

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

NEW WINE, OLD WINESKINS:
IS A SHORTAGE OF PRIESTS RE-
SHAPING CATHOLIC IDENTITY IN
AUSTRALIA?

A Dissertation submitted by
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Abstract

The Catholic Church globally is facing a declining number of priests, whose remaining numbers are ageing and for whom there are insufficient seminarians to provide replacements. This thesis seeks to examine the consequence of this situation for Catholic identity in the context of the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba in regional Australia. Such circumstances necessitate new forms of day-to-day leadership in parish faith-communities, especially an increasing reliance upon laypeople to fulfil roles once the domain of clergy. In examining this phenomenon, this thesis draws together anthropological discourse on identity and theological insights into the particular importance of Catholicism's ordained ministers in an anthropology of theology. In doing so, the *liminality* of the diocese's parishioners and their experiences of *communitas* are identified and examined. Applying the analytical framework of the emerging anthropology of theology to the findings of fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, this work addresses the question 'Is a shortage of priests re-shaping Catholic identity in Australia?' concluding that this phenomenon *is* re-shaping the identity of Toowoomba's Catholics.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate

Date

ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisor

Date

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