of our present Pope Francis, an Argentinian and the first pope from ‘down under’ — the southern part of the planet. A Jesuit, Jorge Bergoglio has taken the name Francis from his 12th century model — the gentle revolutionary of Assisi. Commentators these days speak about ‘the Francis Effect’ among Catholics, to describe the Pope’s inspired leadership in rejuvenating a Church facing many momentous issues.

Today, we face many challenges in the form of environmental disasters,

global warming, and even a pandemic. In the first decades of this century, the Catholic Church has been facing its own critical issues, such as a reduction of general interest in matters of religion; diminishing numbers in pews on Sunday; lack of equality of women in Church governance; and, above all, the scandal and deep scars left by the sexual abuse of children. We are going through a time of serious reflection about the very mission of the Church itself.

Catholic tradition, at its best, contains a challenge found first in the Christian gospels that tell the story of a young teacher from Nazareth and his vision of life. He called it the ‘reign of God’. Each human heart contains a hunger to be genuine, to be truly itself, to be fully alive and free from disabling fear.

Catholics are not very different from anyone else in the community, but we do hold such beliefs which affect the way we think about ourselves, about other people, and about the world around us.

These beliefs are expressed in many different ways. Over the vast history of two thousand years, they have arisen out of the faith of people from

In the word ‘question’ there is the beautiful word ‘quest’.

I love that word.

We are all partners in the quest.

The essential questions have no answers.

You are my question and I am yours—

and then there is dialogue.

The moment we have answers, there is no dialogue.

Questions unite people.

Answers divide them.

Elie Weisel



INTRODUCTION

every race and nation on earth. There are thousands of stories, a wide range of religious practices, and quite diverse ways of celebrating these beliefs. Catholic tradition embraces all that is life-giving.

This small book can in no way attempt to cover the profusion of these beliefs. There are libraries of books written about such questions as: who is Jesus? what is the Church? how do we make healthy and moral choices today? In 1994, the Church published a significant summary of Catholic

teachings in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* which precisely attempts such an overview.

So You're Working for the Catholic Church is designed, rather, to be a friendly and accessible summary for those coming in contact with the Catholic Church for the first time.

May such an experience be met with hospitality, grace and friendship and match something of your own search for a more human, deeper and fulfilling life.



“The recent pandemic enabled us to recognize and appreciate ... those around us who... responded by putting their lives on the line. We began to realize that our lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people ...: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests and religious... They understood that no one is saved alone.” (No. 54)

Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis

THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF WORKING IN A CATHOLIC INSTITUTION

Around the mid-seventies, I returned from a long stint overseas and for a while was unemployed. One evening, a neighbour knocked on my door with a book and a piece of advice. She said, 'You should be a school librarian. They can never sack you, and think of all the holidays for travel.' Sounded promising. But, heavens, all those children? I went back to my dinner, read the book I was given and—within days—I had signed up for life.

It has been an interesting and rewarding journey: going to a workplace full of 'little people', observing them as they develop their organisational skills, their notions of justice and how to negotiate the minefields of making and keeping friends.

There have been many changes in school libraries, the most obvious being the introduction of computers. Ironically, the technological revolution has coincided with what is generally accepted as a golden age of children's books. To my mind, they co-exist happily. The internet and the huge range of excellent factual books provide children with the opportunity to extend their curiosity into realms far beyond the school curriculum, creating—we hope—the informed open-minded citizens of the future.

Through children's books—the best of them—the children learn about love, tolerance, compassion, ambiguity, complexity and resilience.

If these values sound familiar, they should. They mirror the values found in the Gospel stories that are the bedrock of our faith and our schools.

They are part of the unspoken, mutually agreed contract that comes into being when parents make the choice to give their child a Catholic education. Those parents and teachers assume correctly that

our lives are strengthened and given meaning with a deeper appreciation of a loving God and our love and understanding of each other.

For me, it is now thirty-eight years, eleven schools and thirty-two school principals later. I am deeply grateful for my neighbour, the book and the knock on the door.

ELIZABETH HUGHES: CATHOLIC SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

This is a fabulous resource! In my previous role as Pastoral Associate in a K-12 Catholic school, I found it very useful to share this book with staff new to Catholic Education as it is easy to navigate and clearly outlines the key elements of the Catholic faith. It is presented in an engaging and succinct way, using modern images, fresh layouts and easy to follow information. I would highly recommend this resource for all new to the Catholic faith.

**LEANNE PRICHARD
EDUCATION OFFICER,
TASMANIAN CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE**

Ironically, one aspect that appeals to me about working in a Catholic workplace is the complexity. This is a positive form of complexity, particularly in the discernment process when we make decisions involving many different elements and looking through different lenses that are not usually considered part of the decision-making process for many other organisations. As a result, while the process is more complex and



THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF WORKING IN A CATHOLIC INSTITUTION

usually slower, I believe we make much richer and well-considered decisions for ourselves and the communities we serve through our values-based framework.

As for working in a Catholic hospital, I think the culture is very strong, positive and aligned with my own personal values. There is a certain sense that we look at the welfare and issues of the whole person we either work with or provide care for, and I personally find this a very rewarding, respectful and fulfilling environment in which to work. It is also a privilege to continue the heritage and tradition of those who have gone before us—such as the Sisters of Charity—to make our organisations the iconic services they are today. This, of course, brings with it a great responsibility. I have worked in health management all my working life and in many ways I consider it a vocation rather than a career.

ROBERT CUS: CATHOLIC HOSPITAL WORKER



I'm curious about the scenario that whilst parish numbers are dwindling, people come to our Catholic hospitals en masse. We encounter them often at a very vulnerable time in their life. We are the only encounter with Church and sacrament many people will ever have and it is here that they hear the invitation through every action in our facility to 'come to me all you who are weary ... and I will give you rest.'

I even like the fact that we don't always succeed and we share our pain when we feel we have strayed from our values. We hold our values in high esteem and are prepared to fight for them and work to bring us

back on track. In this respect, the old Christian tradition of lamentation still has a place and is cathartic: we stay together as a community to continue the healing work.

As a Catholic facility we have a wonderful history, in our case gifted to us by the enduring legacy of the Sisters of Charity. Storytelling is a powerful element in building culture, inspiring loyalty and connecting each person—patients and staff—to a story much longer than their own. The Sisters are loved and their contribution recognised. Our challenge as leaders is to invite staff to not look back wistfully on the old days when the Sisters were with us in greater numbers. Instead, we must rise to the challenge and meet the needs of our own time in the world and in our communities—in the spirit of Mary Aikenhead—just as the Sisters have encouraged us to do. In this way, our hospital mirrors the predicament of the entire Catholic Church.

On a daily basis I like the fact that words such as love, joy, formation, sacred and hope are always welcome at the table, right there alongside quality reports, budget negotiations and patient care.

I'm not sure that this can be found everywhere. Foremost, I believe that we are not a hospital with a Mission, we are a Mission with a hospital; that our purpose, our vision and our Catholic Mission will endure well past my own lifetime. I'm in the right place, right time, and live with the intention of offering my work in loving service.

LISA McDONALD: DIRECTOR OF MISSION, ST VINCENT'S HOSPITAL MELBOURNE



WHAT DO CATHOLICS BELIEVE?

What Catholics believe is summed up in a series of short formal statements called creeds, taken from the Latin word *credere* meaning 'to believe'.

There are a number of these statements dating back to the earliest centuries of Christianity when they were used as statements of faith by those being initiated into the Church. When an infant is baptised, his or her godparents and all those gathered, recite the Creed (called the 'Apostles Creed') as a sign of accepting the beliefs of this particular community of faith on the infant's behalf.

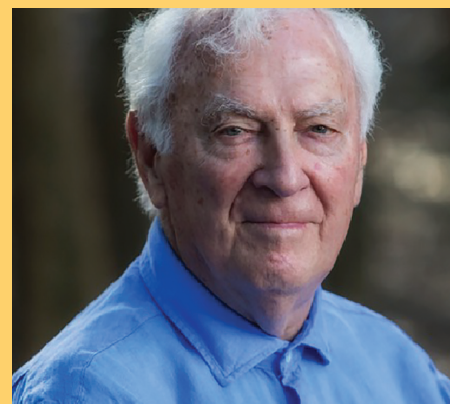
The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again
from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God
the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.

Amen.

So *You're Working for the Catholic Church* is designed to be a friendly and gentle introduction to a few of the beliefs and values which make Catholics tick. It is a modest overview for people coming in touch with the Church, perhaps for the first time, or refreshing their acquaintance. It has been written for people working in the wide range of employment offered by the Catholic Church.

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 - an administrator in a Social Justice office
 - a worker in a homeless shelter or working with kids on the street
 - a worker in a St Vincent de Paul store...
- ...or dozens of other ministries and occupations within the Church.

This book will help you to appreciate your role in the Catholic Church, and to learn something of the reasons that caused the place where you work to exist in the first place.

Monsignor Tony Doherty is a Sydney priest now retired from parish administration. During nearly six decades of pastoral ministry as a diocesan priest, he has been a hospital chaplain, adult educator, contributed to ABC radio and television, including the two TV series *Echo of a Distant Drum* (the story of the Irish in Australia) and the award winning *Brides of Christ*. In 1995 he co-ordinated the visit of Pope John Paul II to beatify Australia's first saint, Mary MacKillop. While Dean of Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral, he received the 2004 Community Relations Commission medal for his contribution to Inter-Faith dialogue. His lifetime search is to find an appropriate language of faith for contemporary adults.