



BAYSIDE CATHOLIC MISSION
MEETING OF ARCHDIOCESAN AND MISSION REPRESENTATIVES
MEETING HELD AT ST JOAN OF ARC PRESBYTERY
TUESDAY 20 DECEMBER 2022, 7:00pm

On Tuesday, 20 December, a small group representing Bayside Catholic Mission and the Archdiocese of Melbourne gathered to engage with the request for the five Parishes of Gardendale, Brighton, Hampton, Sandringham and Ricketts Point to be canonically amalgamated into a single Parish. Those in attendance were:

Archdiocese of Melbourne

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli	Archbishop
Very Rev Joe Caddy	Vicar General
Tim O’Leary	Executive Director Stewardship
Teresa Rhynehart	Director of Mission
Cath Garner	<i>Take the Way of the Gospel</i> Strategy Coordinator

Bayside Catholic Mission

Rev David Cartwright	Moderator
Rev Dean Mathieson	Pastor-in-Solidum
Rev James Baptist	Assistant Priest
Michael Staunton	Chair, Pastoral Council & Working Group
Bernard Negline	Chair, Finance Committee
Francis Chen	Secretary, Finance Committee
Jo Umbers	Outreach Mission Team
Cheryl Juelg	Prayer and Worship Mission Team
Greg Lynch	Fellowship Mission Team
Lisa Brick	Formation Mission Team
Philip Jackson	Working Group/TWG Reference & Advisory Group
Marina Stevenson	Accountant
Carole Cheng	Pastoral Worker/Catechist

After opening with time for prayer, Archbishop Comensoli began by acknowledging, firstly, the petition he had received from Bayside Catholic Mission to seek amalgamation of the five Parishes, and secondly, a request for Archdiocesan support in strategic planning.

The Archbishop outlined how a request for parish amalgamation is progressed in Canon (Church) Law. Canon law defines a parish as “*a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted...*” (can.515 §1). He emphasised this means that he needs to take a long-term view of what is best for the faith communities involved. In coming to a decision, it is the Archbishop’s responsibility to consult two advisory bodies of the Archdiocese – the Council of Priests (the chief advisory body of Clergy to the Archbishop) and the College of Consultors (a body of senior Clergy who advise the Archbishop principally on stewardship matters) – and to consider their opinion on the petition.



The Archbishop reported that when consulted about the Bayside Catholic Mission's petition for amalgamation, both bodies expressed considerable reservations about what was being requested. Those concerns related to three key matters: (1) the relatively short period of time for consultation leading to the request, (2) the extent of the consultation process with the communities, and (3) the proposed Parishes to be included in amalgamation. Archbishop Comensoli also let the group know that he had subsequently met with Fr Cartwright, Fr Mathieson and Bishop Tony Ireland (Auxiliary Bishop of the Southern Region) to brief them on the advice he had received.

The purpose of the current meeting was to now hear the views of those gathered, so as to further help the Archbishop in his decision-making.

Fr Cartwright and Fr Mathieson were invited to speak. While acknowledging the establishment of Bayside Mission was reactive rather than strategic, Fr Cartwright considered it unwise to inflict further change and uncertainty after the trauma experienced in the recent past and urged Gospel boldness. Fr Mathieson felt the lack of certainty was paralysing, and the communities seem to be resigned to the current Mission structure, even if it is less than ideal.

The views of the lay representatives were also sought. Among the various views expressed, the following were of common significance:

- The financial imperative for structural reform was emphasized, while seeing this within a broader imperative for missionary and pastoral planning.
- The accounting complexity of managing across the separate parish entities and the challenging financial position of some of the parishes was highlighted.
- The question of whether this was the correct mix of parishes was significantly explored, and it was acknowledged that the Mission is not yet a cohesive whole, though this has improved over time.
- Although some people still identify primarily with their individual parish, Bayside Mission is now the primary identity for others who are moving easily between parish communities.
- Acknowledging a lot of work is still required to build the community, it was felt every option had been explored and there is no other option that addresses both the financial imperative of viable parishes and the pastoral imperative of vibrant, vital communities.
- Although some remain uncomfortable with the proposal for amalgamation, it is too late to go back. The downward trajectory in Mass attendance needs to be addressed urgently. It is assumed if the structural change is made, the trend can be addressed.

The Archbishop returned to his responsibility to take a long-term view of what is in the best interests of the people of God in this region. Although he recognised that the need to find financial solutions is important, the missionary focus will be at the forefront in his discernment. He then outlined for all present some questions that come to mind as he is considering the request for amalgamation, and which he wished to share with those gathered for the meeting (by way of a hand-out).



TIMING

- Is there a sufficient level of support and engagement from all the communities involved?
- What more needs to be done to bring people along?
- Has the period of COVID, and its aftermath, allowed for sufficient opportunity to establish clear options to build a parish? (= "...a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established..." Can.515)

PROCESS

- Finding financial pathways are really important, but how is the missionary work and planning to come to the forefront?
- In the consultation processes, were the communities offered the time and space to undertake a process of discernment together?

STRUCTURE

- Is this the right combination of communities for this Parish entity?
- What other options/arrangements have been looked at?
- Might a quasi-parish be worth considering? ("...a certain community... entrusted to a proper pastor, but because of special circumstances [is] not yet established as a parish." Can.516)

The Archbishop reiterated he was grateful for the views that had been shared. He proposed the following next steps:

- The Archdiocese is happy to support and work with key leadership toward ways to assist in understanding and enabling financial options in the process of strategic planning. He has asked Bishop Tony Ireland to chair a committee comprising Parish and Archdiocesan leadership, which will be formed in the New Year.
- Early in the New Year, Fr Cartwright might organise a retreat for the faith communities of BCM, so they can reflect and pray together as part of the discernment process.
- The group will then gather again after the Mission retreat. In the meantime, the participants are asked to reflect on the questions raised by the Archbishop as to the timing, process and structure.

It is the intention of the Archbishop to make a decision on the petition following the taking of these steps.

The meeting closed with a short time of prayer.