

PASTORAL PLANNING IN THE GEELONG REGION:

INTRODUCTION:

The number of priests available for appointment to parishes in the Archdiocese of Melbourne is currently declining at a rate of about 6% nett (deaths, retirements vs. ordinations, priests from overseas etc.) per year. Currently in the Geelong region there are thirteen priests on appointment (and five retired). If the 6% decline continues, this will mean there will most likely be only nine priests on appointment in the Geelong region in five years.

The implication of such a decline in parishes is significant. It is not simply a matter of “filling gaps”, or “amalgamating”. The key issues of “What constitutes a parish?” and “How does a parish community best operate?” must also be addressed.

Throughout the Geelong region, parishioners are being consulted as to how the region could operate most effectively in the likely event of there being nine priests available for parish-based appointments. (The current invaluable service of retired priests must be considered a “bonus” in any planning process).

This consultation is not designed to discover one simple answer. Rather it seeks to promote a consideration of the many elements which are an integral part of any such development e.g., the role of the priest, capacity for paid and voluntary lay leadership, importance of hospital chaplaincy, what is the basis of a parish community.

We recognise that there have been similar exercises in the past, with little apparent effect on subsequent events. However, we expect this consultation to: (a) provoke much thought and reflection among parishioners, with a recognition of the complexity of the issues; and (b) provide the Archbishop with valuable “local knowledge” to assist him in his responsibilities.

The scenarios offered are simply stimulants to thought and discussion. They are neither the final nor the only options available.

An explanation of some terms might be helpful:

“**Partnerships**”: Parishes retain their individual identity, each with the same Parish Priest, but work together as best they can (E.g. the present “cluster” of Bell Park, Geelong West and Manifold Heights.)

“**Amalgamation**”: Parishes merge into one, new larger parish (E.g. St. Edmund’s, Croydon and St. Francis de Sales, East Ringwood amalgamated into the new parish of Sacred Heart, Croydon.)

Completing the questionnaire is helpful and will facilitate a broad parish response to this important issue, now being examined by the Deanery. The responses of the thirteen parishes will then be blended, as best as possible, for a proposal to be presented to the Archbishop for his consideration in pastoral planning.

SCENARIO 1:

The current thirteen parishes remain as parishes in their own right. With nine priests, “partnerships” would have to be established, with, in most cases, one priest serving at least two parishes.

Example only:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Geelong (St. Mary’s) | 2 priests (inc. hospital ministry) |
| Geelong West / Manifold / Bell Park | 1 priest |
| Geelong East | 1 priest |
| Belmont | 1 priest |
| Grovedale / Rice Village | 1 priest |
| Drysdale / Queenscliff | 1 priest |
| Meredith / Winchelsea | 1 priest |
| Corio / Norlane | 1 priest |

POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES:

- # Parishes retain their own “traditional” identity and history
- # Sense of existing community retained
- # Essential hospital ministry is retained with two St. Mary’s priests available

POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS:

- # Some partnerships very difficult for just one priest
- # Inevitable change of Mass times etc. mean identity would not exist for lengthy time. E.g., only one or two churches could have a Sunday morning Mass
- # Some “partnerships” might be geographically advisable, but not take into account other factors which build a sense of community

POINTS TO PONDER:

- # What happens if a priest is absent due to sickness, holidays, etc?

SCENARIO 2:

The current thirteen parishes are amalgamated into eight parishes, each with one priest. One priest is also designated for ministry at Geelong’s three hospitals, the Grace McKellar Centre and Rice Village.

Example only:

| | |
|---|----------|
| Geelong (St. Mary’s) | 1 priest |
| Geelong West / Manifold / Bell Park | 1 priest |
| Geelong East | 1 priest |
| Belmont / Grovedale | 1 priest |
| Queenscliff / Torquay / Anglesea | 1 priest |
| Drysdale | 1 priest |
| Meredith / Winchelsea | 1 priest |
| Corio / Norlane | 1 priest |
| Hospitals / Grace McKellar / Rice Village | 1 priest |

POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES:

- # One priest per parish is a familiar arrangement
- # Benefits from sharing of resources (property, equipment etc.) and talents (skills of parishioners etc.)
- # Administration would be simpler and more efficient

POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS:

- # Very little flexibility for priests (sickness, holidays etc.)
- # Many Mass centres could no longer have a weekend Mass

POINTS TO PONDER:

- # What would be the response from communities whose Mass Centre / Church was no longer in use?

SCENARIO 3:

The Geelong region becomes five major parishes, four of which will have two priests to allow maximum flexibility. One church only might be utilised as a Sunday worship centre, with other churches remaining in use for weekday Mass, funerals, weddings, school Masses etc.

Example only:

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Geelong (inc. current Geelong and Geelong East parishes) | 2 priests |
| Bell Park (inc. Geelong West, Bell Park and Manifold parishes) | 2 priests |
| Belmont (inc. Belmont, Grovedale and Winchelsea) | 2 priests |
| Surf Coast (Ocean Grove) (inc. Queenscliff, Drysdale, Torquay, Anglesea) | 2 priests |
| Corio (inc. current Corio, Norlane and Meredith parishes) | 1 priest |

POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES:

- # Maxi-parish arrangement would be more efficient and make greater use of resources
- # Maximum flexibility with two priests, therefore more easily able to cover absences of one priest

POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS:

- # Current community identity would be virtually lost, with new parishes taking on a new identity
- # Most current Mass centres may no longer be used on weekends

POINTS TO PONDER:

- # Should all Masses be said in the same Church, thus building a new sense of community around the one Church?