

# The Church is the People of God called to be a sign and an instrument of community with God and unity among all people.

(Diocesan Pastoral Plan)

*In the last of our series of articles, Teresa Brierley and Beverly Zimmerman rsj discuss Leadership and Structure, the last of the Foundations to be presented in our preparation for the Diocesan Gathering on 5 (evening) and 6 November.*

## LEADERSHIP

*Leadership is the capacity of a community to shape its future. (P Senge)*

The Synod of 1992/93 outlined the mission and theological principles of the church in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle and determined the pastoral planning principles which would give life to the Diocesan Pastoral Plan (DPP). These principles would enable those involved in leadership “To hear God’s people and empower them to participate fully in Christ’s mission”.

A number of our theological principles call people to participate fully in the life and mission of the church by stewarding their gifts graciously for the good of the community. We have been attempting over many years to understand how shared leadership and decision making by discernment are managed in a church with a long tradition of being more hierarchical than collaborative.

Pope Benedict has endorsed this thinking in recent homilies, remarking 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”. 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 is a real challenge for us but such a dynamic participatory process gives an organisation its heart and soul.

## STRUCTURES

*All church structures exist in order to sustain people’s faith in Jesus and their desire to be his followers and to continue his mission. (E Lyons)*

“The ultimate question we seek to answer is this: What should our parish life and organisation look like in order to best preach and celebrate the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Each parish must examine and question its organisational effectiveness in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the living out of our Catholic faith.” (Bishop Samuel Aquila, *Planning for the Future of a Diocese’s Parishes*)

Cecilia Anning offers us further insights on the place of the parish in the structure of the diocese. “The Parish is not complete without its relationship to the Deanery (Region) and to the Diocese. The Parish is not an independent Church in as much as all parishes make up a single community of faith under the leadership of the Bishop. As an integral part of the diocese, all parishes are striving to carry out the mission of the local church, communicating the Christian faith to the people of the diocese and beyond.



The Deanery (Region) and Diocese provide structures for the mutual exchange of information and co-ordination of activities on issues affecting parishes. More specifically, the deanery (regional) structure exists for the purpose of mutual support between parishes, joint planning of key elements of pastoral life and mission and sharing of resources.” (Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils Cecilia Anning 2007 p 70)

For many years parish councils and teams have been honouring the structures suggested in the DPP by planning, co-ordinating and implementing parish plans in order to promote the Kingdom of God at the local

level. In most parts of the diocese parishes have connected to each other in regions, participating in gatherings and planning and attempting to live out the mission of the church. In some regions parishes have been suppressed and communities amalgamated to form parishes with a number of Mass centres under the care of one parish priest. Local assemblies and gatherings have provided the members of the local community with an opportunity to participate actively in the life of the church.

The *Moving Forward Together* document offers further support to these efforts. Underpinning the fifth foundation of the document is the belief that effective Christian leadership calls for clear and consistent communication, organisational and maintenance structures. Six strategic intentions have been identified in an effort to make this belief a reality

- 5.1 Develop collaborative processes for diocesan structures
- 5.2 Explore new collaborative models of parish and parish leadership
- 5.3 Share leadership in the diocese in new collaborative ways
- 5.4 Have an agreed effective change management process within the diocese
- 5.5 Implement standardised systems where appropriate
- 5.6 Manage resources effectively and achieve financial sustainability.

It is envisaged that before, during and after the Diocesan Gathering, conversations will take place around the proposed strategies. The proposed leadership framework (outlined in *Moving Forward Together* p 22) is an attempt to connect parishes with schools, the services provided by CatholicCare and the Chancery so that the theological principles of the DPP are a lived reality. It is hoped that the resulting leadership framework can bring about renewal for the people of the diocese.

John McKinnon offers us a final word:

“We are living in an important moment in the Church’s history. Change is happening rapidly. We can be victims of change, constantly applying ‘band-aids’ to continually worsening situations, or we can take control of our own future. This will call for enlightened adaptation to the changes in culture and society that are beyond our control.

“We need to meet, reflect and pray together as a diocese that we may discern the call of the Spirit. This will mean effort and some degree of sacrifice. We do not ourselves have to manufacture our future. We simply follow where the Spirit leads us.” (“Re-structuring: Looking at Some of the Issues”)

*Please turn to page 24.*