

St John the Apostle Church, Kippax and St Thomas Aquinas Church, Charnwood Joint Steering Committee

Minutes of Meeting, Wednesday January 22 2025.

1. Meeting Commenced 7:00 pm.
2. Opening Prayer and Reflection – Fr Tru
3. Apologies:
4. Attendance: Fr Tru, Carl Madsen, Di Bruce, Michael Carberry, Megan Winter, Rod Goodisson, Marian England, Jenny McGee
5. Special Guest: Fr Richard Thompson (Vicar General)

6. Following the reflection, Fr Tru presented a draft paper by Elizabeth MacDonald which summarized the history of attempts to bring various Parishes together within the Archdiocese, with particular reference to previous attempts in 2015 to bring St John’s and St Thomas Aquinas together.

7. Fr Thompson was asked to provide the Steering Group with some background and information concerning the arrangement between the MSCs and the Archdiocese concerning the two Parishes. Fr Thompson explained that the MOU with the current MSC Provincial and the Archdiocese was made necessary because of the lack of available priests within the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese had been dealing with a significant shortage of priests for several years and presently there were at least eight other parts of the Archdiocese where similar discussions were about to take place (although usually between diocesan Parishes). They were about to employ an individual whose sole focus was to facilitate the coming together of different Parishes.

8. However, it was also raised that while for the next 5 years the Archdiocese would rely on the MSCs to provide pastoral care to parishioners at both St John’s and St Thomas Aquinas, there was no guarantee that the MSCs would be able to find enough priests following that. In 10 years’ time there may be a need for having a single Parish for the entire Belconnen region. Fr Thompson stated that it was very important that no matter what happened, the underlying charism of the MSCs not be lost.

9. Discussion then turned to the three potential models of how different Parishes could work together as outlined in Elizabeth’s paper:
 - a. A “cluster” or “collaborative model” (for eg the Inner North Canberra Parishes – Watson, Dickson, Campbell, O’Connor, Braddon) where two or more Parishes share a priest, at times also staff, resources and planning – but each maintains its own distinct identity.
 - b. An amalgamation – where you have a situation of A plus B plus C equals a bigger version of ONE of these parishes – ie a bigger version of an existing Parish, which may have a number of different sites for masses. But essentially it involves one Parish absorbing one or two others.
 - c. A merger – which differs from an amalgamation in that a NEW Parish is created. So A plus B plus C equals brand new parish D. There can still be more than one mass site within the new Parish. This is the model used when St Monicas (Evatt) and St Michael’s (Kaleen) came together.

10. From his experience, Fr Thompson thought the third option seemed to work best. He suggested the Steering Group examine the issue and decide which alternative would work best in our situation. A proposal would then need to be presented to the “Council of Priests” within the Archdiocese (which decides on all pastoral matters). Once agreed upon by the Council of Priests the proposal would then need to proceed to the “Trustees of the Archdiocese” to review the property and financial aspects of the proposal. Once passed by them it goes to the Archbishop for final approval. [have I got this right??]. When questioned, Fr Thompson repeated that it was up to the two Parishes to decide how they wanted to come together.

11. Despite Fr Thompson being keen for us to submit a proposal to the Council of Priests by March, the Steering Group felt that more time was needed to consult with parishioners, particularly as some had expressed concerns that they had felt ‘blindsided’ by recent announcements and felt strongly that there had been a lack of adequate consultation in recent times.

12. The need for a joint Parish Assembly with Parishioners from both St John's and St Thomas Aquinas participating together to discuss these issues was agreed upon. However, St John's representatives felt their parishioners needed more time to think through the various issues and that this Assembly should not be rushed. There was also concern on the part of St John's representatives that they needed to rebuild a sense of trust with their parishioners. Many of St John's Parishioners still find it hard to believe how the PPC could not have known what was going on and felt that they (the Parishioners) had been deliberately "kept in the dark".
13. It was also recognized that for many Parishioners, Liturgy members and members of other ministries the impending changes will cause pain and angst. People must be allowed to express what they feel and the respective PPCs must try to do what they can to support these members of their community.
14. It was also important for Parishioners to feel involved and have ownership of at least some of the changes whenever possible. Clear communication of the rationale behind any changes – with greater warning of when they are likely to take place is needed.
15. Difficult decisions will need to be made in several areas. At times we may only have one priest available to say all weekend Masses, and this will become even more likely once Fr Chung's tenure comes to a close. Normally, one Priest is only allowed to say 3 Masses over a weekend. Between the two sites we currently have 6 masses. Members of the Steering Group will come up with a series of proposals on different mass time alternatives for Fr Tru to put to Parishioners. We will also survey Parishioners on their preferred choice of name for the new entity. Suggested options include:
 - a. West Belconnen Catholic Community
 - b. West Belconnen Sacred Heart Catholic Community
 - c. Sacred Heart Catholic Community of west Belconnen
 - d. St John the Apostle and St Thomas Aquinas Parish, West Belconnen
16. St John's (via Marian) has already initiated a joint Sacramental program for children from both St John's and St Thomas Aquinas. Other Ministries will also need to be brought together. A joint bulletin will need to be developed. A timeline for the changes will need to be developed and clearly communicated to all Parishioners so they know well in advance and have time to adapt to, and provide feedback on, any changes taking place.
17. The need for an experienced external facilitator to help advise and guide the process was recognized. Fr Mick MacAndrew (St Monica's Evatt) has suggested Mr Tony McArthur, a Kaleen Parishioner with a background in teaching and extensive experience in Catholic Education, Policy, Organisational Management and Organisational Change. Fr Thompson supported the proposal. After some discussion the Steering Group agreed to invite Tony to our next meeting (Feb 19th). In the intervening period we are to provide Tony with a clear statement of what we are trying to achieve and to whom he will be accountable to.
18. Jenny M read out a letter written by Fr Chung addressed to the Steering Group concerning his thoughts on the current process and his request for gentleness and patience with each other, and how best to support our Parishioners in the process.
19. Final prayer led by Fr Tru. Meeting closed 9:20 pm.