# Blackfriars Parish – Continuing Our Faith Journey

## Introduction

Our parish journey in recent times has been marked by much change.[[1]](#endnote-1) As we continue the journey and navigate what’s before us, we take the opportunity to reflect on the larger communities that we are part of and journey with: the universal Church, the Church in Australia, our Archdiocese and the newly formed Canberra Inner North Catholic Community (CINCC) under the care of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. Some important processes taking place at these levels of the Church set the scene for our parish journey and enable us to reflect on our role in those communities.

## Context

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted Mass attendances in recent years. More recently, the number of weekend Masses was reduced from four to three, the Dominican Order was farewelled and the Blessed Sacrament Fathers were welcomed. The new CINCC offers opportunities to work together to collaborate while the identity and autonomy of each of the constituent parishes is maintained.

The parish celebrated its sixtieth birthday last year, a blink in the eye relative to the twenty centuries of the wider Church. These histories are, at the same time, interwoven especially as Blackfriars responds to emerging trends affecting the wider Church.

## Church’s mission

The whole Church is being encouraged by Pope Francis, as part of the Synod 2021-2024 on Synodality, to increasingly become a ‘**synodal Church: walking together**’ in which we are asked:

How does this ‘journeying together’, which takes place on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?[[2]](#endnote-2)

The Synodal Assembly is still in progress but it is clear that the responsibility for carrying out this mission – of proclaiming the Gospel – is shared widely. As the Synthesis Report on the October 2023 session of the Assembly, whose theme was ‘**For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission**’, says, the synodal path:

values the contribution all the baptised make, according to their respective vocations, in helping us to understand better and practice the Gospel.

Pope Francis has similarly talked positively of a shared responsibility or co-responsibility of pastors and the lay faithful in the Church to contribute to the life of the Church according to their charisms and abilities, emphasising that:

 … co-responsibility of all in mission must be the criterion underlying the structuring of Christian communities and the entire local church with all its services, in all its institutions, in each of its pastoral bodies (cf 1 Cor 12:4-31).[[3]](#endnote-3)

This contribution can be in various areas such as liturgical service, catechesis, caring for the poor and our common home, marriage ministry, prayer, implementation of pastoral projects and administration of goods.

What is meant by ‘mission’ here? The Australian Catholic Bishops explain that ‘mission’ is the final stage of evangelisation. The first is about encountering Jesus and the second is about becoming disciples. Mission, in turn, is the call to all of us to the work of evangelisation that is missionary, Marian and has a synodal style.[[4]](#endnote-4) Evangelisation, in ordinary language, is ‘Making Jesus known and loved’.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Bringing together synodality and evangelisation is at the centre of our current Archdiocesan Year of the Holy Spirit, during which we are asked to pray, discern and be led by the Holy Spirit, animated by the words of Acts 15:28:

‘It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us …’.[[6]](#endnote-6)

A common theme of the Synod on Synodality, the Year of the Holy Spirit and the Australian Church’s recent Plenary Council is the call for all the baptised to share the Good News of Jesus.

## Parish role

What does this mean for our parish going forward? That will depend on our prayerful discernment and the gifts, efforts and financial resources that we bring to a mission orientation – directed to the building of the Body of Christ.

Our parish has indeed been blessed through the participation of many parishioners and parish groups over the years in areas such as prayer, liturgy, social justice and charitable works such as St Vincent de Paul, adult and youth faith formation, hospitality, pastoral care and administration of goods, as well as in a wide range of ministries that extend beyond the parish. Much of this is ongoing and we pray that the participation continues to flourish, enriched by our multicultural membership and the valued ecumenical relationship as part of the ‘Holy Roundabout’ in Watson.

The parish submission to the abovementioned Plenary Council expressed the hope of parish renewal, a process that then drew inspiration from a book called *Divine Renovation* and led to initiatives such as Alpha (see below), the Women’s Faith Circle, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, dialogue on Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’ – On Care for our Common Home*, and parish prayer for renewal.

Building on our parish strengths and encouraged by the vision illuminated by the above processes, some proposed and recently established avenues for participation in the parish’s support for the Church’s mission include:

* Alpha, starting in late July, which is a series that runs for around 11 weeks, exploring life, meaning and Christianity in a friendly, open and informal environment. It’s based on hospitality, sharing and open conversation where one can ask questions and talk about faith. Alpha seeks to facilitate the first stage of evangelisation, the encounter with Jesus. An invitation to this Alpha has been extended to Canberra Inner North Catholic Community leaders.
* The Marriage Course, which starts in early May, is a series of seven sessions aimed at helping couples invest in their relationship and build a strong marriage.
* Evangelium, which starts in the second half of the year, is a course that seeks to facilitate the second stage of evangelisation, discipleship, through a deepening of understanding of the Catholic faith, including the Creed, sacraments, morals and prayer.
* The engagement of a youth coordinator to support the development, implementation and growth of youth and young adult ministry that would include, for example, parish youth faith formation and catechesis initiatives.
* Increased parishioner participation in the celebration of the Eucharist.
* The setting up of a welcome/hospitality committee to lead efforts to ensure the parish is a place where all are welcome and feel they belong.
* The setting up of a grounds and maintenance committee to ensure that the parish’s grounds, buildings, plant and equipment are maintained in good order and condition and replaced / refurbished / repaired when necessary.

In this and other ways, we hope to respond to the challenges set before us by Vatican II, Pope Francis, Archbishop Prowse and *Divine Renovation*:

1. To become more demonstrably welcoming and hospitable, with an active social life, volunteering and participation that builds community; and
2. To offer more home-grown opportunities to members of our community to deepen and share their faith; and
3. To reach out to the unchurched, whether baptised Catholic or not.

Our immediate priority is hospitality and faith formation (the first 2 of this list) while always looking for opportunities to reach out to the unchurched.

## Support for parish role

Historically, our Blackfriars community has responded very well to the responsibility and opportunity to contribute their talents and resources to advance the common good and support the life and the running of the parish. We hope for your continued support.

We are hoping for your support, according to your circumstances, of the well-and-newly-established parish groups and the proposed initiatives through participation in the courses, and through volunteering to help the organising committees and around the parish more generally.

Continuing and enhanced support of parish finances, potentially in some cases through fund raising for specific projects, is also an important need.

More details on volunteering and financial matters are provided to parishioners in separate parts of the document pack.

We welcome your feedback, including other ideas of how to support the deepening and sharing of our faith, and how to build our parish community so that we can continue to play our part in the Church’s mission.

Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Renewal Team

16/17 March 2024

1. See, for example, parish renewal notice in the 25 December 2023 CINCC bulletin: http://cg.org.au/Portals/3/ParishData/Id341/Uploads/Type1/05%20-%20Christmas%20-%20Yr%20B%20-%202024.pdf (viewed 28 February 2024). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, For the First Session (October 2023), https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG\_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf, p. 5 (viewed 28 February 2024). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session, 4 – 9 October 2023, *Synthesis Report*, para 18(b), https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf (viewed 28 February 2024). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. *Evangelisation Statement 2023*, Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1b9wxmLRNQzJCyPiaqLxtb4cxKiYdZM8f/view (viewed 28 February 2024). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The ‘Year of the Holy Spirit’, https://www.cgevangelisation.org.au/year-of-the-holy-spirit/ (viewed 28 February 2024). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)