

Holy Trinity Parish Office
34 Stevens Street
Queenscliff VIC 3225

10th February, 2023

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

After nearly three years of much valuable preparation and planning, towards the end of 2022 we were finally able to hold our parish consultations on *Take the Way of the Gospel*.

On behalf of our whole parish, sincere thanks to all of you who were able to participate, and to our Parish Pastoral Councillors who helped in organising, hosting and facilitating these sessions.

Special thanks to our Pastoral Council Chairman, Tony Frizza, for the huge amount of time and energy he has generously dedicated to the process. This includes representing our parish at Archdiocese-wide meetings, guiding the Council in how to implement materials supplied by the Archdiocese for these consultations, collating all the responses from the parish meetings, and prayerfully discerning how best to distill all these elements into this report.

An essential element of these meetings was *Spiritual Conversation* - a way of proceeding that aims to ensure respectful dialogue and an opportunity for every voice to be heard.

Pope Francis exhorts us to listen deeply, especially to those people 'at the margins' and to those whose voices are not otherwise heard.

Many good ideas have come from our meetings. Some of these we have already begun to implement. Others can grow and develop as we strive to be a *vital, vibrant and viable* community now, and in the future.

I earnestly commend this report to you for your prayerful consideration.

With heartfelt thanks again, and every blessing,

Darien

(Rev Fr) Darien J. Sticklen B.Div. (Hons) P.P.



Holy Trinity Parish—Barwon Heads, Ocean Grove, Queenscliff

Take the Way of the Gospel: Parish Discernment Meetings

October-November, 2022

Prepared by the Holy Trinity Parish Pastoral Council, February 1st, 2023

Meetings were held as follows:

Holy Trinity Parish Pastoral Council—November 3 rd , 2021, Attendance –	12
Holy Trinity Church/Hall, Queenscliff—October 26 th , 2022, Attendance –	22
Our Lady Star of the Sea Primary School—November 10 th , 2022, Attendance –	18
Our Lady Star of the Sea Primary School—November 14 th , 2022, Attendance –	22
Holy Family Church, Barwon Heads—November 18 th , 2022, Attendance --	<u>17</u>
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Because of their positions, some people were involved in more than one meeting; others chose to come to more than one meeting. In all, 71 individuals took part in the process.

Whilst we have collated all of the comments taken down by the recorders for each of the discussion groups, this report is intended to do justice to the “flavour” of the discussions rather than provide a register of every comment that was made. Where a number is allocated before a paragraph, it is an attempt to indicate the relative weighting given by the meetings to that particular point. Where a footnote reference is given, you should note the comment that is made at the conclusion of the report, but which is not intended to be part of the report on the discussions.

Some of the general views expressed:

- The notion of “missions – a distinctive faith locality” makes sense in the light of fewer priests and falling numbers of parishioners. It is an attempt to ensure a critical mass of people that might allow that faith community to operate as a vibrant, vital and viable community.
- Participants found it difficult to accept that the initiative is not coming out of the data, the dwindling number of priests and church attendees.

- This is an example of “consultation after the fact”. We are being asked to comment on a suggested structural change. We do not see real evidence of an attempt having been made to identify the pastoral needs of our mass attendees, the families of our Catholic schools, the lapsed Catholics and the marginalised Catholics. Pastoral needs, not data, should drive change.
- The questions of Pope Francis for our Church and parishes are very challenging and remind us of what we should be. These should be taken as the guide for decision-making at Holy Trinity Parish
 - Is it in contact with the homes and lives of its people?
 - Is it an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration?
 - Does it encourage and train its members to be evangelisers?
 - Is it a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach?

(from *Evangelii Gaudium* §28)

- The presentation made available by the Archdiocese made a couple of references to the Church having been adaptable through history to changing times and circumstances. This is strongly challenged. It is precisely a lack of adaptability that has now led to the Church, as an institution, being in some sense of crisis. How adaptable/compassionate has the institutional Church shown itself in the issue of clerical abuse, utilising the talents of women in all aspects of Church operations, on issues of sexuality, on the economic challenges of young families and other changes in societal attitudes, on the needs of today's young people? It has been very slow to respond to true synodality. Ecumenism has been superficial at best.
- Whilst the demographics of different parishes will vary, at this point in time, those attending Church in the Holy Trinity Parish are in the very senior age bracket. The clergy usually remove themselves from Parish responsibilities at age 75. Given that most of our Church attendees are approaching, or above this age, it is a bit of an “ask” to suggest that they “step up” to develop a “mission”. There is little chance of a parish or mission being vibrant, vital or viable without a critical mass of younger and middle-aged participants.
- Distance and travel will be a crucial factor in any non-metropolitan mission. In any country area, there will always be a Church centre that is on the margin. When this is coupled with the age-factor, there will be a reluctance for people to travel from one side of the Bellarine to the other—for administration, for gatherings or for liturgy. This feeling was particularly expressed by participants at Barwon Heads.
- If missions are seen as a means of a more equitable distribution and a more efficient use of resources, then some redistribution of resources between parishes is implied. The detail of such a move needs to be outlined and explained.

- Holy Trinity Parish is already an example of mission. Our amalgamation took place in 1980. The three church communities have retained their distinct atmospheres, but have become close-knit communities in the two smaller churches, however this is harder at Ocean Grove as it is difficult to distinguish between parishioners and visitors. People do travel across the churches to attend Mass. We are a success story of an amalgamation, but it is too much for one priest.
- We are not the parishes of 40 years ago – we need to now embrace new challenges and opportunities that today’s landscape presents – there is need for greater effectiveness in sharing the Gospel/s and of coming together.

What do you value most about our parish community?

1. Welcoming, friendly, a real sense of community. People do engage and get to know each other and become friends. For some, parish is the centre point of their lives.
Other:
 - a. Successful attempts at after-Mass hospitality exist at Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove. Though Queenscliff has a hall, it lacks appropriate facilities for hospitality, (no kitchen, no town water supply) but local community tries its best.
 - b. Visitors and holiday-makers at Ocean Grove present a challenge to its being a welcoming community. In particular, one cannot easily identify the “new-comer” to the parish and some commented on being here for quite some time before they are recognised. Could there be a special badge for these newcomers?
 - c. Welcomers should receive some training—they need to be more than just people who hand out the bulletin. Their role is significant for the visitor and new comer.
2. Our schools. These are magnificent resources and services provided within our Parish. Whilst a number of school parents and teachers at Ocean Grove have some connection with parish, this has not typically been the case at Queenscliff. For many of our students and parents, the school is the Church and the schools do a wonderful job in Religious Education, sacramental preparation and introducing students to the faith. They have a wonderful environmental focus. Whilst we might want to have parents and young families participating in our parish, might it not be more fruitful to have parishioners playing a more active role in the life of the school? Children’s Liturgy at Ocean Grove is most valuable, as too is the drawing table.¹
3. The fact that we have an excellent parish priest, 3 quite different, but wonderful, mass-centres with excellent grounds and access to the sacraments, sacred liturgy and homilies.
4. Choirs and singing. Uplifting and compliments the liturgy of the day. Seems to have faltered a little at Queenscliff.²

Other

Lay Ministries: We value all of those people who take on positions of Ministry.

Faith Development and Spirituality Group: is a welcome addition, with much potential.

Passionist Family Groups: have been most successful in the past. They are still active, but it would be great to re-invigorate these.³

St Vincent de Paul Society Local Conference—active, with additional members recently, doing great work, largely unseen, across our whole parish. The 2 Vinnies shops in the parish do a fantastic job.

Trinity Aid for Refugees (TAR): a very important group given our white, Anglo-Saxon demographic; we need to see beyond ourselves and learn about others who have cultural backgrounds different from ours.

Baptisms: Number of Baptisms have grown enormously; but it was good when they were part of the Parish Mass.⁴

Men Alive: caters to a different generation and allowed open discussion about social, economic and political matters, needs another drive for members.

If resources were unlimited, what would you most like our parish to be able to be? To do?

1. People are the most important resource: an additional priest; curate/s; deacons—female and male; a parish centre with salaried pastoral associates to train lay leaders in various Church ministries and to co-ordinate these ministries and oversee baptismal and sacramental preparation; Godstart; wedding and funeral preparation; leading weekly scripture and discussion groups; connect with new and school families, etc; a paid Business Manager to decrease work load of priest and parish secretary; additional administrative support; maintenance officer; additional gardeners; youth workers to attract and lead the youth; people on hand to keep the Church open during the day.
2. Parish or meeting or social space at Ocean Grove.
Upgrade of Hall at Queenscliff to allow it to become a proper community public space capable of earning revenue.
A fitted-out meeting space at Barwon Heads.
Have these facilities as genuine community centres to connect the general community with the parish.
3. Technology upgrades at the three Mass centres.

4. Other

- Outside screen for “big” events, particularly at Ocean Grove.
- Facilities/equipment for community events—bar-b-ques, marquees, lighting.
- Padded kneelers at Barwon Heads.
- Re-painting/refurbishing of all our buildings.

What might we ask of our local parish?

- Is it **in contact with the homes and lives of its people?**
- Is it **an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration?**
- Does it **encourage and train its members to be evangelisers?**
- Is it **a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach?**

(from *Evangelii Gaudium* §28)

How can we arrange our parishes to do this more effectively?

These challenging questions from Pope Francis are quite daunting and the immediate response from most participants was to say “no”, then to reflect that these were questions to which individuals will have had different experiences and then to conclude that as a parish we would be some of these things to some of the people, some of the time. However, the questions do set a benchmark to which we should strive.

Is it in contact with the homes and lives of its people?

- Families do tend to use our schools (primary and secondary) as a point of community and the school is their church. Schools initiate the spiritual journey; it is up to families to keep this going.
- The services and support provided through St Vincent de Paul groups and the work of TAR help us to tick off on this item.
- We miss an opportunity by not engaging with our families at the point of baptism; we should be welcoming and following up with these people.
- On an informal basis, there are people who provide rides to Mass; sending out of Church bulletins will have assisted those who cannot or who do not attend on a Sunday.
- We should not forget that many in our parish do take it upon themselves to look after individuals or families in need, even though this is not formally structured.
- The Uniting Church of Queenscliff/Point Lonsdale is often quoted as an example of community; but are there other boxes that this particular Church does not tick?
- Many people are living their spirituality through community involvement and giving, rather than through parish participation.
- The regulations around volunteering are not helping.

- Many support groups and systems operate within the community. Should we be trying to replicate, or should we be tacking on—as individuals or through some informal parish association?

Is it an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration?

- Generally, the answer is “yes” for those who are in attendance and participate.
- Faith Development and Spirituality group is increasingly filling a need in this area.
- Re-emerging RCIA program (a good opportunity for partnering with the Drysdale parish), lay-led liturgies, events such as meeting with Maria Forde are positive examples. Possibility of a Christian Meditation group.⁵
- Many of those who no longer attend Church have seen our efforts in the past as some type of “brainwashing”. To get them back will be very difficult.
- When we come into the Church, we able to say, “Here I am Lord” and for a period of time be in touch with our own realities, vulnerabilities and to share with others.

Does it encourage and train its members to be evangelisers?

In spite of our Baptismal vows, the answer is a quite a resounding “no” and it has been in the Catholic Church for many centuries. This was what the early Church was all about; other Christian and non-Christian communities have left us far behind.

Is it a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach?

Hard to say “yes” with such an absence of young people, young families, and people coming into our faith.

Certainly, those at Mass are “coming to drink in the midst of their journey”, but there is little translation into missionary outreach.

There might be some gap between “being Church and spirituality”, between Christianity and Catholicism.

How can we arrange our parishes to do this more effectively?

1. Make use of the talents of women in every aspect of the Church’s operation—disregarded for far too long.
2. Priest as spiritual/pastoral director, rather than office manager. Use of deacons and lay spiritual leaders.
3. Give real attention to the importance of hospitality and look for opportunities for a couple of big community events that can actively engage people working in partnership from each of the Mass centres—concert, soiree, fete, parish picnic. Requires an organising

group. Shopfront office/drop-in centre in Ocean Grove as the Church is removed from the town hub. Can St Vinnies store be a drop-in centre?

4. Engaging with young people. Children's or Family Mass. Become more aware of what is happening in our schools. Youth Ministry and linking up with the work of Saint Ignatius College in this area. They will be able to tell you why young people are not attending Church. Another real opportunity for partnering with Drysdale.
5. We regularly ask people to volunteer for those ministries which have been long established in our Church. It might be more useful to ask people what skills/talents they could offer for the more effective operation of our parish. Out of this might come some new avenues of service to parishioners. A couple of interesting examples were given by participants.

Other

- Reinvigorate the Passionist family groups and Men Alive.
- Churches open for prayer and visitation.
- Leadership of lay people is an issue. Lay people also have commitments—time, extended family expectations, employment. It now falls on retired people to take on leadership roles, but this leadership can be only short-term.
- Better promotion of the Masses—Sandwich Boards in prominent positions.
- Scripture groups within our parish so that people can better understand them and draw inspiration from them.
- Succession plans for people to take over leadership—there is benefit of change in ministers, and not requiring people to hang on in jobs because no else is available.
- Reach out to, and work with other, Christian Churches.

How would you describe a parish that:

Is vibrant?

Has direction and energised purpose.

Adapts ways of resourcing; is flexible and ready to change.

Makes time to hear different voices and listens to the people in the pews.

Seeks to grow the Kingdom of God.

No shortage of people ready to step up and take on positions.

Ready to be involved in outreach and evangelization.

Has a close connection with the local school.

Has a critical mass of active younger and middle-aged parishioners.

Has vitality?

Trained, qualified, lay leadership involved in strategic and operational decision-making.

Ready to take on new ideas—Hope Filled!

Has a Youth Council feeding into the Pastoral Council. Has a deliberate youth focus!

Music Director/Choir Master—attention to the power of music.

Caters for people seeking deeper spiritual meaning in their lives.

The parish recognises when there is need for change, and is ready to take it on.

Is viable?

Has innovative and creative ideas for fund-raising. Seeks out parishioners with skills in the finance and fund-raising area.

Has sufficient income streams to fund operations and to grow.

Is able to finance the pastoral needs of the parish.

Understands that funds are required for the pastoral needs of people as much as for buildings.

The parish's assets and structures support the needs of its mission and ministries rather than sapping its resources.

Funds are used prudently and there is transparency in their use.

Does that describe us?

- We do have passionate followers of Jesus Christ.
- We see glimpses—not vital, not very vibrant and the recent report from the Finance Committee raises questions as to whether we are financially viable. Our efforts seem to be very much concentrated around who is Church. No real outreach programs to the community.
- Any type of future, irrespective of whether it be parish or mission, will depend on our tapping into the younger populations. We can all see the age gaps in the weekly Mass attendance.
- A stronger connection with our schools is needed more than ever. Include school families in our requests for volunteers. Show a parish face in school and student activities.
- Baptism has become an event, not the beginning of a process. Parish member as welcomers for families attending sacramental events – make them feel part of our community. Perhaps a cup of tea on arrival as people have come from work. Handprints of children baptised in our church could be some way of making families realise that they have joined the church. Yearly celebration of those who receive the sacrament of Baptism that year, with BBQ. Young families given a chance to know each other.
- Greater recognition of a synodal Church—use of women and lay people in Church operations and administration. But life has changed; lay people also have their commitments and priorities.
- To what degree are our three Mass centres really in mission? Have the same priest and the same administrative support. One parish council. To what extent does the interaction between the three centres extend beyond these?

- Family groups seemed to have so much to offer. Can we grow and extend from those still in operation?
- “Feed me Bellarine”—a great community organisation and there are many others; can we build our involvement in these groups, rather than having to have our own groups. Work with them. Be a player, not just stand on the sidelines. It would be an interesting audit of our parishioners to learn of their involvement in the many Bellarine and Geelong community groups. It might lead to a different assessment of our Church’s involvement in outreach.

After considering the matters raised and suggested around the notion of missions:

How do you feel?

- Appears to have some similarities with Council amalgamations of the past.
- Are lay people now being asked to take on a “regeneration” of our Church within a very secular environment, after Church authorities have taken a very complacent approach over many, many years?
- There will be different challenges for missions in metropolitan Melbourne compared to regional and rural areas.
- Holy Trinity Parish is already an example of mission.
- Exhausted. Depressed. Feels like it is inevitable—probably because numbers will continue to decline.
- Coming out of COVID, it is important we spend time re-building our own parish and that we make each of our Mass centres—vibrant, vital and well resourced; then might look beyond. COVID, coming on the back of the sexual abuse issue has really knocked our Church.
- The notion of missions would seem to make sense; not viable in our three Churches at the moment.
- This will present us with opportunities to share gifts, resources and talents of our people.
- It would be good to be working with a music group from Drysdale.
- How relevant is all of this to the age group that is currently attending Church? (Of course, other parishes will have an entirely different age demographic.)

What opportunities and potential do we see in working together in mission?

- Possibilities: Music/youth Mass across the Bellarine, share the load of funerals, Bereavement Group.
- Practical Geography – being a peninsula; we would be a “natural fit”
- There is some merit in the proposal
- Is it time for a Geelong Diocese? Melbourne Archdiocese is the biggest in Australia.
- If this initiative was to do nothing more than develop vibrant/vital youth liturgy and activity, coming out of St Ignatius, and catering for the youth of the Bellarine and both parishes, missions will have been a success.

- A Bellarine Church/Business Breakfast three times per year where anyone can attend. They run for 1 hour - people have breakfast together and a Guest speaker speaks at the breakfast. This captures another age group of the Parish (who may not go to Church) but keeps a connectedness in an appealing way to their parish and church.
- If we were to partner with Drysdale, a person should be appointed to take on the responsibility of working with the schools. This would engage a wider community **and** get the school and the parish connected more. St Ignatius employs youth ministers. Could we contribute to employment costs and make use of these youth ministers?
- Makes sense to share some resources and programs, eg. RCIA, Youth Mass

What are the immediate roadblocks you see?

- To cluster the two parishes would mean at least another priest would be needed. At present there are 7 churches and 3 primary schools, a large secondary college, at least 6 nursing homes and many retirement villages. The tyranny of distance would mean the work of the priest would be increased rather than diminished. Sick calls across the twinned parishes would mean the priest would spend a great deal of his time in his car.
- It is difficult to regularly replenish our teams of lay volunteers in the parish. Who is going to be prepared to take on a responsibility for operations within their parish and also across the Bellarine?
- We might be a geographical and statistical fit, but there are differences across the peninsula. Socio-economic and cultural differences do exist. Some even suggest cultural differences between the 3 mass centres within the Holy Trinity parish.
- There will always be people who are resistant to change. Need to overcome our “preciousness”—prepare for the changes.
- Compared to city parishes and missions, we would spend more time in travel. (The proposed mission for the Bellarine would cover 336 square kilometres.)
- If priests were to now work across two parishes, it would have to be to the detriment of the pastoral time that they have available.
- The ever-increasing administrative and legal demands on volunteers is putting older people off formal volunteering.
- Some parishioners may consider this Mission process too much having just come out of the pandemic.
- Elderly communities make attracting youth to church difficult, so social events would be more useful for giving a sense of belonging initially. Ocean Grove church could be used for school movies as the Blessed Sacrament could be placed in the sacristy.
- Finances—some disparity in level of contributors between Holy Trinity and St Thomas.
- How do we serve and cater for elderly in country areas?
- Ways to engage others—community garden, social events.
- More links with children and elderly parishioners—children sharing their understanding of scripture and what they are learning at school.
- People want to belong to a very local community
- What about those who are not attending these meetings—do they recognise a need for change, will they ever be ready for change?

- How will the Parish Priests coordinate, organise and share their expertise? Should we already be looking at reducing the number of Mass centres on the Bellarine?
- Barwon Heads people are not going to travel to the East of the peninsula; more likely to head towards Armstrong Creek, Grovedale.
- We are being presented with a structural change—have not been shown how it has emanated from a real investigation into the pastoral needs of the parishioners. Clergy dominated and “consultation after the fact”.
- Role of women totally neglected by Church hierarchy. Please involve the talents of women, in positions of leadership in the institutional Church.

What factors do we need to consider as we discern further?

- Much additional formation is required.
- How can laity share the load? Can catechists or lay deacons baptise as Fr. Darien is doing 14 Baptisms at a time. Catechists in Mission countries are more advanced than here. They bury people also. Major need to involve more of our current parishioners to share the load –get to know their gifts and empower them.
- Less emphasis on clericalism, need to do so much more on the role of the laity as people of God.
- If missions are seen as a means of a more equitable distribution and a more efficient use of resources, then some redistribution of resources between parishes is implied. The detail of such a move needs to be outlined and explained.
- Evangelical Churches typically go out in small groups and gradually gather followers who then seem prepared to continue the evangelical process.
- Very big population growth of Armstrong Creek—no Church there yet.
- Data presented is already very much out of date. There are major growth pockets since 2016 across the Bellarine Peninsula, at Point Lonsdale, Ocean and at Armstrong Creek.

What do you consider that we need to do next?

- That the process may take several years is interesting. How urgent? In our ageing parish, there might be a considerable turnover of parishioners from the beginning to the end of this process.
- Could we start with 1-2 small steps of parish partnership, co-operation and sharing—eg. RCIA, involving young people.
- What are the views of our two parish priests? Does the idea of mission assist or hinder their workload?
- Engage in some dialogue with the Drysdale parish.⁶

(End of Report)

Additional comments/information provided by the Parish Pastoral Council

1. *The drawing table at Star of the Sea, Ocean Grove, is in full view of the assembly, adjacent to the sanctuary.*
2. *The choir at Queenscliff has re-started afresh as the “Holy Trinity Singers”.*
3. *The Ladies Social Group is a well-established, active and effective group within the parish.*
4. *There are plans in place to acknowledge and welcome baptismal families at Masses prior to the date of the baptism.*
5. *A meditation/prayer group has now been established and operates at Ocean Grove on a fortnightly basis.*
6. *The parish priests of Queenscliff and Drysdale have held informal meetings on how the notion of missions might impact on our parishes and representatives of both parishes have communicated when present at gatherings arranged by the Archdiocese, but there has not yet been discussion at the “parishioner level”. Father Darien is actively involved in committees of Saint Ignatius College and, as such, comes into regular contact with members of the Drysdale parish.*