

REPORT ON THE PHASE TWO

Discernment Sessions



HIGHETT

CHELTENHAM

How can we create a new community where everyone in the existing parishes can feel they belong?

Phase 2 of the **Parish Amalgamation and Renewal** process involved beginning to discern the characteristics of the new community identity in order to identify a name and charism – or grace – that will animate the community you aspire to become.

Alongside the invitation to personally discern how, in a transformative way, you are being called into and by faith, hope and love, two group discernment sessions were offered in April/May to draw out shared aspirations, values and behaviours.

Drawing on the wisdom of spiritual conversations, participants were encouraged to pay attention to the spiritual movements within themselves and in the other people with whom they spoke. To assist in creating the conditions for this type of engagement, the group conversations were preceded by 10-15 minutes of silent reflection.

The first session began with a presentation on the social profile of the new parish (available on the parish website). Following the presentation, participants were invited to consider two questions during the silent reflection: “What are important characteristics of our new community that we need to consider?” and “What opportunities does missionary renewal present to us?” This then led into a group conversation to consider what our Catholic identity and mission are calling us to in today’s world.

The second session started with a presentation on the Framework for Missionary Renewal (also available on the parish website). ‘Stories from the future’ illustrated the likely outcome of a parish primarily concerned with viability versus parishes expressing vibrancy and vitality. The questions for both the silent reflection and group conversation was “What words would I want associated with our parish community in the future?” and “What would I want people to say about our parish?”

At the end of each session, participants were invited to record the key ideas that emerged in the group conversations. 26 records of the first conversation and 30 from the second were provided. Further input was sought

at the Masses at both churches on the weekend following the second session.

The purpose of this report is to communicate the fruits of the group discernment sessions to the wider parish communities and to outline the process for determining the new parish name.

FRUITS OF THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS

The comments have been sorted into themes and are presented overleaf. They point towards the desire for a community of faith that is welcoming, caring, hospitable, inclusive, active, generous, collaborative, enriching, nourishing, nurturing and growing. There was a recognition of the need to do things differently, a desire to “think outside the box” and an eagerness to work together to enable the desired change.

These shared aspirations parallel Jesus’ own life and ministry and point towards a Christological charism. A Christological charism also offers further insight into the names of our two parish churches. St Agnes’ strength of character and preparedness to sacrifice her life directs us to Christ, who as ‘Agnus Dei’- the ‘Lamb of God’ gave his life for us so we could have new life. Similarly, Mary’s Assumption marks the end of her earthly life and turns our eyes to eternity, inviting insight into our own relationship with God, offering us hope that we too can define our lives by our preparedness to say ‘Yes’ to God. In this way we not only commemorate these historical events, we ‘re-present’ Christ to our world, now and into the future.

NEXT STEPS

Over the next two weeks, you are invited to discern and submit potential new names for the parish that reflect a Christological charism. Submissions should include how you think the name reflects the charism and why you think it would be a good choice. **Please email your submission to Vino.Krishnan@cam.org.au with “New Parish Name” in the subject line, by **Monday 27 May**.** The suggested names will be compiled and available on the parish website. A small group will be convened to short list the names and identify the preferred options for submission to Archbishop Peter.

SUMMARY OF THEMES

Welcoming

Welcoming spirit; making people feel welcome; lovely atmosphere; speak to new parishioners not just in our own groups; stranger said hello; a parish = a family of families; inviting; friendly; warm; belonging; part of it

Caring

Heart people; supportive; filled with love for one another; listening; visible compassion and caring for others in the community; understanding

Hospitable

sociable; social meetings after Mass e.g. cuppa; coffees in the morning after Mass; cuppas at both locations; combined parish get-togethers

Inclusive

Open; literally open the doors; open-minded; not confined to Catholics; accommodating; accepting; respectful of each other; non-threatening; together as equals; all treated equal; non-judgemental; sense of togetherness; sincere

Engaging

Personally engaging; engaging all parishioners not just a few

Active/charitable/outreaching

On the go, always something happening; involved; missionary; meeting people's needs; helpful; seek out parishioners e.g. widows, the lonely; parishioners willing to engage and reach out to other parishioners; we need to go out of our way to include them; helper/driving/transport; offering transport between churches; bring people to Mass; assistance for people to come to either church; Communion visitation; reach out to those who cannot come to Mass; social justice programs through/via Vinnies; home assistance (small jobs); SVDP and second hand uniform shop so important; outreaching beyond the parish – broader view of church; active with other local churches and faith groups; social justice and ecologically responsive; proactive in reaching out to those in need – physically, spiritually and emotionally; responsive to current affairs and pressures

Generous

Giving; generous spirit; good givers

Faith-centred

Eucharist is the source and the summit...; Christ/gospel centred; spiritual; spirit filled; prayerful; celebrate/acknowledge Baptisms; good homilies; joyful; positive; uplifting; celebrate those who come; Advent Lent prayer group; Exposition; pray, reflect, meditate; would love RCIA at our parish

Faith enrichment

Deepen faith; faith enriched; faith renewal; liturgy session for Mass participation; need to educate people about the parts of the Mass; need for existing parishioners to have nourishment in their faith; formation/training of people to take on roles; Programs

to deepen faith; Alpha program?; faith is a journey – good to be with other people;

Family focused

Ways to bridge the gap to connect with the next generation; find a way to bring young and elderly together as one; cross-generation – how do we build this?; what activities/groups could keep the young adults involved?; involving children in some way; find ways to get children involved; invite children to read at Sunday Mass; acknowledge the presence of kids at Mass; involve more students during the homily; prayer sponsors for First Communion and Confirmation

Community/school connected

Community minded; community centred; cohesive Church and school; school involvement and connection; school and parish together look after the environment as an example of working together; school fetes bring people together, working together and sharing lives and experience too; major social justice initiatives could be a catalyst for connection; embrace faith, life and energy that exists in the schools

Leadership Style

Participative; let women be involved in running the church; democratic; accountable; transparent; openness to see financial position of the parish; good leadership that unites parishioners with each other; sharing information

OTHER COMMENTS

Some participants offered practical suggestions about the celebration of Mass or the formation of children. Finding a 'cause' to unite the parish and school was also suggested. There were also suggestions about the future leadership structure including the suggestion of one Vinnies.

Others expressed concerns, such as where to find the time to be more missionary, or over the practicalities of bringing the two parishes together. Frustration about the unused female talent in the Church was also expressed.

One participant wondered if what is said will have any impact on what happens, another questioned how much of amalgamation is to do with money, while another proposed "as a collective we should view this as an opportunity to get to know wonderful new people and expand horizons".

A FINAL WORD

The primary purpose of this phase of the process has been to begin to the process towards creating a shared identity, but the process is not over. Following amalgamation, the new parish leadership team will assist in translating these aspirations and suggestions into the vision, values and pastoral plan for the new parish.