

Address to Interim Mission Team, Bayside Catholic Mission

26 August 2020

Thank you for accepting this invitation – Interim Mission Team

It is an important opportunity for us to listen to each other; share our stories and our wisdom and our vision.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge where we have come from in forming this Mission and what is our current reality.

We are currently 5 parishes; 6 churches.

We can travel from the top to bottom of the mission in 15mins. Many people would travel longer for shopping and work.

The most recent census data tells us that the combined parishes are 22% Catholic.

Church data tells us that we have approx. 1060 Mass attendees in the combined parishes.

After Covid it is likely to be significantly less. But also opportunities to rebuild.

Look at our history for a moment.

St James was the mission parish in the area- called Elsternwick, Gardenvale, Brighton – started in 1892

St Joan of Arc celebrates its centenary next years, from Gardenvale

St Mary's Hampton, 1926, from Sandringham

Sacred Heart 1914 – from St James, Elsternwick at that time.

Stella Maris 1957 – from Mentone , with the vision of Fr O'Hanlon- the Dunlop factory providing the jobs in the area.

Black Rock , 1931 – from Mentone & Sandringham

All these places were established when Mass attendances were very high.

Just look at the size of our churches. And how often are they full ? Not yet anyway.

All were established before most people had cars and public transport was limited or non existent. When life was very local; when people could, and needed to, walk to Mass.

We are a much more mobile society today.

It does not diminish our need for a sense of community however.

That was the reality then.

As we know, life has changed a great deal in the years since the establishment of our communities. Society has changed; much has moved on.

But I suggest many of our parishes in Melbourne and beyond haven't changed too much.

Most of our parishes in Melbourne have kept the same structures, timetables, procedures in place for many years- because they worked; and still work.

But are perhaps a bit labour intensive and not bearing the fruit that they used to.

We have maintained our Mass timetables from about the 70's or 80's or not changed much.

I'm sure you can all recall when you had many more people at Mass.

And please God the time will come when we will have more at Mass in the future.
We are not planning for obsolescence.
We are not closing our doors.

Firstly, yes we acknowledge that things have changed – this is where we are.
How do we do our best with what we have now ?

And secondly, how do we become a more missionary Church when maintenance has been so important to us ?
We need both of course- but perhaps now is the time for us to adjust the percentages a bit.
How much of what we do presently is maintenance, and how much is mission ?
Where do we put our energy and our resources ? We all want our communities to grow.

We have in the past spend much time and many resources on maintenance when our Mass attendances and practice was high; we didn't need to think about Mission. That happened in our schools and families and groups and workplaces. Things like the YCW and other movements did great work.

Providence has decreed that at this time we need to look differently at things.

Not because of negative reasons. Not just because we 'have to do it'.

We know the reality of the Church in Australia and beyond- the pains and hurts
The loss of confidence, and the loss of credibility.
And I am acutely aware of such feelings in this part of Melbourne in certain parts of our Mission.

These realities, acknowledged as part of who we are, are however not a reason to close up shop or to give up. From suffering and pain and death comes a more glorious life.

Our new Bayside Mission recognises our present reality
And invites us into a new framework to minister to our existing people
But also for growth in new ways. This is not just change, it is Mission.

This Mission Team is one of the ways that our communities can begin to think outside the square. We won't do this overnight. It will take time. We will make mistakes. All of us.

So it was in the early Church- the Holy Spirit is in charge, but sometimes we get in the way.

So our first steps are to pray. To listen- to the Lord and each other.
Discuss. In charity and patience – with an open heart and a vision for future mission in Bayside.

We are people of hope. Let us step out boldly in confidence and trust. As I said in the homily last Sunday, 'Do Not Be Afraid, Open Wide the Doors of Bayside to Jesus Christ'.