

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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PARISH UPDATE 58

Hello everyone!

During this week the Archbishop convened a very significant meeting that radically affects the years ahead for the Catholic Church in Melbourne. This first meeting was a gathering with the Priests of the Archdiocese. Similar meetings will be convened for Parishioners during the next few months.

The Archbishop has taken the decision that a reorganisation of the structures and the resources of the Archdiocese must be undertaken, brought about by the declining number of Priests available for Parish ministry. A simple statistic is that this year five men entered the seminary for their formation for priesthood and there are twelve Parishes whose Parish Priest will be retiring this year. This is the pattern both for each year of the seminary process and for the ageing of Priests. Quotes from the meeting: "there are no indications that trends will be reversed"; "we must look to new ways of thinking"; "our current structures are unsustainable"; "there is a feeling of urgency to bring forth change"; "the way of the Gospel was from the very beginning a changing of arrangements to engage with changing circumstances".

The Archbishop outlined a broad picture where the current 210 Parishes in the Archdiocese will be reorganised into 50 or 60 'Missions', each 'Mission' being served by two (and sometimes more) Priests. An example that was given – emphasised as not being definitive - was that the Parishes of Ascot Vale, Essendon, Essendon West, Moonee Ponds, Strathmore could become one of these 'Missions'. The Archbishop liked the phrase 'family of Parishes'.

A timeline was outlined. Following this meeting of Priests, there will now be a similar meeting of representatives from all Parishes, information communicated to the wider Catholic community, and gatherings in the four Regions of the Archdiocese whose task will be to identify 3 to 5 'Missions' in each Region. (Our Parish is in the Western Region.) Further work will be undertaken so that all 'Missions' will be identified by mid-2022. The overall reorganisation will be implemented within three years.

Some very large Parishes – such as Werribee – may become a 'Mission' themselves. Smaller Parishes will likely be part of reorganisation into a 'family of Parishes'. Parish boundaries may change.

Some will recall that thirty years ago the Archdiocese embarked on several processes in response to the fact that circumstances were changing. Some may have participated in the RENEW process in which large numbers of Parishioners participated in reflection and formation processes to grow the active co-responsibility of Parishioners in order to ensure and grow vibrant Parish life. Some may recall the 'Tomorrow's Church' process which was driven by the question 'How can we be the Church well in the years that lie ahead?' This led to some amalgamation and partnering of Parishes in a planned way with substantial formation provided for the Parishes involved, and the 'pilot project' of a lay-person Parish Leader appointed to a Parish by the then Archbishop, who had support from a neighbouring Parish Priest.

A number of participants at this week's meeting expressed regret that those plans and processes were stopped.

We are a large Parish. The example above of five Parishes becoming a 'Mission' may not be applied to us. We should be aware, however, of what will be happening around us, that this will impact on us, and that a difference type of 'Mission' may be applied to us.

We will participate in all the processes that are being started.

In our Parish during the week, we have at last 'caught up with' the postponements of Sacraments with our young Parishioners' which had been caused by COVID lockdowns last year. Young Parishioners at our Cana School celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time. Next week we enter the next round of Sacraments. Our young Parishioners at our Sacred Heart School will share in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Once again the Archbishop has delegated his role to Parish Priests. This is because we are still limited to having 190 people in our churches, and that means that we will need ten separate gatherings.

Give a place in your prayer this week to these young Parishioners and their families. May their experiences of the Sacraments of our Church reassure them of the love of God active in their lives and of the support of their Church community.

Best wishes to all! As we continue in Easter season, don't let that renewal slip away – blessings for continuing 'Easter-ing'!

Prayer of St Francis 'Make me a channel of your peace!'

Maurie Cooney
(Parish Priest)