

Vineyards Pastoral Region

Branxton, Lochinvar, Singleton, Cessnock and Kurri Kurri 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 and Regional Pastoral Planning.

Dimensions of this issue included -

- Sharing our resources, approaches and activities within the region.
 - Establish a communication system in the Region, e.g. what's on, special celebrations, etc. A regional newsletter.
 - The lack of an existing effective communication system was revealed through questions such as
 - When does the Vineyard Regional Council meet? How often does it meet? When was the last meeting?
 - Why are Faith Development workshops in other Regions not advertised in Parish Bulletins?
 - Why is a copy of the Diocesan Bulletin not made available to parishioners as soon as it is released?
 - Results and issues of this Regional Assembly to be taken back and shared in each parish.
- Need to consider a 4th stage to 'New Wine ...' especially in relation to the celebration of Eucharist.

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

Diocesan Pastoral Planning could be of support and assistance in some of this is considered appropriate by the region. Contact Paul O'Bryan on 49791151.

2. Our understandings of Ministry

Dimensions of this issue included -

- Role and place of **women** in the church.
 - There are different perspectives on this issue.
- **Ordained Priesthood**
 - Need to affirm our priests
 - Priests need to change as well as the people.
 - Issue of shortage of priests needs to be addressed. Possible solutions -
 - Encourage vocations
 - To have aged, and in some instances, retired priests looking after us seems to me to be cruel, certainly not Christian.
- Role and place of **women** in the church.
 - Ordination of women should be permitted.
- **Ordained Priesthood**
 - Issue of shortage of priests needs to be addressed. Possible solutions -
 - Married priests in the future.
 - Bring ex-priests back into ministry.

- Sexual abuse issue:
 - The 'good' priests are also the victims in the sexual abuse situation.
- **Seminarians**
 - More should be in parishes/ regions

- Invite OS priests to Australia.
- Ordination: Training for full ordination should become a two-year course at most.
- Sexual abuse issue:
 - Without referral to Rome, accused priests must be liaised with at once.
 - The present conditions of unmarried priests are the cause of present sex problems.
- Homosexual priests. Without referral to Rome, such priests must be liaised at once.

- **Permanent Diaconate.**

- The choice of candidates should be a matter for the people of each parish, and be based on the discernible talents of candidates.

- **Permanent Diaconate.**

- What is being done in the diocese about this?
- As many people as possible – men and women – should at once be ordained as deacons, with the right to seek full ordination in due course.

- **Bishops**

- Ordination as Bishop open to men and women who are already priests and who are married with children in 10 years.
- Bishop to be elected by the People of God with no interferences from outside.

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

- Laws about who is eligible for ordination as either Deacon, Priest or Bishop are the laws of the universal church and can only be changed at that level. Our discussion of this issue takes place within this context.

3. We have different understandings of Church – Community.

Dimensions of this issue included -

- Community
 - Importance of welcoming and supporting people in their faith.
 - Need to take community out into wider community – mission.
 - Commitment needed to be more tolerant and friendly
 - Need to build concrete relationship between parish and schools
 - Out with fear in with passion
 - What we do with our faith is important. We have to practice it.
 - Catholics should be challenged to 'publicly give their life to God.'
 - Catholic people must learn to communicate, both before and after mass.
- The Church/ the Future/ change.
 - There is a future.
 - Explore the future of the Church with Fr. Richard's sheets.
 - We need to bring the image of Jesus into the 21st century.
 - Rosary and Benediction to Jesus through Mary is the one and only way to solve any problems we have.
 - Need to find news ways of being church in a changing world, while at the same time being a Church.
 - Stop talking about being a new Church and get back to teaching kids and their parents the real truth, that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist.
- Mission
 - The local community needs to have a mission outreach mentality, to think of ways of involving people to minister to others, such as the lonely, youth, and homeless.
 - Explore ways in which other parishes are responding.
- Assemblies:
 - Concerns that 'the powers that be' ignore valid and legitimate matter raised at assemblies.
- The Church/ the Future/ change.
 - Bishop Michael has got it wrong! It is not the oldies, who think Vatican II was wrong, who are still at Mass. It is the young ones. That's why they have given up, and don't come any more.

- Caring for social justice aspects - this seems to receive very little attention.

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

Dimensions of this included -

- Music is important in engaging young people
- Some would like quiet time in Church.
- Nothing to attract youth especially in liturgy.
- **Mass**
 - Mass is a learning time.
 - Clarification needed about the requirement to attend Mass.
 - Change the attitude of "I've attended to my duty by attending mass," to "attending to celebrate the Eucharist and worship God with an enlivened community, who strengthen their faith and enriches their life."
 - Mel Gibson's movie about Jesus' passion drives home the sacrifice made to atone for sin. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is presented today as only a community meal. The sacrifice Jesus made needs to be recognised.
 - A big issue is "music in the Mass." It is a key part to enjoy our Mass and to express our faith.
 - bring our young people back. It needs enthusiasm.
 - Change is good. Make our celebration of Mass lighter for the young, but do not ever stray from basics.

- Accessibility to Eucharist in the future.
- **Reconciliation**
 - Very few Catholics use the sacrament of reconciliation in its present form. Why not?

- **Sacrament of Reconciliation**
 - Many questions about Third Rite of Reconciliation.
 - Young people, so they say, are not interested in the First Rite. From observations, neither are the older
 - Would be good for lapsed Catholics. Not as daunting.
 - Need well organised clear explanation of Church's teaching re this.
 - As well as our current form of Reconciliation, it would be good to have at all masses - once a month - the Third Rite of Reconciliation plus general absolution.

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.
- See Faith development point below for resources which may assist you in responding to some of these issues.

5. The need for Faith Development; for a variety of opportunities to nurture our Faith.

Dimensions of this included -

- Question: Why are there so few Faith Development workshops held in our region?
- I would like to see more emphasis on Christian
- Need opportunities at parish and regional (as well as diocesan) level, for adults to experience and gain knowledge, to exchange ideas and discuss

Meditation.

issues affecting our church.

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

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

6. The Young, handing on of the Faith and Catholic Schools.

This is a significant issue about which people hold differing opinions and consequently propose different strategies. The following reflects this.

• The Young

- Young people are underestimated.
- Something is wrong with our faith education system and parish life that fails to make faith important to youth.
- Nothing to attract youth especially in liturgy.
- We must find ways to encourage the youth back to the Church. Suggested strategies -
 - More youth focused Masses.
 - A "fellowship" type evening for youth could be discussed.
 - Share ideas across parishes.
 - Inter-parish activities with other youths from around region and with other regions.
 - Faith development seminars to be held in the parish/region for our youth.
 - Bring back Youth Groups urgently.
 - Importance of music in engaging the young
 - Advertise the Youth Groups activities in local newspapers, etc.
 - We need to cater for them so they won't find it boring: modernizing music, homilies catering for youth, etc., or, most likely, can we have a Youth Mass?
 - Our kids need to feel they are of some value in their parish. They need to be considered and involved in decision-making. They are the future of the Church.

• The Young

- Camp Dio established to affirm young people's faith.

• Catholic Schools:

- Schools ought to provide an opportunity for students to choose to celebrate Mass at school.
- Need to build concrete relationship between parish and schools
- Religious Instruction needs to be more important in schools.
- People with children in CS ought to participate by putting an envelope in Sunday collection.
- In Primary and High Schools run by our church - avoid the trap of Political Correctness - we need to teach and inspire our young Catholics in our Faith.
- Having attended the Catholic school system from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s - we were not taught the Catholic Faith. Mostly it was vague spiritualism and humanism - there was no emphasis on the Mass or the practise of our Faith.

• SRE (Special Religious Education)

- Scripture teaching in public schools should be made easier for kindergarten and first classes.

- Pressure on our youth by peers and media. Most of our children's Catholic friends thus don't attend Mass.
- Youth is the main issue of religious longevity.
- Get the basics right. Mass, sacraments, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and the score-board will be a winner.
- Has anyone read Sr Louise Gannon's Youth document? How are such Masses as she proposed being promoted in this region?
- **Faith and the under 40's/ 45's**
 - Target the young adults (under 45s) with courses on the very basics of Church doctrine. They are the parents of today's school students, but are the ones who were not taught the Faith in their school days.
 - We must retrieve the lost generation.

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

- As mentioned above, 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

7. Communication and Media

Dimensions of this included -

- Need to promote a Christian outlook through the media
- Advertise activities in local newspapers, particularly those associated with the younger folk.
- Publish in our Parish Bulletins or the *Aurora* occasionally, the list Fr Richard gave re "how we participate in the liturgy."
- Get a television station.

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

Re the suggestion above to procure a television station: *Church Resources* which was established in 1997, has as one of its ultimate aims, the raising of sufficient funds to establish a Catholic Cable Channel. *Church Resources* can be accessed through the internet <http://www.churchresources.com.au/aboutus.php> One of its services is a free daily news bulletin and daily prayer. These can be found via the diocesan website.

8. Environment.

- The environment, caring for the world, receives little attention.

Some comments which may help your reflection ...

In 2002 the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference social justice statement was on the environment. The statement was called *A New Earth: The Environmental Challenge* and is available at <http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net/socialjustice.html> It may be able to help your parish/ region respond to this issue.