

Macquarie Pastoral Region

Morisset, Toronto, Booragul, and Boolaroo-Warners Bay Parishes

Regional Assembly Report - Issues Raised

Preamble

This is your *Regional Report*, promised by Bishop Michael Malone at your Regional Assembly. We hope it is of assistance to you, as you continue to engage in the process of responding to the regional issues raised at your Assembly.

A good place to begin may be to recall the aims of the round of Regional Assemblies:

1. To provide an opportunity which invited the participation of a wider cross section of people, particularly of young adults;
2. To engage people with stimulus material that would help them develop their understanding of:
 - the influences which have shaped the Church as we experience it today
 - the culture in which we live
 - the type of Church we are called to be
 - what it means to be involved in the evangelising mission of Jesus and his Church in the 21st century;
 - what is needed to be effective followers of Jesus in today's culture.
3. To provide an opportunity for participants to discuss key issues in the light of this stimulus material.

The following questions, which emerge from Fr. Richard's presentation, are offered to help you continue to explore your Regional issues in the light of his input.

1. What is the heart or essence of this issue?
2. What about this issue is Good News or has the potential to bring Good News?
3. What about this issue contains obstacles or blocks to the Good News, both for the faith community and the society beyond it?
4. Where or how in this issue, is the Spirit calling you into the Paschal Mystery; into the journey from death to new life?
5. What resources do you have to help you respond to this issue in a way that takes you forward into a fuller living of the life of Christ?
6. Amongst the options you are considering as your response to this issue, what would you consider to be -
 - healthy or unhealthy responses (does it blame; does it deny the existing reality)?
 - responses focused on mission or survival?
 - responses emerging from a catholic (both/and) mindset as opposed to an either/or mindset?
 - responses that will take your community of faith forward?
7. Where and how does your response fit with the 15 principles and tasks outlined in Fr. Richard's sheet 'Shaping the Church's Future'?
8. Will your response spark and energise people's life, passion, commitment and hope?

With every Best Wish,
The Diocesan Assembly Standing Committee.

Regional Issues

Shared Issues (Region and Diocese)

Diocesan Issues

Universal Church Issues

1. The Region/ Pastoral Planning

Dimensions of this issue included:

- Concern regarding the continued operation and integrity of small parishes within the Region, especially in the move to the Moderator Model.
- Neighbourhood Churches and Small Church Groups are the way to go.
- Concern about where we are going with the Moderator model.
 - We need a firm date for its introduction rather than this development being crisis driven.
- Suggestion of a program of community activities which will serve to unite all the people of the parish/region to make them feel ownership and connectedness to God/Jesus/the church and his/its people.
- A specific suggestion made for using our diminishing number of priests to best advantage.
 - Set up patterns for services with or without communion in case of no priest in all parishes.
 - During priests' holidays, reduce no of masses, add communion service and share priests in region.
 - The advantages are that each parish would have at least 1 mass per weekend, priest would see other communities and get to know them it would encourage lay people to come forward and serve each other, instead of expecting to be served.
- I feel that the Parish Council consists too much of cliques and appears to be innocuous when outside parish jurisdiction.

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

- Diocesan Pastoral Planning could be of support and assistance to the Region in working through these issues. Contact Paul O'Bryan on 49791151.
- Paul O'Bryan can also provide support for the establishment and development of Neighbourhood Church Communities and Small Church Groups.

- The need to generate finance for all issues raised here.
- In response to questions put directly to him Bishop Michael replied:
 - He hopes the region will have the same number of priests in 3 years time.
 - Timeline for implementation of Moderator Model in this region is up to the region ... when it is ready.

- Bishop Michael commented on people's desire to 'get priests from OS,' by quoting figures showing that our ratio of priests to people is much higher than other parts of the world, even in those countries which we perceive to have lots of priests.

2. Ministry

Dimensions of this issue included:

- Need to pray for vocations
- Need to broaden the meaningful involvement of women in church ministry.
- Need to get priests from OS.
- Priests ought be allowed to marry
 - Need married priests and deacons who can understand their flock.
- The exclusion of **women** from ordination to priesthood.

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

- The issue of married and women priests is not an issue that can be addressed at a diocesan level. They involve laws made by the universal church and can only be changed at that level. Our ongoing conversation regarding these issues takes place within this context.

3. Church – Community

Dimensions of this issue included:

- **Authority** is an issue.
 - the tension between understanding ourselves as a pilgrim people looking forward and prescriptive and restrictive use of authority in the Church.
 - Listening has to be two way: Hierarchy needs to listen to us and we have to listen to the wisdom of authority.
 - Authentic leadership is about sifting through what we all say. We need faith and reason.
 - Those in leadership need to give consideration to the diverse ways in which priests approach the issue of parishioner participation in the running of a parish. One approach is summed up in Father saying ‘... but they’ll never get their hands on the cheque book,’ the other approach in the ministry of the priest who really empowers the people. We, the people need some consistency in this.
- **Some want a different Church** – one that:
 - engages our humanity and our rational thought.
 - is more egalitarian and therefore Christian.
 - will place less emphasis on the ordained minister and more on the fact that we are all members of the Body of Christ.
- **Authority** is an issue.
 - Lack of info coming from hierarchy especially about Mass and liturgy.

- faces the fact that it is really more challenging to believe in the Christ in one another, than it is to confine Christ to piece of bread that can be locked up and worshipped in the tabernacle.
- lets go of control: our Catholic Church has been very good at control, not just of people and what they think, but of Christ in the tabernacle.
- responds to the spiritual message of Christianity which is so rich and deep, and it seems we have seldom taken it seriously. My hope is that the church of the future may be more open to the mystery of Christ in each one and therefore more intent on spreading this "good news" than on filling pews.
- Focus on **Mission**
 - As a church we are very (too) inward looking. Isn't the challenge to enter into "dialogue" with the world – a world where our church language is not understood (even misunderstood). A new language from the pulpit?

4. Liturgy/ Mass/ Sacraments.

Dimensions of this issue included -

- People are generally concerned about liturgy.
- We have different valid understandings of liturgy and Eucharist, especially centered on the issues of placement of the tabernacle and quiet in the Church.
- We need different liturgies that are relevant to our youth.
- Youth do not seem to experience the parish celebration of Sunday Eucharist as life-giving and nourishing. What are the implications of acknowledging this and facing it?
 - Youth will come to Mass on Sunday if their particular needs are met at other times.
- What are we – the people who currently come to Mass – willing to do and change so that others might want to come and participate? (See suggestions in data.)
- Hierarchical control of liturgies.
- Inadequacy of our current liturgical language to carry the full meaning of our shared life in Christ.
- **Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest.**
 - Concerns for future planning for Sunday's without a priest. The priests will never experience Sunday without a priest and so decisions need to involve the people who will be affected. Please hasten slowly so we take people with us.
- **Sacrament of Reconciliation – Third Rite**
 - Article from Sale Diocese submitted for consideration as a possible way ahead in our diocese given the unavailability of the Third Rite. (See attached.)

- The importance of Sacraments of Initiation being celebrated in the parish community, even if the bishop cannot be part of it.
- See attached letter: 'To all those who ask why I no longer come to Church regularly.'

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

- Diocesan Support will be available for negotiating the implementation of *Sunday Celebrations in Anticipation of Eucharist* as appropriate to Regional needs.
- Many of these liturgical questions could be dealt with through some formation programs. These could be organised through TWEC (see below) or the Diocesan Liturgical Commission.

5. Faith Development/ formation.

- If people are to enter with openness into the dialogue Fr. Richard spoke of, they need to know themselves and the Church. They need formation to be able to do this.
- Need formation in all sorts of prayer; in deep listening.

Some Comments which may help your reflection ...

There are multiple resources available throughout the Diocese to support the region in its Faith Formation requirements. Some include:

- TWEC – contact Sr. Colleen Carney on 49307431
- Beginning Theology programme – contact Christine Cavenagh on 49791186
- Faith Development Commission can be contacted through Dianne Lantry – Commissions Support Officer on 49791156
- The resources in this region of the Mercy Sisters Retreat House at Toronto and the Josephite Sisters Prayer House at Wangi.

Basically most regionally based faith formation opportunities are provided in response to requests. The groups listed above and others respond to invitations. It's up to communities to say 'We want/ need this!'

6. Youth, young adults, Catholic Schools and handing on of the Faith.

Dimensions of this included -

- Lack of participation of youth in the Church.
- Young people and the Church is a cultural issue.
- Need for the church community to understand young people today:
 - their enthusiasm and passion about their relationship with God and Eucharist.
 - their desire to be part of the church.
 - Our tensions and issues regarding change are not theirs.
 - They are spiritual, prayerful, love Jesus but for them the Church is irrelevant, inflexible, slow

- Does the diocese have a youth forum where people (under 30?) have a chance to talk about their faith and develop ways of expressing that liturgically? If not, why not?
- **Catholic Schools:**
 - The CSO
 - The teaching of the faith
 - the ability of parents to be primarily responsible for the faith education of their children.

etc.

- Need for Church and schools to be good supporters of parents.
- Youth are still members of the Church even though they might not come. They are baptised.
- Concern about the lack of catechetical work in State Schools.

Some Comments which may help your reflection ...

- The diocese has already placed considerable focus on this issue culminating in the report Vitalink. Referring to it may be of assistance in addressing some of these issues.
- Paul Toohey is employed by the diocese in the Pastoral Planning area of Young Adult Ministry, especially regarding 'You are the Voice'. He can be contacted on 49791153
- In our diocese catechetical work in State Schools is known as SRE (Special Religious Education). Mary Smith is the co-ordinator. 49671098. The work of SRE in any region is dependent on parishioners willingness to do this ministry.

7. Communication

Is it possible to look at the communication structure of the diocese, with a view to improving the passing of information from the grass roots i.e. parish to the Bishop? I feel that the Parish Council consists too much of cliques and appears to be innocuous when outside parish jurisdiction.

TO ALL THOSE WHO ASK WHY I NO LONGER COME TO CHURCH REGULARLY

I grew up in a deeply religious family in a place where I learned to marvel at the beauty of nature and to adore and praise the Creator. I knew myself as part of this creation, breathed into life and held in love by the ever present Spirit of God. I was taught that Jesus was my "elder brother" whose life showed me the way that I should live.

Then we came to the city and I attended a catholic high school. We had excellent teachers who were also good kind people who set a wonderful example of dedicated fidelity. I am very grateful to them for all that they did for me in those adolescent years. However it was there that I was led to address God as some Supreme Being Who lived in some place above the world called Heaven and Who might deign to listen to my prayers if I was careful to obey all the rules and regulations which were said to come from HIM [either directly or indirectly]. I was told that I might hopefully avoid Hell but would probably be sent to Purgatory to make up for my sins. This being the case I was encouraged to pray for the souls in Purgatory who had no one else to pray for them in the hope that someone might pray for me when I managed to get there! It made sense to think that God would require such suffering since HE condemned His own Son to death to make up for the sins of all of us.

I clearly remember how at scarcely fifteen years of age I struggled with all of this. I was bereft at the loss of the God of my childhood; the God Who would always continue to love me no matter what else might happen; the God Who was the Spirit in Whom all things exist, in Whom we live and move and are. I was depressed even to the point of suicide. However suicide meant hell for all eternity! I felt I had nowhere to turn. I was deeply ashamed of who I was and could not talk to anyone about all this. I felt I was beyond redemption because I could no longer believe in this avenging God. I was told that all I had to do was to decide to believe and to act as if I believed. So I did that.

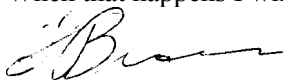
There were times when we were told about the unconditional love of God. Strangely the same Jesus story seemed to be quoted to prove God's love and also God's avenging justice. We were also taught a lot about law and dogma as well as the so-called traditions of the church. God's love didn't figure very prominently. We learned about sin, but little about living in love. We learned that we SHOULD love others, but that was yet another "should".

As I have grown a little older and wiser I realise that my belief in God is very precious to me and has sustained me throughout many difficult times in my life. But it is the God of my childhood in Whom I believe. I can so easily reconcile all that I have learned about the wonders of science with this all wise and bountiful Creative Spirit Who holds all things in being; this God Who is Mystery beyond all human words, all dogmas, creeds or traditions. This is extremely important to me. I want to live each day IN this God, WITH this God, THROUGH this God. I believe there is no other way to live.

So why do I no longer come to church regularly? Coming to Mass very often feels like returning to the God Who I learned about as an adolescent. The words I hear there are addressed to a distant God somewhere up [where?]. There is much talk about SIN, and placating an avenging God [who seems to me more pagan than Christian]. I'm still even told to pray for souls in purgatory who have no one to pray for them. The God I believe in is not like that! The God Whom Jesus spoke about is not like that! Jesus didn't seem to put much emphasis on SIN and he seemed to think that God loves sinners!

It would be wonderful to come to a Mass where the words of the liturgy reflected an understanding of God more in keeping with what we now know about our universe. It would be wonderful to come to a Mass where both the words of the liturgy and the words of the homily reminded us of God's life in us and our life in God. It would be wonderful to come to a Mass where we actually celebrated "the mystery of Christ among us, our hope of glory".

When that happens I will be there!



ANOTHER VIEW ON RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS

Bishop Coffey (Sale Diocese) published the following for the people of his diocese. It seems to be a clear explanation of the place of reconciliation and forgiveness in the Church.

Christ gave the ministry of forgiveness to His Church. This is exercised in many ways. Sins are forgiven by Acts of Contrition, works of charity and alms giving.

The most common way to obtain God's pardon is through the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass. When we come to Mass, we begin by confessing our sinfulness. The priest then calls on God to forgive us. Only serious (mortal) sins require individual confession in the Sacrament of Penance.

After the Protestant Reformation, the Church placed great stress on the Grace of the Sacrament in response to the Reformers' rejection of the idea of Sacramental Grace. The catechism that the older ones of us memorised at school, tended to give the impression that the Sacrament of Penance was the only way to have our sins forgiven and that this called for individual confession.

Confession was also seen as a necessary preparation for the reception of Holy Communion. "Going to the Sacraments" meant going to Confession on Saturday and to Communion at Mass on Sunday morning.

There was also a tendency to exaggerate the seriousness of many sins, and hence the need to confess them.

Many Catholics, with no mortal sins to confess, find confession difficult; yet they still want to receive the grace of the Sacrament.

This has led to the popularity of the Third Rite of Reconciliation when people gather, make a general confession of their sins and receive the Sacrament of Penance in the General Absolution given by the priest.

Many cannot understand why the Pope was so adamant in his address to the Australian Bishops that this practice is permitted only in rare and exceptional circumstances.

The Church still encourages confessions of devotion as a worthy practice. However, it needs to be stressed that the reception of the Sacrament is only necessary for those who are guilty of serious sin.

If communal penitential services prove to be pastorally valuable as a preparation for the Major Feasts of Christmas and Easter, they are to be encouraged. They should not conclude with the priest saying the words of sacramental Absolution: *I absolve you from your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

The formula should be that used in the Penitential Rite at Mass: *May Almighty God have Mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.*

This change may seem trivial, but it will help to break down the over dependence on the Sacrament as the sole means of forgiveness that has for so long existed in the Church.

- ❖ How does the Diocese answer the stipulations of Luke 6:27-38?
- ❖ Could an explanation of Canon Law be given.

Some Specific Questions and Comments Arising via Macquarie Regional Assembly

1. Why was the tabernacle taken out of our Church? Loss of reverence. (Booragul) Church is now a hall, reverence is barely expressed. Preparation for the Eucharist is made more difficult with the atmosphere of a hall with loud greetings and talking.
2. In a recent issue of "**Aurora**", in your **Chancery News** column, it was stated that it was wrong to store the blessed sacrament in a pix for several hours or overnight in a home. Surely, in an impending era of the shortage of priests, we should be encouraging the laity in their endeavours to visit the sick and take them holy communion, not discouraging them, or placing "legalistic" limitations on them? (I'll bet when Jesus fed the five thousand, the remaining baskets were taken to the poor and the lepers, not stored in a tabernacle overnight!)
3. Again in the **Chancery News**, a year or so ago, there was comment on the controversy of "infection spread via the communion cup". The answer given was that, upon seeking legal advice, the church "**could not be sued**" following an instance of such an infection being spread. Is this legal opinion a real answer to such a human problem of infection control, which should concern us in the modern church?
4. Could the parish/ region find the money to help sponsor young people to attend programmes which would foster their faith and help them to discover a clearer vision of Church? Families can't always afford this on their own.
5. How can a priest tell primary school children attending Mass on Ash Wednesday, that if they don't attend Sunday Mass, they are not a friend of Jesus, and Jesus is not their friend? My non-church going daughter was horrified and her children were really upset.
6. Why are so many boys not going on with the priesthood? Is their 7 years training a point?
7. Was the Second Vatican Council a "pastoral" or "dogmatic" council? If "pastoral", did the Holy Spirit guide it?
8. Tradition OK. Antiquarianism? Is not this (Antiquarianism) that Pius XII wrote against in *Inmediator Dei*?
9. What about the influence of a changed world view on the church? Most of our liturgies, dogmas, traditions reflect a "flat world theology". Is it possible to have liturgies which reflect a sense of God **in** creation instead of someone **outside** of creation? Can our language be more in tune with current scientific understanding of our world? Embrace the present reality and move on.
10. How can my faith be real if it is clothed in language that no longer is consistent with what I know about the scientific view of the world I live in? The living tradition cannot be passed on in the language of yesterdays beliefs about the origins of the earth.
11. This is all very good, well presented etc. But what about the spiritual reality of what it means to be a Christian – to live the Christ life? We need to know who we are in Christ, in God. Mission comes out of this Christ life that we share. This is the good news. We have to live that good news that we are in Christ and Christ in us. If we live that, mission will follow. This is what is essential. But we won't even be conscious of the wonder of who we are, unless our liturgies express this wonderful reality in words that make sense in this day and age, not in the traditional concepts of God as a "super father" who is eternal, who must be placated because we are "sinful".
12. What training is available for senior/middle/young to adapt to cultural changes in church?
13. Does the attending of Liturgy of The Word on Sunday fulfill one's obligation of Mass?
14. Why ordain anyone? Do we need a celibate male clergy? What about the priesthood of the baptised?
15. So much of this seems very superficial! It all seems to me to miss the point. How can I really participate when it is only the priest up on the stage who does what is really important – it all depends upon the ordination! The words of the liturgy are all predetermined and don't seem to have anything to do with me or my relationship with God.
16. Re Catholic Schools Office
 - Why is it that the CSO within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle chooses not to advertise classroom teaching positions?
 - How then are classroom teaching positions filled?
 - Who actually has the authority to select (from a pool of available teachers) teachers to be interviewed for teaching positions?
 - What is the criteria used to make such a selection?
 - Why has the CSO adopted such a process?
 - What is the reasoning behind such a practice?
17. Some liturgy concerns.
 - 17.1.

In the liturgy of the Mass I find the words of the third section of the Penitential Rite very irritating in that they seem to be contradictory. In Section I the prayer of confession is appropriate. In Section II the words are appropriate but this section does not seem to be used much. In Section III a) to Section III h) the words of the response seem to have no relationship with the words of the Celebrant eg.

C Lord Jesus you came to gather the nations into the peace of God's Kingdom:

Lord have mercy.

P Lord have mercy

C You come in word and sacrament to strengthen us in holiness:

Christ have mercy.

P Christ have mercy

C You will come in glory with salvation for your people:

Lord have mercy.

P Lord have mercy

The response to these prayers should be "Thank you Lord". There are far too many appeals for mercy from God who has offered us infinite forgiveness. We should be thanking Him more and not constantly wallowing in guilt.

17.2.

I want to appeal for a more appropriate emphasis to be given to the message that is presented by the words of the liturgy and in many of the homilies one hears. Again the issue of 'salvation' is so often predominant - we need to constantly seek salvation so that we can go to heaven when we die. What needs to be emphasized is the need for us to recognize God's love and generosity and infinite forgiveness so that we can be assured of being able to be with Him for eternity. We need to thank Him constantly for the offer of salvation and set our minds on the goal of accepting that offer by living for His Kingdom. Taking action to bring about God's Kingdom is surely the prime requirement of a Christian person and we can only do this by giving our lives to the care of others and working to bring justice and peace into the lives of the people of the world. Being responsive

to the needs of our family and members of our Parish community,

to the needs of those who are poor and sick and suffering physically and socially beyond our Parish through action in support of the St Vincent de Paul Society and Salvation Army and the many other charities,

action for Social Justice by supporting the ACSJC and Amnesty International and Greenpeace and the many other such organizations,

and action for the preservation of God's Creation by supporting the many environmental preservation organizations such as the ACSJC, the Wilderness Society and Greenpeace.