



Bayside Catholic Mission Working Group

Report on Parishioner Consultation

Introduction

On March 2, 2022 the Bayside Mission Working Group was established with representatives from each community. This Working Group has met almost fortnightly since then. The Bayside Catholic Mission was formed by the Archdiocese on 5 August 2020 as a family of Parishes serviced by three shared Priests. The issue of how best to administer the relevant Parishes, including options up to and including full amalgamation, has been the job of the Bayside Catholic Mission Working Group.

This issue of amalgamation has also been discussed by the Pastoral Council and Finance Committee for many months. Both bodies, as well as the Working Group, have voted unanimously in favour of this issue and agreed that it go to the community for consultation.

Parishioners have been kept apprised of the progress of the working Group. The issue was first raised in the parish bulletin on 7 August; in the Working Group Update on 11 September; in the Position Paper on 18 September; in the subsequent Working Group Update on 24 September and a video message to the community was issued on 24 September. During this time, written and verbal comments have been received.

As a final consultative step with Parishioners, a member of the Working Group spoke at each weekend Mass on 1 / 2 October and invited Parishioners to raise with them and one of the clergy directly any feedback or comments following the Mass or via written and email submissions. In addition, an announcement was made that the priests were available for consultation without appointment during the period 12-14 October.

Summary of Responses

A total of 63 individual parishioner approaches (both verbal and written) were received as a result of the consultation steps taken over the weekend of 1st and 2nd October 2022 and in the following week. Whilst individual responses from Parishioners were overwhelmingly supportive of a full merger or at least neutral to the concept, a number of related concerns were expressed. This paper seeks to offer clarification. In addition, six written submissions were received, five strongly in favour of amalgamation. On the consultation evenings of 12-14 October, the issue was raised by three people, all in favour.



Individual Concerns and Working Group Responses

During the consultation process several common concerns and issues were raised by one or more parishioners. These issues are listed below along with a response from the Working Group for the purposes of clarification and moving forward.

Concern #1. Amalgamation will result in the loss of identity of our local communities and groups

WG Response. The existing churches will retain their names. Individual communities within the Bayside Mission are diverse and reflect their members and this is not expected to change. Not all parish committees or groups will be merged. Existing individual community groups will continue under a new banner and be open to new members, and hopefully enriched and enhanced by new people and growth. What is good and flourishing locally will continue and be enriched by being open to new members and a wider community to draw from and to share with.

Concern #2. We feel like we are being told what to do by the Archbishop but we want to stay as we are

WG Response. It is true that the combining of individual Parishes into parish families and Missions served by shared priests was initiated by the Archdiocese, it was primarily in response to a shortage of priests and declining parishioner numbers in certain areas of the Archdiocese which is challenging the viability of individual Parishes. Within that framework, individual parishes, including the Bayside Catholic Mission family of parishes have been given the leeway (and responsibility) to determine the detailed arrangements that best suit their situation. We need to take this initiative as it is given to us. We have not been told what to do; this amalgamation process was initiated at the local level. The wish to remain unchanged is perfectly understandable but ignores the financial and practical realities that must be addressed. It is best that we do that ourselves, lest we do become unviable, as we take responsibility for our future.

Concern #3. Where do the assets and the money go?

WG Response. They remain the property of the new parish; nothing is given away or lost. The patrimony that has been built up is retained by the new parish and not given to the Archdiocese. As we have said in the past, each existing parish brings many things to the proposed new parish. Some bring assets and land; some bring cash reserves; all bring potential and the gifts and talents of people and communities. Sharing of our gifts for the benefit of others is Christian charity.



Concern #4. Will my Church Close?

WG Response. The issue of church closures is different to the amalgamation issue. In the future it is possible that we will discern together that we do not need as many Mass centres as we have now and/or that Parish resources can be more optimally distributed to balance costs against resources and provide opportunities for future growth. This will be a matter for local communities and the wider community to discern. No decisions have been made on any of these issues at this point.

Concern #5. What about our Primary Schools?

WG Response. Any proposed amalgamation will not effect the existing primary schools. They continue to be part of the important life of the parish and the children will continue to receive the sacraments as in the past. We will continue to try to build on existing relationships for the future.

Concern #6. What about the future? Will it change again?

WG Response. When the existing parishes were established a long time ago, nobody could see into the future. They were established in the times of big Mass going populations, and with the ability to walk to church each Sunday. They were established in the time when we had many priests and not many people had cars. Times have changed, and we are trying to change to accommodate our present situation, which will include how to accommodate the East Hampton community, the re-opening of St James Church at Gardenvale and initiatives that are part of the Archdiocese's "Way of the Gospel" strategy. There is much to do in a community and society that is rapidly changing. Beyond that, we will leave the future to the next generation to work and discern.

Conclusion

For ten months the issue of parish amalgamations has been discussed at various levels. Information and consultation has taken place at many levels in the community: individual; communal; written; verbal and electronic. The latest level of community consultation has identified some issues that require repeating and clarification, and this document seeks to answer those issues. However the consultation process has revealed that the parishioners who spoke and offered comments were accepting of the need to amalgamate. Therefore the decision of the Working Group, based upon the process that has been undertaken, is to support to proceed to full amalgamation of the parishes of Gardenvale, Brighton, Hampton, Sandringham and Ricketts Point into one new entity under the patronage of St John Paul II.

Bayside Mission Working Group 14 October 2022