



MEDIA RELEASE: THE PARADOX OF SERVICE

Life for former Catholic Church nuns who leave their order is often a sorry story of poverty, mental and physical ill health, social isolation and emotional pain, a report released by the Victorian Women's Trust today has revealed.

This landmark research, the first of its kind to be undertaken in Australia, 'The Paradox of Service', examines the experiences of nuns after leaving religious life, and uncovers systemic issues of neglect by the Church. It highlights inconsistencies and inadequacies of the Church in dealing financially and in other ways with members who have left.

"The lack of support former nuns experience flies in the face of the Church's own Canon Law which instructs that legitimately departing members be treated with *equity and evangelical charity*," Women's Trust Executive Director Mary Crooks said.

The report highlights the critical contribution of nuns in supporting the work and role of the Church over its history.

"Without the effort of women as nuns, the Church simply could not have initiated and sustained its wide-ranging educational and social services across the Australian community over many decades," Women's Trust Executive Director Mary Crooks said.

Ms Crooks said the Catholic Church seems to have taken for granted the unpaid work of nuns.

"Paradoxically, despite making huge contributions to the work of the Catholic Church in their service as teachers, nurses and community carers, these women have received little to virtually nothing on departure."

In releasing the report, the Women's Trust has called on the Catholic Church to rectify this ongoing injustice which has affected at least several thousand women since the mid-1960s.

"With some vision, political will and resource priorities, the Church now has an important opportunity to be proactive in addressing the welfare of former nuns across the board," Ms Crooks said, adding "many of them are now elderly and in poor health, still grappling with practical and psychological issues related to their life in the convent".

The Report outlines proposed ways the Church can help rectify the on-going situation for so many:

"Firstly, an ex-gratia payment should be paid to former nuns to acknowledge their services rendered to the Catholic Church. The second step would see the Church set up an overarching fund that could provide an appropriate level of financial support to meet the challenges of departure and negotiation of a new life outside," Ms Crooks said.

Victorian Women's Trust Executive Director Mary Crooks is available for comment on (03) 9642 0422. 'The Paradox of Service' report is available to download from the homepage of the Victorian Women's Trust's website:
www.vwt.org.au