



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

Dear Fr Binh and parishioners of St Joseph's Parish,

Warm greetings to you all,

I was pleased to be able to with you for a Pastoral Visitation from Friday 9<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2022. During my time amongst you I found a very warm welcome. Indeed all the meetings with individual parishioners and groups were most cordial and engaging. I am deeply grateful to have had this opportunity to be with you over these days.

Following a welcome and a brief meeting with Fr Binh, I visited both of your primary schools of Sacred Heart, Newport and St Margaret Mary's in Spotswood to be welcomed by the principals, staff and children.

I spent time with the Principals, Vice-principals, and Religious Education Leaders. I also had time with some of the student leaders and met with the children in their classes. I had the opportunity to share morning tea with the staff at Sacred Heart, Newport and later a light lunch with staff at St Margaret Mary's at Spotswood.

I met with the Parish Secretary and reviewed the Parish registers. At the same time, the Parish Secretary also fulfils the role of Safeguarding Officer and she informed me of the safeguarding standards and practices that the Parish community has in place. I commend you as a Parish community for your commitment to implementing a safe and caring environment for your children, young people and vulnerable adults.

I shared a lovely meal on Friday evening with a few of your Parish leaders hearing some of the stories and for the Parish.

It was wonderful to be part of the Parish forum on Saturday morning and to listen to parishioners sharing their reflections on Parish life, the challenges you face and also your hopes for the future. I was able to hear of your commitment to your new Parish Council Constitution. It was an opportunity to hear feedback from the consultation you had with members of the Parish community. This was carried out over the previous weeks in preparation for the Parish Visitation. There is obviously a willingness and an openness to listen to one another. It was also an opportunity for members of the council and others at the forum to share their reflections on the situation of your Parish and possible future scenarios. I appreciated your candour in all of this and your sense of commitment and love for the Parish of St Joseph's.

It was good to be able to visit some of those who were housebound and also to visit the Josephite Sisters who have been closely associated with the Parish from its beginnings.

Celebrating the weekend Masses on Saturday evening at Spotswood and Sunday morning at Newport was at the heart of my time with you as together we were nourished by the Lord through his Word and the Eucharist itself. It was so good to meet with many of you after those Masses and to be able to share a BBQ lunch with you on that Sunday in the hall.

**Most Rev. Martin Ashe**

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It was a blessing for me to meet with you in a variety of settings over these few days. I do hope that all the effort and time that you put into preparing for the Parish Visitation will be seen as worthwhile and of benefit to you as you continue your journey and mission as a Parish in the years ahead.

The following reflections are offered to you to be both a source of affirmation and encouragement for you to reflect on and consider.

In both churches of Sacred Heart and Margaret Mary's the celebration of the Eucharist on the weekends was accompanied by wonderful music and song. This was good to experience because when People sing together at the Eucharist it helps us all to deepen our love for the Lord and to deepen their faith. People commented on how good the Prayers of the Faithful are. I was made aware that you have a roster of people who prepare them and including prayers that highlight what is happening locally and around the world. There are many others whose ministries contribute to the celebration of the Eucharist. All the above is important in helping to create a welcoming and faith filled community. It might be worth considering having a ministry of Welcome on for the weekend Masses. It has also been suggested that providing 'a cuppa' after Mass could also be considered as part of this.

I was very impressed by your new Parish Pastoral Council and the contribution they are making in order to be a more vibrant Catholic community within your local area. Much thought and work has gone into the creation of the Constitution. You describe your desire to involve more people in the mission and life of the Parish not only to have a sense of belonging but also to play their part in sharing their spirit-filled giftedness for the building up of the community. It will be important to think through your priorities for the future and what might be the most important steps to be taken now. I would encourage you to make contact with the Western Region Animation Consultant of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Michael Azzopardi, [Michael.Azzopardi@cam.org.au](mailto:Michael.Azzopardi@cam.org.au) who could also be of assistance to you at this time.

Your Parish finances are currently tight due in large measure to the impact of COVID. At the same time you have been committed to addressing your maintenance programme and have upgraded the lighting in both churches during 2020/2021.

There is also a desire for people in your Parish to come to know each other not only socially but also from a faith perspective. It is to find ways of deepening your faith through prayer and reflection and to be willing to share this with each other so that we can each be a source of encouragement for one another. It may be worth following up with the Proclaim Office in the Archdiocese their email address is [Proclaim@cam.org.au](mailto:Proclaim@cam.org.au) to find out what resources might be available in this area.

You are conscious of the need to reach out to the isolated and the lonely. The St Vincent de Paul is highly regarded within your community. Their presence was very much in evidence in leading up to Christmas. Given the variety of needs in the broader community round about, it may be worth considering other ways the Parish might reach out in serving Christ to the broader community?

You would like your young people to be more involved in the Parish. The very fact that you sought out their ideas during your consultation process, even to visit some of the Secondary Colleges, is a real sign of this. I commend your decision to include two young people on your Parish Council. Given that for the Parish this a new initiative in regard to young people, I would recommend that you contact the Archdiocesan

Youth Discipleship Team who could assist you at this time in the Parish's mission to young people; their email address is [ArchdiocesanOfficeforYouth@cam.org.au](mailto:ArchdiocesanOfficeforYouth@cam.org.au)

Many of you have commented to me on how much regard and respect they have for their Parish Priest, Fr Binh Le. His leadership style draws people to being aware of the difference they too can make for their Parish. He has a way of tapping into the gifts and talents of others including parents from the schools. His homilies are especially appreciated as he connects, in creative ways, the gospel of the Sunday to life. From the feedback also people want Fr Binh to stay with them.

I have had the opportunity to speak with the Principals, Deputy Principals and Religious Education Co-Ordinator from both schools. There is a strong emphasis on the prayer element in both schools and there is a consciousness of the need to help our children in this area. As the Pastoral Visitation occurred during the season of Advent, this theme was very much in evidence in displays of the violet colour etc as we went around the school and various classes. Throughout the school year Fr Binh celebrates the Eucharist regularly with individual classes. He also meets up with the Principals on a regular basis throughout the year, including attending the School Advisory Board meetings. Ongoing formation of staff within our Catholic school was also discussed. Feedback from parishioners also revealed a desire for deeper connection and partnership between the schools and the Parish. I would encourage the School Advisory boards and Parish Council to consider ideas of addressing this.

I commend the Catechetical Programme in the Parish which is for those children in schools other than Parish schools. The lessons take place on Sunday morning followed by the Sunday Mass at 10am.

In reaching out to all our children in the Parish both those in our Parish schools and those from other schools we are not only wanting our children to learn about a particular sacrament but we are also committed to drawing our children into a personal relationship with Jesus. I would encourage you to keep discovering ways to do this creatively and especially to have an overall family approach in this journey of growing in the faith.

Take the Way of the Gospel is the journey that parishes across the Archdiocese are embracing at this time. It is a process of renewal for us as disciples of Jesus but also for the parishes themselves. It is to create more vibrant Christian communities where all of us play a part in giving witness to Jesus and his life-giving presence. It is through the leadership of Fr Binh and your Parish Pastoral Council that you have set out on this journey of Renewal. During this Pastoral Visitation I have seen some wonderful signs of this. I thank God for the ways the Spirit is active through you in your Parish community and beyond. You are also beginning to take steps on this journey with your neighbouring parish of St Mary's in Williamstown.

It has been a blessing for me to have been with you all. I thank you for your welcome and the generosity of your time. I pray that the Lord will accompany and guide your Parish of St Joseph into the future and give you the strength and the courage to be life-giving witnesses of Gospel joy and hope within the broader community.

With every Blessing,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

