

## PARISHES CONFERENCE HELD AT MCKILLOP CENTRE APRIL 19 & 20<sup>TH</sup> 2016

### ***New Directions for Jesuit Parish Ministries***

Dear Friends,

Yesterday the Jesuit Parishes' Task Force met in North Sydney to continue working through the wealth of material you left us in regard to *Challenges, Solutions, Strategies and Preparation for the Jesuit Parishes of the Future*.

We were inspired by your willingness to participate in the processes and the quality of your work when it came to grappling with the issues and searching for answers. The breadth and depth of the material has enabled us to begin mapping out a way forward for Jesuit parishes in Australia over the next 5-10 years. This will not be without challenges as we face the inevitable mergers and withdrawals.

There was a vast amount of material which I will attempt to summarise in this letter and if you require further detailed information all the responses from groups and individuals can be found on Immaculate Conception Parish Hawthorn website under 'Conference' on the 'Navigation' page.

#### **Challenges:**

There was a general recognition that with the ageing of the Jesuit priests and the diminishing numbers of priests the status quo could not remain and new and innovative measures need to be taken. Lay leadership was identified as the way forward. The need for formation and training in Ignatian spirituality and theology was seen as key in the development of lay leaders in parishes. If this is to happen then finance is most important, as is the development of parish structures which engage and involve the parishioners. Many people noted the administrative and compliance burdens on contemporary parishes and the necessity to take these away from the priests.

Congregations are also ageing and changing and there are real challenges associated with engaging young families and youth – how to give them a part to play in the parish? The contribution of volunteers and the necessity of acknowledging and supporting them were mentioned by many. There are often silos in parishes and between parishes and parish personnel were urged to be more collaborative within their parishes and with other parishes. Given the cross-section of people in any parish a number of people mentioned resistance to change as a challenge in most parishes.

#### **Solutions:**

There was widespread agreement that withdrawal from a parish or parishes is inevitable and some urged it to be done quickly! Theological training and Ignatian formation were seen as important ways to prepare lay leaders to take a necessary and significant role in the parish. Volunteers viewed by most as key to the future development of parishes. For parishes to remain vibrant and responsive it was seen as important to develop a variety of ways to involve people in the parish not just in the Parish Council. Improved communication is a key factor in enabling parishioners to feel a part of the parish. Fewer masses would take some of the pressure off the priests. Involving the wider group of Jesuits, i.e. those in other ministries, in assisting with mass and the sacraments in parishes would benefit all. Developing clear processes, based on detailed analysis, for withdrawals and mergers is crucial in planning for the

future. Better use of our resources both financial and in personnel could assist in the growth and development of parishes.

**Strategies:**

If parishes are to grow and develop with or without a Jesuit presence many people saw the necessity of developing new models of parish administration. Parishioners need to be invited to help in planning for the future. Parishes could be more entrepreneurial in their use of parish facilities and plant in order to fund administration, improve communication and support the formation of lay leaders. It is essential that the Jesuit province and individual parishes develop 5 year strategic plans. Jesuits, other than those in the parish, could be involved in giving the Spiritual Exercises, explaining the charism and assisting parishes in their discernment for the future.

**Preparation for Change;**

Acknowledge the situation of Jesuit parishes as a province-wide challenge and engage as many as possible in searching for solutions. Networking between parishes and parish groups could contribute to innovative models of leadership. It was seen as essential that relationships were formed between parishes and Centres of Ignatian Spirituality for the formation of lay leaders. Theological training for leadership was seen as necessary. It would be helpful for all parishes to develop 10 year financial sustainability plans.

This is just a snapshot of the material discussed and developed by you at the Parishes Gathering. The Task Force members are enormously grateful for all your hard work and it provides the under-pinning for our continuing work. We are always grateful for any further ideas and contributions.

With much gratitude

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sherry Regan". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.