



Blackfriars Parish

Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn



Blackfriars Parish
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Blackfriars Parish
Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary
Antill St, Watson

To: Fr Richard Thompson, Vicar-General, Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn
Patrick McArdle, Chancellor, Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn
From: The Renewal Group of Blackfriars Parish, Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary

Dear Fr Richard and Patrick,

Thank you for your reply to our letter of 1 February 2023 regarding possible arrangements consequent on the departure of the Dominicans from Blackfriars Parish. While saddened by these changes, we are confident that Holy Rosary will come through renewed and bear new fruit! We look forward to meeting and discussing with you how Holy Rosary can better live the mission of Jesus Christ now and into the future.

The Parish Renewal team, in unity with Fr Mannes, is committed to working constructively with the Archdiocese and our future pastor to move the parish community as a united body in Christ towards acceptance of the inevitable changes. The following discussion points derive from our Gospel inspired vision of renewal that enables and empowers the parish laity (through formation) to develop a missional focus in relation to Community, Discipleship, Evangelisation, Service and Prayer.

In advocating for a co-design process of Parish Renewal with the Archdiocese, we recognise that professional support and facilitation are not available locally and archdiocesan support is essential to undertake the spiritual and structural renewal. We also consider it crucial that the Archdiocese facilitates dialogue and collaboration with the clergy and laity across North Canberra parishes as a whole in discerning pastoral and evangelisation opportunities as parish reorganisation planning proceeds.

As you can imagine, parishioners have questions and concerns about the future of Holy Rosary Church. Whilst understanding that the Archdiocese also faces uncertainties and that we face an extended decision and implementation process, we believe it is important that, as soon as possible, options for the future of Blackfriars Parish are put before our parish community to give people time to be reconciled to the inevitable changes ... and to be energised to respond positively to opportunities for a renewed evangelisation.

Noting Archbishop Christopher's significant ecumenical responsibilities both nationally and internationally, and rejoicing in the missional partnership he has established with Anglican Bishop Mark Short in areas such as the ecumenical promotion of Alpha, we ask the Archdiocesan leadership to take full account of our strong existing relationships with local ecumenical partners and our mutual desire to further develop our partnership in mission and evangelisation as we discern the next steps for church renewal in the inner north.

With great faith in the future of our Archdiocese in the inner north of Canberra, we look forward to meeting with you on Thursday 9 March.

Holy Rosary Parish Renewal Team

The role of the laity in Parish Renewal

1. Will the archdiocese provide logistical support and facilitators for lay leadership formation to help us carry out, in unity with our priests, our mission of witnessing to the Gospel within the new parish structures?
2. Given that our priests already face heavy workloads, how does the Archdiocese propose to support them as they take more responsibilities, to ensure they have capacity to flourish in their ministry and as human beings, brothers in the body of Christ?
3. Can the archdiocese facilitate the creation and training/formation of an interim 'North Canberra' pastoral body comprising, e.g., 4 or 5 nominees from each parish, to identify possibilities for enhanced collaboration in renewal and evangelisation, especially in particular ministries (e.g., youth, sacramental preparation).

Resources

1. Will each parish (e.g., in a 'twinned' situation) have a dedicated Finance Council to advise the Parish Priest as per CIC 537? What approaches exist in other 'twinned parishes' in the ACT?
2. What options are there for funding mechanisms (archdiocesan, Catholic Education Office and multi-parish) to support 'whole of North Canberra' youth and pastoral ministry?
3. How can the archdiocese help address the needs of people with disabilities and other marginalised parishioners (see: Plenary Council decision) in the North Canberra reorganisation?
4. Noting the projected population increase of 23,000 by 2041 in North Canberra generally, and especially in North Watson, what planning provision is being made regarding Catholic schooling and the relationship between the Catholic schools, the ACU and the evangelisation mission of the local parishes?

Structure

1. Is there any likelihood that Holy Rosary Church will be decommissioned? Can we assure parishioners that a Sunday Mass will still be celebrated in the church?
2. What models for combination are under consideration for the Inner-North parishes?
3. What options are there regarding the structures of Pastoral Councils? E.g., in a '2 Parish – One priest' solution would there be 1 or 2 Pastoral Councils? Is there a possibility of establishing a Mission Council for each church, to assist the priest in discipleship and evangelisation of each local worshipping community? What options have been tried in other 'dual Parishes' and were their strengths and weaknesses?
4. What is the Archdiocesan vision about other institutional arrangements in 'twinned' parishes, e.g. St Vincent de Paul Conferences, sacramental preparation of children in government schools?

Ecumenical Partnerships

1. How does the Archdiocese propose to address ecumenical partnerships in the North Canberra (Catholic) parish changes? Will the Archdiocese formally liaise with other Christian churches?

The way forward

1. Hold a Facilitated Parish Meeting for Holy Rosary ASAP

We propose a facilitated Parish meeting to advise on the options and process (VG and/or Chancellor) followed by Fr Mannes speaking on immediate proposed changes in mass times. The proposed date for this meeting is Thursday 30th March at 7:00 PM.

2. Ensuring the Wellbeing of our Pastors and Building Capacity for Evangelisation

As part of the parish reorganisation, review clergy roles and responsibilities and possibilities of delegation of responsibilities to trusted lay collaborators (as recommended in the Divine Renovation process).

3. Formation in Discernment of Gifts and Preparation for Evangelisation

During the pastoral planning stage, the Archdiocese provide the logistical support and facilitators for lay leadership education and training to the people of the inner north, similar to that provided in 1990-92 when the Archdiocese first confronted the issue of joint parishes.

4. Establish a North Canberra pastoral team

Establish and form a North Canberra pastoral team to identify possibilities for cross-parish collaboration in evangelisation.

5. Timely advice on Possible Parish Configurations in North Canberra

Lack of informed guidance is a recipe for disunity. The Archdiocese is asked to advise as early as possible the options for North Canberra parishes in general and Holy Rosary in particular, and to update these as options are foreclosed or new options become available. This could take the form of a regularly updated page on the Archdiocesan web site, which parishes could then broadcast to their communities.

6. Development of a Consultation Plan

That a formal consultation plan be promulgated incorporating details of planned community information / dialogue sessions, formation workshops and 'meet our new pastor'.

7. Establish priorities for Ecumenical Involvement at the Local Level

Establish an ecumenical action group of inner North clergy and laity (in consultation with Archbishop Christopher and Bishop Mark, and co-chaired by area Deans or equivalent clergy) to identify possibilities for inter-church collaborations in discipleship and evangelisation with reference to the principles of IARCCUM.

8. Public presentation by the Archbishop

At some stage during the process, it seems desirable that the Archbishop speak to a gathering of North Canberra Catholics. The Archbishop is the 'centre for unity' in the Archdiocese and it is important that the local people see and understand the issues that he is confronting. At the same time, he can challenge us to take up our "apostolic" baptismal charter: each of us, in Baptism, is called by Jesus to live in closeness to him and to be sent forth, in union with all our brothers and sisters, to bear witness to his Gospel before the world.