



We proclaim a crucified Christ

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19 October 2023

To the priests and parishioners of the greater Bayside area

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

The more recent history of the seven parishes comprising the Bayside Catholic Mission has been a challenging one, without a doubt. You have been seeking to build both a new missionary and pastoral direction that might engender vitality, vibrancy, and viability, and a new form to that direction, coming from individual parishes into a shared Mission.

Over the past few months, especially since June, local processes of consultation and discernment have been taking place to find a more secure and confident way ahead for the sustainable life of your communities of faith, culminating in the report and recommendations I recently received. Thank you to all who have participated in this process, and for the commitment to finding a way forward.

As I indicated in my letter to you last weekend, while no consensus emerged from the consultation sessions, certain clear indications were evident in what was reported to me. I note the recognition that a number of the parishes in the Mission are not currently viable on their own. I also note the desire for having a Pastor who is not so stretched that he cannot be known – or get to know – the communities to whom he has been appointed. Finally, I note the levels of cooperation and shared pastoral administration already developed in the Mission over the past few years. These factors have significantly influenced my own discernment. You have requested direction from me, and this is now what I offer for you.

Taking into consideration questions of social demographics, ecclesial cultures, ministerial workloads and financial viability, I believe there is a need for four parishes in the present-future in the general Bayside area, and possibly three parishes in the more extended-future. There is a parish at the northern end; one on the western central side; a third in the eastern central area; and one at the southern end.

- **North:** Gardenvale, Brighton and Brighton East
- **Central (West):** Hampton, Hampton East and Sandringham
- **Central (East):** Highett and Cheltenham
- **South:** Rickett's Point and Mentone-Parkdale

To facilitate this progress, a small change to boundaries - the area currently located east of Bluff Rd in Hampton East Parish - is to be incorporated into Highett Parish and Brighton East Parish.

In terms of formal structures, the parishes in each of the North, Central (West) and Central (East) will be canonically amalgamated to form a single parish in each of the three areas, with a Parish Priest appointed to each of those three parishes. The parishes comprising the South will be initially twinned

(i.e., remain as two parishes), with their eventual amalgamation into one parish at a future time; the South will initially have a Parish Priest (to cover both parishes) and an Assistant Priest. Finally, there is the possibility of the North and Central (West) parishes twinning or amalgamating sometime in the future. These proposals will also be brought for consultation to the Council of Priests according to Can. 515 §2.

You may wonder why the above arrangements involve the immediate move to the amalgamation of parishes in the North, Central (West) and Central (East), rather than twinning. The answer is a fairly simple one: vitality, vibrancy and viability. This was acknowledged and highlighted in your consultations. By amalgamating now, resources can be co-ordinated for all the communities within the newly established parishes, better enabling the missionary renewal that is at the heart of *Take the Way of the Gospel*. I suspect there is also a felt need among many of you to 'get on with it' in terms of establishing a settled future, and this progress will provide opportunities for a solid platform.

With these proposed arrangements, and having spoken with the current priests in each:

- Fr Ian Ranson has agreed to be the PP of the North;
- Fr Alan Fox, the PP of the Central (East);
- Fr Justin Ford, the PP of the South.

I will need to appoint a new PP for Central (West), noting that Fr Dean Mathieson will finish up his tenure in the current Bayside City Mission once the various canonical amalgamations have been completed (which might take a couple of months, or so).

May I acknowledge that these new configurations – and the ministerial, pastoral and administrative leadership and staff support needed – will have some significant implications. For example, the new arrangements should allow for Mass times that suit the local community, and that can be adequately carried by one priest in each parish. I will give authority to each Parish Priest to work with you in making these adjustments.

I am also mindful that canonical amalgamations will have an impact on the pastoral administration of each parish, which needs to be handled justly and sensitively. I have asked that these changes be co-ordinated through the Vicar-General's Office, drawing on support from my Archdiocesan Mission and Stewardship Offices. I have also assigned a canon lawyer, Rev Michael Gallacher, with expertise in parish amalgamations, for you to draw on. Correspondence and queries may be directed to: mission@cam.org.au

There is no reason why the bringing about of these new configurations can't begin to unfold relatively quickly. Things will look the same next week, and perhaps the following few weeks. However, I envisage some canonical processes of amalgamation can begin before the end of the year while others will unfold over the ensuing months. Similarly, Mass and Sacramental arrangements may proceed earlier than other dimensions of adjustment, as needed. My hope is that each new parish will dive quickly into establishing a strategic process for developing a missionary and pastoral plan.

The aim of this letter to you is to set the direction, and the next steps will be implementing processes that will support and enable you to bring forth these new arrangements. Over the next week your communities will be provided with guidance for planning.

As you will readily recognise, there are any number of practical dimensions to be now entered into, for which Fr Mathieson will carry a significant leadership responsibility. I will ask the Bayside Taskforce, chaired by the Vicar General, to come together with the leadership of the Bayside communities (PPC, PFC, etc) to develop a project plan for implementation. I will make available staff of my Offices (as noted above) to assist in these steps. Central (East) and South will also have their tasks to undertake, and the canonical processes will need to be progressed, with the help of the canon lawyer.

The extensive processes of consultation have been valuable on many levels. Hearing from the lived experience and learnings of the past couple of years; listening to the needs and desires of communities; assessing the demographics and data of changing environments; and looking toward development and growth for both a stable future and one that is open to missionary energy, have enabled a determination that I believe will work for you. But it will require your missionary commitment as well, which I heartily encourage.

At this point in time, might I encourage you firstly to come together in prayer this weekend – not just for your own community, but for your neighbours, “... for we are God’s coworkers, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (1 Cor 3:9)

Please be assured of my own prayers for you, as I call on the saints of your communities: St Mary (under her various titles), St Joseph, St James, St Finbar, St Joan of Arc, St Agnes, St Patrick and St John Vianney – pray for us! Sacred Heart of Jesus – Christ, our Light – fill us with your mercy, grace and peace!

With every grace and blessing, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter A Comensoli'. The signature is stylized and includes a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne