



BAYSIDE CATHOLIC MISSION

Under the patronage of St John Paul II

Position Paper

Proposed Amalgamation of Bayside Catholic Mission Parishes

Preamble

The Bayside Catholic Mission was established on 5 August 2020, bringing together the existing parishes of St James, Gardenvale, St Joan of Arc, Brighton, St Mary's, Hampton, Sacred Heart, Sandringham, St Joseph's and Stella Maris, Ricketts Point.

The Bayside Mission is a grouping of parishes with no legal or canonical or financial status. Until now each parish functions as a stand-alone individual parish with a shared pastoral ministry of the three priests. One administration hub has been established at St Joan of Arc, Brighton and this is the main contact point for the parishes.

Currently, each parish retains its ABN, financial and ecclesiastical records and functions side by side with the other parishes.

Current Position

The local Catholic communities in the Bayside area face current and ongoing viability challenges and are operating at a loss of over \$300,000 per year or 25% of our accumulated savings from prior decades. The current arrangements are not sustainable. This is due to:

- *decrease in income due to trending decline in parishioners (accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic)*
- *increase in expenses due to growing property maintenance and insurance*
- *increase in expenses due to a move from volunteer to paid provision of services*
- *several parishes cannot afford to pay their expenses*
- *shortage of priests to cover the number of existing parishes in the Archdiocese*

These issues are real and urgent and have necessitated consideration of options to mitigate the challenges and take purposeful action to meet the needs of our Bayside Catholic community at affordable costs. The options considered included:

1. Maintain status quo
2. Semi amalgamation (twins or groupings)
3. Full amalgamation

It is considered by the Finance Committee, the Pastoral Council, and the Working Group that full amalgamation (joining of the existing parishes into one parish) provides the greatest platform for response and future development and growth in this regard.

Process

For the parishes to be officially joined by the Canon Law of the Church, several steps have to be followed.

1. Approval was given by the Pastoral Council. This was discussed and passed unanimously on 25 August 2022
2. Approval was given by the Finance Committee. This was discussed and passed unanimously on 10 August 2022
3. Consultation of communities and parishioners. This is the process we are now undertaking.
4. In addition, we have discussed this at the BCM Working Group and this was passed unanimously as well, on 11 August 2022.
5. Once the steps of consultation have been undertaken locally, the Parish Priest officially petitions the Archbishop of Melbourne to canonically amalgamate the parishes according to the request of the Parish Priest.
6. The Archbishop is then obliged to consult: the Diocesan Consultors and the Council of Priests. These bodies must also vote on the proposal.
7. If all parties agree, the Archbishop can formally amalgamate the parishes according to Canon Law, and a new parish is established.
8. Work will then begin at the local level to begin the amalgamation of financial records, assets, records, etc. This process is likely to take several months to be finalised.

Simultaneously a process will be started to discuss the viability of our places of worship in order to increase the size, capabilities and viability of the remaining communities and to transfer out of BCM the costs and better usage of the closed buildings.

Frequently Asked Questions

Hasn't this already happened?

No. The Bayside Mission was formed on 5 August 2020. Each parish remained its own individual status, but was part of a bigger grouping of parishes called the Bayside Catholic Mission.

Will the name of my church change?

No. Many parishes have multiple churches with different names.

What will be the name of the new entity?

The Mission has already adopted St John Paul II as its patron. This will be the patron of the new parish.

Will the Mass times change?

The times and locations of weekday and Sunday Masses are separate from the parish amalgamation issue. However, Mass times and places will change in the future when and if the use of some church buildings is changed allowing the formation of larger, more vibrant communities. This will be a matter for further discussion and discernment.

Will the Parish Priest change?

No. The priests of the Mission will continue to share pastoral ministry across the communities.

Will I lose my identity as a parish?

A new parish will be established, but individual communities around Mass centres will remain. BCM will become a parish with multiple communities, welcoming new members and encouraging sharing of resources, people, gifts and talents across communities within the new larger parish.

How will I benefit from the merging of all the parishes into one entity?Administration

It will eliminate duplication of records, processes and procedures. Currently, we have five sets of everything.

Costs

Amalgamation will enable costs to be shared and will in many cases, reduce costs. It will allow the costs of programs, paid staff and remaining buildings to be matched to the annual BCM parish income.

Sharing of resources

Some parishes are physical asset rich, but cash poor, while other parishes, relatively speaking are cash rich, but physical asset poor. All parishes have valuable assets in their heritage and current members of their community. The combination of all parishes within the Bayside Catholic Mission into one entity will make it easier to share these valuable resources for the betterment of all members of the Mission and for the proclamation of the Gospel with better resources.

Community

With the establishment of a new parish, there will be new opportunities and invitations to get to know others and to share across the communities. The maintenance of smaller communities is not viable and the building and flourishing of a larger community are essential for an effective mission. It will help us to look outwards to others and hopefully be more welcoming.

What will happen to the property owned by my parish?

The ownership of all properties will rest in the new combined entity of the new parish. The use of all properties will be assessed as to how well they are currently being utilised, and how that use meets with the Vision of BCM. Future decisions about the use of properties will be a result of discussion and discernment with communities and the appropriate bodies.

What will happen to my regular financial contribution?

The first collection (the presbytery collection- supporting the priests, sick and retired priests and presbytery expenses) is currently joined and shared across the parishes. The second collection (church account) would be shared across the communities where income and expenses would be shared according to need. Your contribution will support the entire new parish, not just a single community.

Will my local church close?

With six churches within the Mission, it is likely that one or more churches will need to cease being used for Sunday Mass and transferred to another use as it will become increasingly difficult to maintain and continue the costs of services at all churches. Some churches have very small congregations which will be strengthened when welcomed into other Mass centres. The issue of number of Mass centres is different to the merging of the parishes.

What will happen with the assets held by my parish?

All parish resources will be retained and merged into the new entity. This will allow them to be used efficiently for the betterment of all members of the mission, in much the same way as all properties will be merged into the new entity to support the growth and future of the mission as a whole. All expenditure is monitored by the Finance Committee and the parish accountants.

What will happen in the future?

We will leave this up to the guidance of the Holy Spirit working through the BCM leadership teams and communities. But in the short term, the amalgamation will provide a platform for future planning with all parishioners having an equal say, rather than some parishes feeling they are being left out or not listened to.

I feel sad losing my parish

We acknowledge and understand that the parishes making up the Bayside Catholic Mission have important and long histories, in some cases for over 100 years. It is sad that these parishes cannot continue in the manner they have in the past for many reasons. Our hope, however, is that we can build on the history of each parish as the foundations stones of the new parish moving forward, where the strengths of each parish are united into a larger, vibrant parish that will be relevant to all Bayside parishioners for the next 100 years.

How will I be heard?

The present structures for decision-making and consultation will remain: One Pastoral Council for the new parish, which comprises two members from each existing parish; One Finance Committee for the new parish, which comprises representatives from each existing parish; One Working Group for the new parish, which comprises representatives from each existing parish. The new Mission Teams with specific areas of ministry will be comprised of people from all communities. In addition, you are welcome to contact any of the members of the above bodies or the priests to have your voice heard.

What is the next step?

Think about the information in this paper. If you are not sure of anything please ask! The Working Group, Pastoral Council, Finance Committee, and the priests are here to help you. We know this is a big step for our communities which we believe is both necessary and beneficial and we want you to feel comfortable with it.

*Bayside Catholic Mission Working Group
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