

Port Stephens Pastoral Region

Raymond Terrace, Bulahdelah, Nelson Bay and Stockton 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				
<p>1. Youth. The primary focus of this issue appears to be -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The need to develop our understanding of why young people are not involved in the Church today; ❖ The need to reflect on what we the church have to offer them that will be meaningful to their life experience; ❖ Working out authentic strategies to respond to this reality as a community of faith. ❖ How do we as a community of faith resolve the very different ways we think we should respond to this issue? How do we respect and support a variety of different strategies which may invite, speak to and nourish a variety of young people? <p>Some comments which may help your reflection ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The diocese has already placed considerable focus on this issue culminating in the report Vitalink. Referring to it may be of assistance. ▪ Paul Toohey is employed by the diocese in the Pastoral Planning area of Young Adult Ministry. He can be contacted on 49791153 							
<p>2. Priesthood The primary focus of this issue seems to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Our need as a community to develop our understanding of the role of the priest today viz-a-viz the ministry of the entire community of faith. ❖ How we live as a community of faith in the creative tension of our different understandings of the role of the priest. <p>Dimensions of this issue included -</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 25%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parishioners desire and are entitled to effective, consistent, inspiring, pastoral leadership in their parishes. • Clergy need to recognise the importance of their <i>promotion</i> (not just reminders) of events like the Regional Assembly. </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 25%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of message are we as a church sending to the rest of the world and to ourselves by, the poor treatment meted out to priests who, for whatever reason, have left the priesthood. </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 25%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the face of the shortage of priests we should get more from OS. </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 25%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why has all discussion regarding women priests come to a full stop? • Why hasn't the subject of married priests been discussed, or any statement in relation to this been made? </td> </tr> </table> <p>Some comments which may help your reflection ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Laws about who is eligible for ordination are the laws of the universal church and can only be changed at that level. Our conversation continues within this context. 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parishioners desire and are entitled to effective, consistent, inspiring, pastoral leadership in their parishes. • Clergy need to recognise the importance of their <i>promotion</i> (not just reminders) of events like the Regional Assembly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of message are we as a church sending to the rest of the world and to ourselves by, the poor treatment meted out to priests who, for whatever reason, have left the priesthood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the face of the shortage of priests we should get more from OS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why has all discussion regarding women priests come to a full stop? • Why hasn't the subject of married priests been discussed, or any statement in relation to this been made?
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3. Community.

Dimensions of this issue included –

- Are we a welcoming community – to the visitor and the stranger?
- There was much wisdom in Fr Richard’s suggestion that we see ourselves as “the hospitality of God”.
- There is concern about the lack of ‘practice’ after reception of sacraments by children.
- There is an absence (not only of ‘youth’) but of ‘under 40s’ in our parish communities.
- We need to take ownership of our faith.
- Are the difficulties posed by inter-Communion sufficiently understood?
- The place of divorced people in the Church.
- Prayer for vocations needs a higher profile.
- The place of divorced people in the Church. (repeated)

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

- Divorce itself does not compromise the place and participation of people in the Church. Re-marriage without an annulment is the difficulty. As with other issues our conversation regarding this one continues within the context of these laws being made by the universal Church.

4. We have different understandings of Liturgy/ Mass/ Sacraments

- Reverence and silence in the church, eg when the rosary is prayed before Mass, are often lacking as conversations frequently occur when people are arriving for Mass.
- ‘Breaking open the Word’ is crucial, especially given the difficulties (often) of the first reading of the Sunday liturgy, and the fact that most in the congregation don’t use missals.
- The place of the tabernacle in the Church.
- Need to encourage prayer in whatever way we can. Importance of the Rosary.
- That a decision be made and communicated to people, that where and when a Sunday Mass is cut, it will be replaced by a form of *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest*. This would alleviate people’s anxiety.
- Availability of the Third Rite of Reconciliation.

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.
- Laws limiting the availability of the Third Rite of Reconciliation are made by the universal Church. A possible response of local communities is to explore the use of ‘Penance Services’, models of which appear at the back of the *Rite of Penance*.

5. The need for Faith Education and Formation.

Dimensions of this issue included -

- How do we get what has been heard today out beyond those present?
- Role of the Catholic school in support of parents as primary faith educators of their children.

- The importance of homilies in Adult Faith Education.
- There is a need for adult education. How can we become an educated and informed people?
- We have very different understandings of what we need education in. e.g. some talk about ‘defective teaching’ being promoted and the need for strict church teachings, and while others want more of the understanding and insights presented by Richard Lennan.
- Need for conversion courses for people qualified in other fields, to take up lay ministry.

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

While this is a local issue, there are multiple resources available throughout the Diocese to support the region in this issue.

- 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

6. Communication

- What happened at other assemblies, and what were the conclusions?
- Will these conclusions be made public and to whom will they be referred?
- Good things are happening in our church, but we need to know about them.

7. Primacy of Conscience.

- Cardinal Pell has indicated that, contrary to the statement of Vatican II regarding primacy of conscience, this should be publicly rejected. Which way should we go?

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

Bishop Michael responded to this issue on the day.

8. Regional Pastoral Planning

Some specific issues raised included -

- Why hasn't a plan of action regarding practicalities for when Raymond Terrace and Bulahdelah need to share a priest been developed?
- Would it be helpful if, when one priest in a region took holidays, other priests in that region 'covered' for him? That way people would become used to the consequences - ie reduced number of Masses, having Liturgies of the Word rather than Eucharist, Lay funeral Ministers.
- Proposal re Regional Ball in Spring. (See collation of Assembly data for detail.)
- A proposal made that Beresfield parish be included in the Port Stephens Region. (See collation of Assembly data for detail.)
- Clustering might work in Newcastle but it will not work here with big distances and few priests.
- The distances between parishes in different regions are sometimes shorter than those between parishes in the same region. This doesn't facilitate regional communication/identification.