

## **A preliminary picture of upcoming changes to parish structures in the Archdiocese of Melbourne**

### ***Introduction***

- As mentioned by Fr John and as parishioners have read in recent Bulletins, the Archdiocese is proposing significant changes in its organization to renew the Church.
- Archbishop Peter Comensoli has decided to reorganize the Melbourne Parishes into 'Mission Communities'. He proposes Parishes collaborate more closely to build vibrant and viable centres of Catholic life and faith in Melbourne.
- In response to this, Fr John has established the Sacred Heart Parish Leadership team comprising four members of our Parish.
- Preliminary summary of the proposed changes include:
  1. What changes are being proposed by the Archdiocese?
  2. Why is change being proposed now?
  3. When will the changes occur? and
  4. How will the changes be implemented?
- The Leadership team's purpose is to represent the Parish in obtaining more clarity about what is being proposed and to keep you fully informed. This will include presenting summaries from preliminary discussions with other Parishes concerning benefits that might arise from closer co-operation with them. Of course, no decision will be made in relation to any formal collaboration without first seeking the views of parishioners.

### ***What is happening?***

- The direction is for Parishes to evolve into Mission Communities, as a single Parish or groups of Parishes that form relationships, partnerships or amalgamations. The concept of Mission is unclear,

but we understand it will evolve and it will be unique to each Parish. Some Missions may be a single Parish, others multiple Parishes. Some Mission Communities will establish quickly, and others will take time.

- The Archbishop has stated this is not about parish closures or amalgamations in the short term. Instead, the reform is to assist in the 'renewal' of the Church by reorganizing its outdated structure.
- While the Archdiocese suggests the purpose of the change is a 'renewal', the Leadership team has serious concerns in relation to this. In our view, what is being proposed today is a structural change with 'renewal' a second phase, which is vague and unclear.
- To assist in our understanding of this new direction, the Leadership team has written a letter to the Archbishop seeking clarification on several points. We are yet to receive a reply.
- We point out, Parish closures and amalgamations are occurring globally, and just last week in Spain, the Archdiocese of Barcelona announced the closure of 160 parishes out of the 208 existing. The reasons given are: 1) the covid epidemic has dealt a fatal blow to the finances of the diocese and 2) the tsunami of secularization. The 48 remaining parishes will be renamed "pastoral communities" and will concentrate all the activities carried out within the previous structures. Where necessary, the churches could be put up for sale.

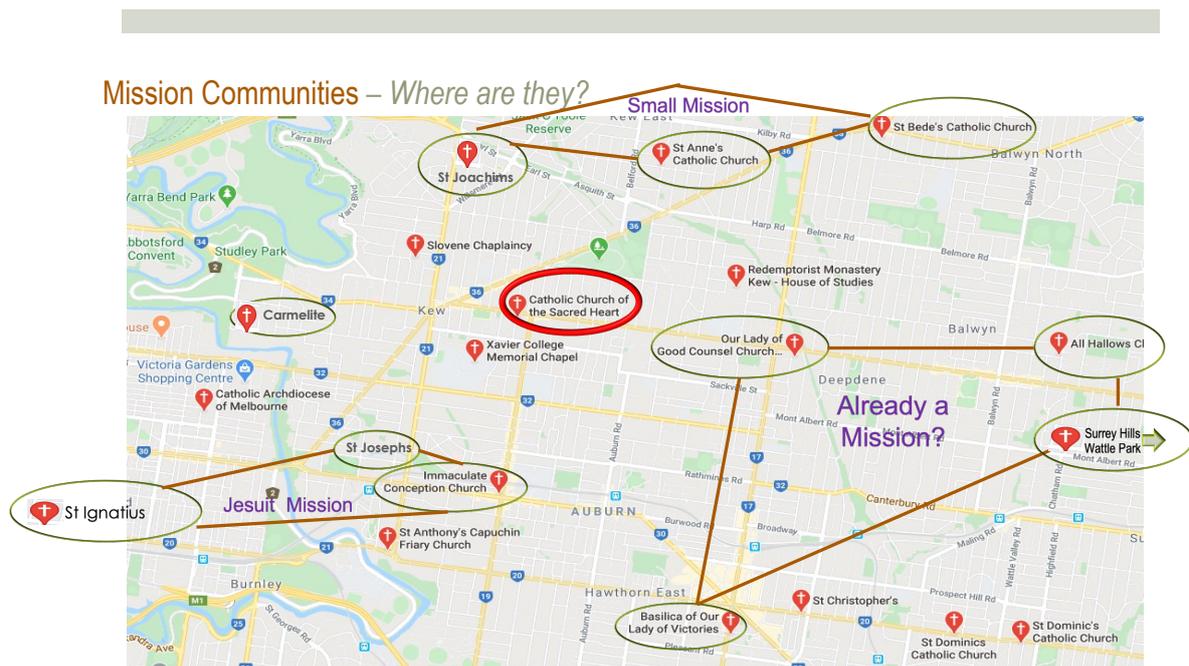
### ***Why is this happening?***

- There are three main reasons:
  1. *a decline in congregation numbers.* Older demographic. A small number of schools families at mass,
  2. *a decline in the number of priests in the Archdiocese.* See what has happened in our neighbouring Parish of OLG, where Fr Brendan is now PP for not just Deepdene but also Balwyn,

Camberwell, and now Surrey Hills Wattle Park due to PPs retiring in those Parishes, and

3. *There are too many Churches* for the declining number of priests and worshippers in the Archdiocese.

- Turning to our Sacred Heart Parish, the number of parishioners attending our weekend masses has declined in recent years and more recently has dropped from 300 pre covid to 150 today. These numbers are well below the target set by the Archdiocese of 500 worshippers per Parish. In response to this, Fr. John has reduced the number of weekend masses from 4 to 2.
- A map of the region shows where we are in relation to other parishes.



- There are 10 competing Catholic churches/chapels within circa 5km radius of Sacred Heart
- In regards to potential Mission Communities:
  - In 2012, OLG (Deepdene) amalgamated with All Hallows (Balwyn). In 2016 the new parish partnered with Our Lady of Victories (Camberwell) and in 2021 it partnered with Surrey Hills Wattle Park. Common parish management and one parish priest
  - In 2013 St Anne's (East Kew), St Bedes (North Balwyn), St Joachim's (North Kew) amalgamated

- As you can see from the map, Sacred Heart, Kew, has 10 competing Catholic Churches within a 5 km radius. Several Missions have already formed to the north, south and east.

### ***When will this happen?***

- It has started and is happening now.
- The Archdiocese held a meeting with all Clergy in April 2021 and then with lay representatives of the 208 parishes in May. In August, the parishes in the Eastern Region of the Archdiocese will meet for the first time to commence a discussion.
- Parish communities will then enter into a period of discernment and discussion about reimagining our local Church as Mission communities.
- The Archdiocese stresses that the discussion and formation of Missions will take time. The Archbishop hopes to have each Region identify (not implement) 3-5 Missions by the end of 2021 and the balance of the proposed 16 by the end of 2022. Implementation will take longer.

### ***How will this happen?***

- It will occur on a geographic basis with Sacred Heart being one of 56 Parishes in the Eastern Region of the Archdiocese (one of four Regions).
- Via discussion and consultation, each Parish is to work out its position. The Parishes between themselves will need to form a Mission Community and decide who does what and how a Mission Community would work and be structured.

- The proposal contemplates that each Mission will be served by two priests who will live 'in the community.
- In regards to Mission Community formation, options for Sacred Heart include:
  - We remain a single Parish without partnering/collaborating, which is our hope, or
  - We form a Mission Community with surrounding Parishes, such as:
    - St Anne's/St Bede's
    - Hawthorn & Richmond (Jesuits)
    - Others?
- The initial thoughts of the Leadership team are:
  - We protect our independence as long as we can.
  - If we need to form a Mission Community, we propose that Sacred Heart will be a central part of any Mission Community supported by:
    - Our magnificent Church and great location
    - Our strong sense of community and care for the elderly
    - We offer to become an education centre of faith for the Mission Community to support the process of renewal, and
    - We demonstrate our stable financial position and a plan for our financial sustainability.
- To conclude, we understand change is complex, and for many of you, this change is unwanted or will create feelings of apprehension, fear, and sadness. Others may see this as a positive to enable growth.
- As your Leadership team, we represent you and need to hear your voices to guide us. As such, we are asking for your feedback and comments on:
  - Your feelings about the restructuring and renewal of the Archdiocese of Melbourne
  - What do you want for our Parish as part of this change?

- What could Sacred Heart offer, and what do we need if we form a Mission Community?
- The Leadership team will make a formal presentation to you and hold a Q&A session after 9.30am mass on 25<sup>th</sup> July. This forum will also provide the opportunity to discuss 'Mission Communities' and provide an opportunity for your further feedback and comments.

***The parish leadership team***