

A Process of Renewal – Moving Forward Together

Last month we began to explore the work that has been done by the Diocesan Stewardship Committee with a view to providing information in preparation for the Diocesan Gathering in November.

In this month's edition we look at the important work of **Pastoral Planning** and the first of the five foundations from the Diocesan Stewardship Planning Framework – **Identity and Community**.

This foundation intentionally fosters Christian community, hospitality, welcome, respect and an identity grounded in *communio*.

Pastoral Planning is the process of a Catholic community organising itself to carry out the mission of the church in its own locality. It is a process built upon a diocese's knowledge in three areas:

- Knowing its vision - its aspiration for itself, which grows from the diocesan vision
- Knowing the people who make up the Catholic community and the general community
- Knowing the resources (strengths, gifts and circumstances) available to the diocese to realise the vision.

Diocesan and Parish Social Profiles have been developed by the Australian Catholic Bishops Pastoral Projects Office as a resource for pastoral planning, focusing on the second and third points above.

In 2006 our parishes participated in the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) and the results were distributed to all parishes. This survey, conducted every five years, provides a snapshot of our

people, their hopes and concerns, their values and their experiences.

This profile of the diocese's demographic reality helps the diocesan leaders name its strengths and shortcomings and better understand how it might use the resources it has to pursue the mission of the church.

SNAPSHOT OF THE DIOCESE (2006)

- Total population: 634,666
- Catholic population: 153,857
- Catholics make up 24.2% of the total population
- Median age of Catholics is 38 years
- Total Catholic families: 61,466
- 13,772 Catholics live alone
- 14,333 Catholics were born overseas
- 934 Catholics do not speak English well
- 7,952 Catholics need assistance with core activities
- 54,946 Catholics have changed address since 2001.

The NCLS results demonstrated that we could improve in many areas of church life. And so our parish/regional/diocesan pastoral planning is important if we are to enrich our lives and become vibrant worshipping communities.

Identity

According to the Brisbane Liturgical Commission, "Ours is essentially a Eucharistic church. Catholic identity

can be seen most clearly when the parish gathers for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is then that we show to one another, to other Christians, and to society in general that Catholics are united in faith and worship and life.

Without the Eucharist and the other sacraments, we could not maintain our Catholic identity.

For Catholics Eucharistic sharing is inseparably linked to, and is the visible expression of, full church membership. The members of the local community are not only united to one another in the Eucharist, they are also united to every other Catholic Eucharistic community. It is made clear in the words of every Mass that the local community, through its bishop, is united to the pope who is the centre of Catholic unity, and through the pope to every other Catholic Eucharistic community."

For some Catholics the Mass is central to their identity. However for many others the Mass is not a significant part of their lives. In this diocese the Mass attendance rate is presently 10.1%. Being connected to parish is not seen as relevant or important for 90% of Catholics, yet they are happy to identify themselves as such. How can we reach out to our fellow Catholics? Blessed John Paul II offers some solutions.

Communio (Community)

Pope John Paul II wrote, "to make the Church the home and school of Communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which we are

Angels treated to brunch

During National Volunteers Week, volunteers who give of their time, expertise and gifts to the many diocesan groups, executives, ministries, councils and committees were invited to Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral followed by brunch. Bishop Michael described them as "angels carefully disguised as human beings"!



Kerry Bush, Moira Gordon and Clare Murphy.

now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings....Consequently, the new century will have to see us more than ever intent on valuing and developing the forums and structures which, in accordance with the Second Vatican Council's major directives, serve to ensure and safeguard communion." (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 43,44)

Communion is a visible reality, a Eucharistic presence; it is the essence of a church and is generously inclusive. It is the heart of the Trinity and a profound mystery. Hence we need to develop a spirituality of communion. We need to spend time in relationship with those we encounter, both inside and outside the church. To make real the sacrament of Eucharist we must intentionally engage in relationship with God, each other and with all life on earth. Christ is present with us now; this is the incarnational reality of Christianity. Jesus came for everyone for all time.

In recent homilies, Pope Benedict remarked that there was still a tendency to identify the church with the hierarchy, forgetting the common responsibility, the common mission of all the baptised. The Pope expressed his satisfaction that the community "wishes to promote, in regard to the vocations and the role of consecrated persons and the laity, the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God." To do this, he said, "demands a change in mentality, above all with regard to the laity, moving from considering themselves 'collaborators' of the clergy to recognising themselves as truly 'co-responsible' for the being and action of the Church, promoting a mature and dedicated laity in this way."

Co-responsibility and collaboration require real and genuine relationships, teamwork, trust and openness to achieve a harmonious outcome. This dynamic participatory process gives an organisation its heart and soul.

The common vision and purpose is what gives our local parishes, regions and the diocese their identity.

There are no two parishes the same in our diocese and within Australia there would be no other diocese like ours.

Conclusion

The diocesan approach to **Planning and Renewal** is designed specifically to focus the work of the diocese on an authentic living out of the Good News. It provides a structure for:

- the alignment of parish, agency and chancery plans
- a collaborative diocesan approach to planning and continual renewal
- the development of shared understanding of, and a common language for, planning and renewal
- seamless delivery of diocesan services and resources targeted to each agency's or parish's renewal agenda within the Vision, Mission and Values which underpin all activity
- clear lines of accountability within the diocese for the effectiveness of implementation of the Stewardship Plan.

Cecilia Anning in her book *Handbook for Pastoral Councils* states:

"Pastoral Planning enables a parish or region to continue to develop, to be a place of spiritual nourishment, belonging,

healing and meaning and so to fulfil its purpose faithfully and well in a changing world. Pastoral planning seeks to determine effective ways for parishioners to be active in the life and mission of the Church, promoting the reign of God in our world." (p17)

It is hoped that through the Foundation of Identity and Community the following intentions may be achieved:

- To build dynamic faith communities
- To build strong relationships

Finally, we hope that the document, "Moving Forward Together" will provide the diocese – parishes, the Chancery and agencies - with a common purpose and understanding around planning across the diocese and make real the vision of the diocese as a way of life. It is hoped that from this common vision and purpose *communio* will flourish.

Diocesan Pastoral Council

By way of clarity and summary, each of the following words has a clear purpose and a particular context.

Co-responsibility, which arises from Baptism, is a matter of *status*, not process. It calls one to participate actively in the life of the church, via communion, which is *a way of life*. Presuming the power of grace, this is achieved through consensus and collaboration, which are *processes*. The starting point for these processes is seeking a common vision among all those involved (providing *clarity*) and a common purpose (providing *commitment*).

Common Vision + Common Purpose ▷ Consensus ▷ Collaboration ▷ Collaboration + Grace ▷ *Communio*.



Bal Gato, Mike Tyler and Ben Tyler.