

PROCLAIM
2016



On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes



A PARISH RESOURCE - PART 1

**Keynotes & Reflection
Questions**



Office for
Evangelisation

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY

Acknowledgements

This PROCLAIM 2016 Parish Resource is published by the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay.

PO Box 340, Pennant Hills NSW 1715

Tel: (02) 9847 0000

Fax: (02) 9847 0001

Website: www.dbb.org.au

Writing: His Eminence Donald Cardinal Wuerl, Dr Susan Timoney, Most Reverend Nicholas Hudson, Daniel Ang, David Patterson, Richard McMahon, Rev John Pearce CP, Paige Bullen, Dr Bob Dixon, Dr Trudy Dantis, Very Rev Dr David Ranson VG

Design: Cyrilla Almeida

For enquiries regarding PROCLAIM 2016 contact:

Office for Evangelisation

Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay

Tel: (02) 9847 0508

Email: evangelisation@dbb.org.au

Photos used with permission



CELEBRATING PROCLAIM 2016

Over three energising days in September 2016 over 520 delegates came together in Chatswood, NSW, to share insights and exchange best practices on parish evangelisation. The third turn of this national Conference, PROCLAIM 2016 was hosted and organised by the Office for Evangelisation, Diocese of Broken Bay, on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The unique character of the PROCLAIM Conference is its focus on the local parish and its life and mission, serving as a gathering point for those working and serving in the midst of these 1,300 parish communities across the nation.



The conference was formally opened by Bishop Peter A Comensoli, who announced that the gathering had received the apostolic blessing of the Holy Father himself. In his correspondence to Bishop Comensoli, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State at the Holy See, shared:

The Holy Father asks you kindly to convey his cordial greetings to all assembled in the Diocese of Broken Bay for the third National Conference on Evangelisation, Proclaim 2016: Mercy. He trusts that in this Holy Year devoted to the preaching and practice of mercy, the Conference will contribute to a more effective proclamation of the Gospel message of forgiveness, redemption and interior renewal . . . With these sentiments, His Holiness commends the Conference to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

Following morning prayer His Eminence Donald Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, shared his learnings from Pope Francis with Conference delegates, confirming that the 'new evangeliser' in the parish requires four qualities to lead renewal: courage, confidence, a sense of urgency, and joy. The Cardinal encouraged our boldness as evangelisers, a boldness that emerges from our own dedication to personal prayer in the Spirit, our confidence in the glorious truth that we have received, and the desire or passion to be an evangelising disciple in the midst of an often challenging culture.

In her own keynote address Dr Susan Timoney, also of the Archdiocese of Washington, underlined that our parish boundaries do not determine where a person goes to church but rather who the parish is called to serve. Dr Timoney emphasised that the local parish serves everyone, Catholic and otherwise, who lives and works within its boundaries and that our parishes are called to be flexible and creative in engaging this local community with the Gospel. This is the meaning of an embedded and missionary parish.

I was privileged to address participants on the cultural tensions and challenges of change within the life of Australian parishes, the need for vision, bold proclamation, personal witness and a constant orientation outwards to the world, while the final keynote of the conference was delivered by Bishop Nicholas Hudson of Westminster, UK, who spoke beautifully of the potential of parishes to express Christ's mercy. In a moving reflection, Bishop Hudson recalled St John XXIII's description of the parish as "a village fountain to which all have recourse in their thirst", a metaphor extended by Pope Francis in his own image of the parish as an "oasis of mercy". The inclusive and transformative potential of our parishes, when they express the tenderness of God's love, was affirmed also by the concluding panel discussion of the Conference, facilitated by Vicar General of Diocese of Broken Bay, Very Rev Dr David Ranson.

Conference participants also enjoyed daily liturgies hosted by Fr Paul Finucane and Chatswood Parish, and facilitated by Fr Robert Borg, a 'Praisefest' event on the second night of the Conference led by Catholic Youth Broken Bay with over 350 participants both young and 'young at heart', and numerous workshops across the three days, canvassing a range of topics that sought to speak to the lived situation and evangelical mission of parishes today. The response from Conference delegates has been overwhelming and we trust that participants from across Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific have returned home inspired to renew the face of their parishes and communities.



To support the ongoing mission of our parishes, the Office for Evangelisation has assembled the four Conference keynotes from PROCLAIM 2016 and supplemented these with reflection questions to support local discussion and implementation of the insights of the Conference. Select workshops have also been chosen to provide additional resources for your community's reflection, covering themes such as parish engagement, the best practices in parish evangelisation drawn from Australian research, and the formation of evangelisation teams. We hope this resource enriches your parish life in its mission.

With every blessing in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Ang', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Daniel Ang
Director, Office for Evangelisation
Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay



HOW TO USE THIS PARISH RESOURCE

For those able to attend PROCLAIM 2016, the three days of the Conference offered fresh insights and practical strategies to the task of developing an increasingly missionary focus for our parishes. This parish resources aims to make these insights and strategies more widely available and to assist parishes in their discernment and implementation of those learnings.

Part 1 of this resource contains:

- Text of all four keynote addresses, with accompanying guided questions
- Material from the 'Praisefest' youth event, with a sample run sheet

Part 2 of this resource contains:

- Five workshop presentations with accompanying handouts

Whilst this resource can be used for personal reflection, it is best used within a parish setting by a parish group, for example, a Parish Pastoral Council. The guided questions are offered to facilitate the process of parish discernment, and it is hoped that by engagement with this resource, parishes will be able to consider fresh ways to develop a growing missionary outlook and to become ever more effective in the mission of evangelisation.

Note that PROCLAIM 2016 keynotes and many of the workshop presentations were recorded and can be accessed at www.xt3.com/proclaim2016 (video of keynotes) and www.xt3.com/proclaim (audio).

PROCLAIM
2016



On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes



**POPE FRANCIS,
FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON RENEWAL,
AND THE NEW EVANGELISATION**

Keynote Address by
His Eminence Donald Cardinal Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington



Office for
Evangelisation
CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY



Before beginning these reflections, I want to thank Bishop Peter Comensoli, the Bishop of Broken Bay, for his thoughtful invitation to participate in this important conference that addresses the impact of Pope Francis on the Church and wider society and particularly how it is a source of renewal in our parishes today.

So much of the renewal, revitalisation and new evangelisation that we see in the Church today finds its lived experience in the parish, the place where the sacramental, pastoral, spiritual, educational, social service and evangelising action take place.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, speaks of parishes in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. He says, “The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. [...] In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelisers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach” (EG 28).

The Holy Father underlines the importance of parishes also in his most recent apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony” (AL 202).

With this glowing appraisal of the potential and capacities of parish life, how do we see that each parish carries out its many missions – and in a spirit of communion and solidarity?

No small part of the impetus driving the new spirit of welcome that we find in the Church and particularly in our parishes and evangelising programs derives from the impact in ministry of Pope Francis.

We can follow the Pope’s thought, beginning with his apostolic exhortation, ‘The Joy of the Gospel’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*), that followed on the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelisation and continuing through his encyclical letter, ‘On Care for our Common Home’ (*Laudato Si’*), and culminating most recently in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation following on the 2014 and 2015 Synods, ‘The Joy of Love’ (*Amoris Laetitia*).

Pope Francis sets out for us, from the perspective of a pastor of souls, the elements of the Church’s answer to the perennial question, what does the Church, and the more radical question, what does Christ offer us, all of us, today?

What the Church Offers

A number of years ago I was invited to speak at the Catholic Center at Harvard University. The designated theme was “The Role of Faith in a Pluralistic Society.” At the conclusion of my presentation, a man who self-identified as an atheist and who taught in the law school was the first to present a question. He asked, “What do you people think you bring to our society?” The reference to “you people” was to the front row of the audience that was made up of representatives of a variety of religious traditions all of whom were in their appropriate identifiable robes.

Since he was a lawyer, I asked if he would mind if I answered his question with a question of my own. When he nodded in agreement, I asked: “What do you think the world would be like if it were not for the voices of all of those religious traditions represented in the hall?”

What would it be like if we did not hear voices in the midst of the community saying, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness? What would our culture be like had we not heard religious imperatives such as love your neighbor as yourself, do unto others as you would have them do to you? How much more harsh would our land be if we did not grow up hearing, blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers? What would the world be like had we never been reminded that someday we will have to answer to God for our actions?”



To his credit, the man who asked the question smiled broadly and said, “It would be a mess!”

The Church brings what it has always brought: an invitation to faith, an encounter with Christ, and a whole way of living

Yet the Christian way of life and the Gospel vision of right and wrong, virtue and God’s love all seem to be eclipsed by a strong secular voice that comes even from some within the Church that find the Church’s perennial teaching somehow passé.

It is against this background – a diminished appreciation of the faith – that the Pope calls all of us to a Year of Mercy and the New Evangelisation.

The New Evangelisation

To understand the present energy and focus, the new invitational outreach and engaging openness at so many levels in the Church, we need to appreciate the New Evangelisation and its impact.

‘The New Evangelisation’ is a term that has become very familiar in the Church today. Saint John Paul II began, more than three decades ago, to speak of the need for a new period of evangelisation. He described it as announcement of the Good News about Jesus that is “new in ardor, method and expression” (Address to the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), March 9, 1983). Pope Benedict XVI has affirmed that the discernment of “the new demands of evangelisation” is a “prophetic” task of the Supreme Pontiff (*Caritas in Veritate* 12). He emphasized that “the entire activity of the Church is an expression of love” that seeks to evangelise the world (*Deus Caritas Est* 19).



Likewise, in continuity with his predecessors, Pope Francis calls us to the work of the New Evangelisation. We can see as a hallmark in this papacy the emphasis that the Church “go out” into the world, to not stay wrapped up within herself, but to go out to give to people the beauty of the Gospel, the amazement of the encounter with Jesus. I think we are going to have, as we move forward, a time of blessing, a time of renewal, of looking to the future to bring that New Evangelisation to the hearts of people we know.

Today our outreach, especially involving all of the various parish ministries, is as much the witness of action as it is in our words. What Pope Paul VI said about teachers is also applicable to any evangelising disciple – anyone of us. “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”

Before a recent Easter Vigil Mass as I greeted those who were to receive the Sacraments of Initiation, I said to one of the young candidates for reception into the Church, “I thought you were Catholic because I see you so often at Mass.” She replied, “I have often come to the Cathedral for Mass but I never began the process to become Catholic because no one asked me.”

The New Evangelisation and parish life renewal include three elements on our part: to renew our faith in mind and heart, to stand confident in its truth, and then to share it.

Hermeneutic of Continuity and Renewal

Since the evangelising disciple must both know and be confident in the message, I want to step back and have us look briefly at recent examples of the continuity and integrity of the Church’s message and its unity with the Gospel.

Over 50 years ago in 1962 when Pope, now Saint, John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council he highlighted that it had, as its goal and purpose, to support “the Church’s apostolic and pastoral mission



by making the truth of the Gospel shine forth to lead all people to seek and receive Christ's love which surpasses all knowledge (cf. Eph. 3:19)" (Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum*, 1992).

The principle task entrusted to the Council by Saint Pope John XXIII was in the words of his discourse at the opening of the Council, October 11, 1962, "to guard and present better the precious deposit of Christian doctrine in order to make it more accessible to the Christian faithful and to all people of good will." He went on to say for this reason the Council was not first of all to condemn the errors of the time but above all to strive calmly to show the strength and beauty of the doctrine of the faith. The Pope said, "The Church...will become greater in spiritual riches and gaining the strength of new energies therefrom, she will look to the future without fear...to that work which our era demands of us, thus pursuing the path which the Church has followed for 20 centuries" (Pope John XXIII, Discourse at the Opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, October 11, 1962).

I had the experience of being a student of theology in Rome during the Council. It was a time of excitement and there was a palpable sense of new life and energy in the Church. It is precisely into that Spirit guided life and energy that Pope Francis is calling us today.

However, much happened between the close of the Council in 1965 and the election of Pope Francis in 2013. It is only in understanding those intervening five decades that we can, I believe, appreciate the guidance the Holy Spirit continues to give the Church and the place of Pope Francis in God's Providential plan.

Immediately following the Council in the late 60s and a greater part of the 70s, there emerged pathways of renewal and development totally consistent with the direction of the Council and, on the other hand, ways that diverged dramatically from what the Council said and the received tradition of the Church. This was particularly evident in the areas of liturgy and catechesis where the so-called "spirit" of the Council was invoked to override the actual words in its texts and the tradition of the Church which provided both the context and the continuity for understanding the Council and its future impetus.

What emerged was a new hermeneutic or principle of interpretation often invoked to support liturgical aberration and catechetical misrepresentation. The "hermeneutic of discontinuity" was also used to justify new theological directions that disengaged from the received tradition and were barely recognisable as part of the Catholic heritage.

It was Pope Benedict XVI who began explicitly to point out the failings and unacceptability of the hermeneutic of discontinuity which he contrasted with the true hermeneutic of renewal or reform.

Precisely in order to understand what Jesus is revealing to us, we turn to his Church and the continuous apostolic tradition in the Body of Christ to clarify, reaffirm and assure us of what it is Jesus says to us.

A deepened appreciation for our faith should lead us to a new level of confidence in its truth. The words of the Gospel are the words of everlasting life (John 6:69). The teaching of the Church is God's Word applied to our day. We need to be confident that we stand in the truth so that we are not shaken by every challenge to the Gospel message.

From the days of the Council until today, the Church has been greatly blessed by a series of pontiffs, Successors to Saint Peter who have so well served the Church.

I think first of Pope, now Blessed, Paul VI (1963-1978) who dealt with the tensions and challenges of the post-conciliar Church with a goal always to maintaining the unity of the Church. One of my favourite quotations from Pope Paul VI is a comment he made when asked what one could do in the face of so many challenges to the Church and her Gospel. Pope Paul VI said: "You know the Gospel, we all know the Gospel, we must simply say it and say it and say it again." Pope Francis tells us that doing the Gospel is a very persuasive way to say it.



On to the world stage, next came Pope, now Saint, John Paul II. The world watched on Sunday, October 22, 1978 as Karol Wojtyła, now Pope John Paul II, the 264th Bishop of Rome and Vicar of Christ, stepped out of Saint Peter's Basilica to celebrate the Eucharistic Liturgy before tens of thousands of people filling Saint Peter's Square.

It was an exciting day – one that I will always remember – as I sat there with so many others awaiting what the new Pope would have to say in his first *urbi et orbi* message. “Open wide the doors for Christ” he announced. The image was a dramatic one – the doors being broken off their hinges to make way for Christ into our hearts and into our world.

What we see in the nearly 27 year pontificate of Saint John Paul II, the third longest pontificate in the history of the papacy, is a refocusing of the energy and vision of the Church, once again, on to the Council and its reform.

For a quarter of a century, he worked to lift up the role of Peter in the Church and to provide clear teaching in the wake of the Council. All of Pope John Paul II's writings, whether encyclicals or exhortations, reflect his first words addressed to the College of Cardinals in Conclave immediately following his election. He said that he envisioned the work of his papacy as the implementation of the Second Vatican Council.

There is an encyclical or an apostolic exhortation that touches on just about every one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Saint John Paul II refocused the attention of the Church on the proper recognition of the reform in the life of the Church and provided that stability and platform on which all of us now stand.

Following the death of Saint John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger, now with the name Benedict XVI, assumed responsibility for the direction of the Church (2005-2013). One of the Church's most gifted theologians who himself had been present at the Second Vatican Council and who stood by the side of Pope John Paul II for most of his pontificate, he provided now in his encyclicals and apostolic exhortations, writings and books the deep and profound theological certification for the Church's perennial teaching. He simply reminded all of us that there is an extraordinary theological richness to what you and I each day proclaim in the Creed and share through our teaching.

In March 2013, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Cardinals of the Church chose Jorge Mario Bergoglio, to fill the Chair of Peter. He took the name Francis.

It seems to me that in God's Providential design and in light of all that has transpired over the past 50 years, we now are able to reconnect again in an authentic manner with the renewing energy of the Council. This time our continuity and ongoing implementation is in a renewed and purified sense having moved from the hermeneutic of discontinuity to, as Pope Benedict called it, the hermeneutic of reform.

Fresh Perspectives

The fresh perspective for renewal rooted in the Council and in his predecessors that Pope Francis brings includes: an emphasis on the role of the laity in the life and mission of the Church (cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, and the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*), the collaboration of bishops with the Pope in an active, lively sense of collegiality or synodality (cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church*); and a reawakening of the understanding of both God's mercy, and the significance of conscience in making moral judgments (cf. *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the Declaration on Religious Liberty, and the Decree on Ecumenism*).

The Role of the Laity

Pope Francis highlights the role of the laity in what the Second Vatican Council explained was their responsibility for the sanctification and transformation of the temporal order (cf. AA 6, 7).



The understanding of the distinctive role of the laity in the mission of the Church was developed further, beyond the insights of the Second Vatican Council, by Pope Saint John Paul II. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, he connected the vocation of the laity in the world to the living out of the universal call to holiness spoken of in *Lumen Gentium*: “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their *involvement in temporal affairs* and in their *participation in earthly activities* . . . Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ” (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 17, emphasis in original).



Building on the work of his predecessor and the Council, Pope Benedict XVI would assert in his first encyclical that the creation of “a just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church” (*Deus caritas est*, no. 28).

Pope Francis has consciously echoed these themes of the Council and his predecessors in his own teaching. Like Pope Benedict, he has insisted on the autonomy of politics and religion: “I say that politics is the most important of the civil activities and has its own field of action, which is not that of religion. Political institutions are secular by definition and operate in independent spheres. All my predecessors have said the same thing, for many years at least, albeit with different accents” (Interview with *la Repubblica*, 1 October, 2013).

In a May interview with the French paper, *La Croix*, the Holy Father spoke about the legitimate distinction between Church and state, the role of laity in the world, and the correct sense of understanding secularity or, as he names it, laicity. But he also pointed out that the emphasis on the secular to the exclusion of religion and faith values has been disproportionately exaggerated in Europe, particularly France. The same can be said of the English speaking nations as well.

In every circumstance but particularly in a pluralistic society we need to be active agents of evangelisation. Otherwise, the Good News will not be heard or its values will simply be considered of no importance in public life. When asked what do we bring to the public debate over national identity and policy, we reply – our faith values.

In Pope Francis’ words it is very easy to hear the echo of Jesus’ command that we are to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold I am with you always until the end of the age.”

In the mantra of Pope Francis we hear, go out, encounter people and accompany them on the journey that we all hope brings them and us closer to the Lord Jesus.

Collegiality

Ecclesialogically what Pope Francis has done is to refocus, once again, on the ministry of the College of Bishops as was the case in the Second Vatican Council particularly in the document *Lumen Gentium*.

In considering the new perspectives on renewal that Pope Francis brings, we do well to turn to his recently published apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. The very content of the letter shows the Holy Father’s desire to listen. His exhortation reflects the consensus of the bishops who were a part of the 2014 Synod, the material provided to the Office of the Synod by episcopal conferences around the world following that meeting, and the discussions and material of the 2015 Synod.

At the end of all of the discussions and all of the reflections carried out over two full years, there emerges now this apostolic exhortation that I would call a “consensus exhortation.”

Another element of this exhortation is its continuity with the teaching of the Church expressed in so many



Magisterial documents and most recently in the teachings of Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

All of the hallmarks of post-conciliar renewal are carried forward in *Amoris Laetitia*: the focus on the human person, the primacy of love, the deep engagement with scripture, and the turn to virtue and grace rather than just law and obligation as the primary categories of Catholic moral teaching.

But the document clearly sounds important notes of its own, and significantly contributes to and applies these hallmarks of post-conciliar renewal. The focus on the person and his or her dignity is carried forward in the Holy Father's critique of what he calls "a culture of the ephemeral" (see *Amoris Laetitia* 39)—a culture which views and treats others as sources of affective or sexual pleasure to be discarded when this pleasure runs dry. This pursuit of a shallow happiness falls short of the joy of which the Exhortation speaks. As was true for the Council, the dignity of the human person is fully disclosed in Christ but in this case especially in Christ's embrace of families with their struggles, in children and other vulnerable persons, and in sinners. The Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage and its moral teaching, Pope Francis writes, should not be treated as "dead stones to be hurled at others" (*AL* 49), but as a summons to conversion to all of the Church's members.

As I noted, Pope Francis approaches his teaching ministry first and foremost as a pastor of souls. Indeed, in many places in the document one hears the voice of a pastor speaking directly to members of his flock, sharing his own experience and wisdom formed from many years of service to God's people.

God's Mercy and Our Conscience

For the Holy Father the pastoral mission of the Church, focused on the lived expression of mercy and love and the significance of conscience in our moral life, is founded on four principle activities: *listening, accompanying, discerning, and evangelising*.

One can say that *Amoris Laetitia* is itself the fruit of very intensive LISTENING on the part of Pope Francis. The two synods on family called by the Holy Father were themselves preceded by consultation of local churches throughout the world on the lived situation of families, their challenges, and their experience. The Extraordinary Synod of 2014 prepared the agenda for the 2015 general assembly. Pope Francis modeled this listening activity by his attentive presence in the Synod assembly hall. Indeed, he comments on this experience at the outset of the apostolic exhortation (*AL* 7).

Pope Francis understands this process of listening to the faithful and to his brother bishops to be a key part of his own teaching and pastoral ministry. It is part of the "synodality" or "journeying together" which he sees as essential to the Church at every level.¹ The fruit of this listening is reflected in the generous citation and engagement of the reports of the two synods in this Exhortation.

The second activity on which the document focuses is ACCOMPANYING, the pastoral accompaniment of all who seek to find a way closer to God. In many ways this is an extension of listening and of the synodality to which it gives rise. The journeying together of all of the members of the Church implies this accompaniment. But it also calls for a change in pastoral style and intensity.

The action of accompanying has special significance for our parish life and all of its various manifestations. It is in this personal contact that renewal of interest and re-awakening of faith can take place.

Pope Francis calls pastors to do more than teach the Church's doctrine—though they clearly must do that. Pastors must "take on the 'smell of the sheep' whom they serve so that "the sheep are willing to hear their voice" (*EG* 24). This requires a more careful and intensive formation of all who minister – all who invite people to renew their faith. The many manifestations of parish ministry, in this view, take on the dimension of both invitation and listening.

¹ See Pope Francis, "Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops" (October 17, 2016).



The Church's pastoral ministry is intended to help the faithful to grow in the art of DISCERNING. A key part of discernment is the formation of conscience. The Holy Father insists that the Church's pastors must "make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them" (AL 37).

Part of this formation is presenting the teaching of the Church in its fullness and without compromise (cf. AL 307) though in language which is welcoming rather than defensive or one-sided (cf. AL 36, 38).

Pope Francis further elaborates Saint John Paul II's distinction in *Familiaris Consortio* between the law of gradualness and the gradualness of the law. The "law of gradualness" refers to the progressive nature of conversion, enabling a person to grow in holiness in living out their faith convictions. When they fall short they need to return to the mercy of God poured out in the cross of Christ and made accessible in the sacraments of the Church. The "gradualness of the law" on the other hand, is the erroneous idea that there are "different degrees or forms of precept in God's law for different individuals and situations" (*Familiaris Consortio* 34).

Even in the midst of our challenges and imperfections, we are called to respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings to grow more fully in the Gospel mandate, not emptying it of its meaning.

Admittedly, this individual process of discernment may not be easy. A person may know full well Church teaching, Pope Francis notes, yet have great difficulty in either understanding its inherent positive value, or in being able to fully embrace it right away because of circumstances (*Amoris Laetitia* 301). Yet, the underlying moral principle which should inform both that personal discernment and the priest's ministry is that a person whose situation in life is objectively contrary to moral teaching can still love and grow in the faith, he or she can still take steps in the right direction and benefit from God's mercy and grace while receiving the assistance of the Church (*Amoris Laetitia* 305).

Amoris Laetitia is not a list of answers to each individual human issue. Rather, it is a call to compassionate accompaniment in helping all to experience Christ's love and mercy. To the extent that our ministry does this, it is also an evangelising action. As we recall the challenge to go out, to encounter, and to accompany, we also recognize that this is at its heart an act of the evangelising disciple.

In the action of going, encountering, sharing and accompanying, we also recognise that in the journey we, ourselves, are also drawing closer to the Lord. In all of our action of evangelising, teaching, catechising, counselling, admonishing, instructing, we also remember both God's liberating truth and saving mercy. None of us can claim yet to be perfect as is our heavenly Father. But we can grow closer to the Lord who will by his grace heal us so that we can have the life he wants for us.

At the conclusion of the 2015 Synod on the Family, one of the priest delegates invited by Pope Francis gave a beautiful intervention with this memorable reminder: When the love of God that brought all things into being encounters the human condition that we have created, the love of God becomes the mercy of God.

As we talk about bringing renewed energy to our efforts, particularly in the light of the example and focus of Pope Francis, I think it is worthwhile concluding with a description of some of qualities of the evangelising disciple.

Qualities of the Evangeliser

The evangelising disciple has to have a number of unique characteristics. I would list here four that stand out: boldness or courage, connectedness to the Church, a sense of urgency, and joy.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the word that describes the Apostles after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at



Pentecost is “bold.” Peter boldly stands up and preaches the Good News of the Resurrection. Paul boldly announces the Word in frenetic movement around the world. Today, the New Evangelisation must show a similar boldness born of confidence in Christ. We cannot be lukewarm, but must be on fire with the Spirit. Other examples abound: Saint Thomas More, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Blessed Teresa of Kolkatta(now Saint), Blessed Miguel Pro, and the various martyrs and missionary saints.

The evangelising disciples also need a connectedness with the one Church, her one Gospel and her pastoral presence. The authentication of our message of everlasting life depends on our communion with the Church and solidarity with her pastors.

Another needed quality is a sense of urgency. It is our turn now. We see in Mary’s visitation to Elizabeth how the Gospel recounts that Mary set off in haste on a long and difficult journey. There is no time to be lost because the mission is so important.

Finally, when we look around and see the vast field waiting for us to sow seeds of new life, we must do so with joy. Our message should be one that inspires others to follow us along the path to the kingdom of God. Ours is a message to *Rejoice! Christ is risen, Christ is with us!*

Conclusion

This is a new moment in the life of the Church, a new Pentecost. It is our turn now. We are called to reinvigorate our faith, not only today in this Year of Mercy, but every day and every year, and to share it with others.

We must always be open to the gift of the Spirit. It is the movement of the Spirit that has led us along this path, it is the nudging of the Spirit that brings us to this moment and it is in the outpouring of the Spirit that we will continue to walk united with Christ at the service of his Bride the Church.

It is our turn in the long history of the Church simply to believe, to say and, in our parishes, to live the announcement: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Thank you.



Reflection Questions

1. Cardinal Wuerl opens his keynote address by noting Pope Francis' impact on the Church and wider society. He notes that Pope Francis' pontificate is a "source of renewal for our parishes." In what way does Pope Francis witness to the renewal and revitalisation to which our parishes are called? What words, gestures and actions of Pope Francis call your community to renewal, and how?

2. In quoting Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Cardinal Wuerl speaks of the great dynamism and flexibility of parishes when they are open to missionary creativity. In what way is your parish flexible and creative? What role might you play in engendering a more responsive and dynamic parish for the purpose of missionary outreach?

3. We are called to carry out our mission "in a spirit of communion and solidarity". How does your parish seek to nurture a common faith, hope and love of Jesus Christ? What are the concrete signs in your parish of communion and solidarity? What are the opportunities that you see to strengthen this connection and commitment among those who share faith?

4. "The Church brings what it has always brought: an invitation to faith, an encounter with Christ, and a whole way of living." Call to mind a recent "invitation to faith" and "encounter with Christ" that you have experienced within your parish. How might this be extended to others?

5. Cardinal Wuerl mentions three elements of the New Evangelisation: to renew our faith in heart and mind; to stand confident in the truth, and then to share it. Where do you see the greatest opportunity to advance the New Evangelisation within your parish life?

6. "Pope Francis tells us that doing the Gospel is a very persuasive way to say it." How best might we "do" the Gospel as a faith community? What shape might this action take?

7. Cardinal Wuerl highlights the role of the laity and collegiality in Pope Francis' vision for the mission of the Church. Do you see yourself as being co-responsible for the mission of the Church? How might this sense of co-responsibility grow within your local community? What changes need to take place for such growth to come about?

8. "For the Holy Father the pastoral mission of the Church, focused on the lived expression of mercy and love and the significance of conscience in our moral life, is founded on four principle activities: listening, accompanying, discerning, and evangelising." How would you summarise Cardinal Wuerl's remarks on these principles, and why are they essential to mission?

9. Cardinal Wuerl closes by enumerating the ideal qualities of the evangeliser. How are these qualities expressed in your life and in the members of your parish? If you were invited to suggest an additional quality to this list, what would you offer and why?

PROCLAIM
2016



On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes



**THE MISSIONARY MANDATE OF THE PARISH:
CHRISTIAN LIFE EMBEDDED IN OUR
NEIGHBOURHOODS**

Keynote Address by Dr Susan Timoney
Secretary for the Secretariat of Pastoral Ministry and
Social Concerns, Archdiocese of Washington



Office for
Evangelisation
CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY



Parish as a Spiritual Home

The first insight we have as to how the parish community as we know it today took shape is in the Acts of the Apostles, in which we find a description of the structure of the life of the first Christian community. In Acts 2:41-47, we read that they gathered for worship, to share fellowship to share with those in need, and to learn from the teaching of the Apostles.

The substance of parish life has not changed because the mission of the parish has not changed. The parish is the local Church in the homes of her sons and daughters. The primary mission of the parish then is to be the spiritual home of those who have been baptised and have become members of the family of God. When people have an experience of the parish as a spiritual home, it really does take on the life of a family.

In my more than 25 years of experience working in parish ministry, I would say that most people love their parish. I have the privilege of assisting the parishes of the Archdiocese of Washington with pastoral planning and evangelisation initiatives. I have never been to a parish where I have not heard people say ‘I love this parish’. Sometimes, even when I am there because there is some sort of pastoral crisis, people will want to assure me that this is a great parish.

People love their parishes because they are their spiritual home. When we have found a parish home, it becomes part of our life – fellow parishioners become like family members, parish celebrations are as important as some of our family celebrations. My father, with the exception of military service, never lived more than six kilometers from the parish in which he was baptised, made his first communion and confirmation. It was the parish in which all but one of his children were baptised and from where his parents were buried. When the parish was being merged with another parish and the only activity that would take place in the church, was one Mass on a Sunday, I asked my father how he felt about that. He said, “I am fine with it as long as I can be buried from it!” In my father’s eighty-two years, so much of his faith was lived out in that parish community and that in turn shaped his relationship with God.

I have lived and travelled to four continents and I have always felt at home in the parish where I have gone to Mass. While a student in Rome and a member of San Agostino parish, I can still vividly remember how proud I was the day I could pray the rosary in rapid-fire Italian with the senior ladies of my parish!

This feeling of a parish community being a family is deeply rooted in the theological concept of the Church as the People of God. We are family, sons and daughters of the one God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, deeply connected through the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, we become the body of Christ! St John Paul II said it so well in his exhortation of the mission and role of the laity, “the parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather ‘the family of God,’ a ‘fellowship, afire with a unifying spirit’”.

The unifying spirit that defines the experience of communion is also captured in the Greek word that is the origin of the word ‘parish’. Paroika means “those living near or beside.” The communion is found in a literal sense in the parish being located in a particular community but also there is a second meaning that captures the reality of the parish as the temporary home of a pilgrim people. In Greek, there is also an understanding of members of a parish being “resident aliens,” in the sense of pilgrims, who are on a journey toward their real home which is heaven.

Embedded in the Life of a Community

Just as homes are the heart of family life, families are also a school that prepares it is children to go out into the world, to grow into citizens of the community. In the same way, the parish prepares its family members to “go forth” as Pope Francis likes to say, to invite people to an experience of the Risen Christ. Parishes are embedded in a particular community to serve not just its members but its neighbors as well. St John Paul II





described this mission as “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters” (Pope John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*).

Embedded is a word that became popularised in the media for the way it which it covered the wars of the last 20 years or so. Journalists and photographers were embedded with soldiers—living in the same quarters and moving with them around the battlefields. “Embedded” helped the listener to grasp in a vivid way the actual life of soldiers in battle. In relationship to the mission of the parish, the word embedded helps us see the importance of asking the question “*What do our parishes need to be doing if they truly are embedded in the lives of our neighborhoods?*”

A Place of Encounter

Parishes are the place where one finds Jesus. Joseph Fox, OP writes “*The parish is a stable point of reference of the Church’s daily life for believers at the level of the neighborhood*” (“The Status of the Parish in the 1083 Code of Canon Law in What is a Parish? Baima, Thomas, Hillenbrand Books, 2011). The parish is the place that forms us in the Christian life and prepares us to be that sign of Christ in our neighborhoods. We, in the way in which we live our lives, should be pointing people to the life that can be found in the parish.

Beginning with Pope John XXIII, when he opened the Second Vatican Council, and continuing on to the papacy of Pope Francis, the Church has spoken of the missionary mandate of the parish light of the vision of the New Evangelisation. The emphasis on the experience of encounter which is at the heart of the New Evangelisation calls for our parishes and their parishioners to be in the neighborhood inviting, welcoming, offering an encounter with the living Christ—most obviously through our worship, education and service just as in the time of the very first Christian community. Today, given the number of people who live in our neighborhoods who are unchurched, or who have forgotten what it means to be part of a parish community, our parishes have an opportunity to share in the civic life of the community as door to something more spiritual and profound. People may first come to our parishes though participation in an AA meeting that uses the parish meeting hall for any number of kinds of community meetings and gatherings. We know that today, for many people the only time they are in a church is for a wedding or funeral and so these moments too become an opportunity to invite or suggest what people might be missing for not being part of the church family. What does our parish offer by way of invitation to those guests who pass through our doors?

What I am trying to say is that parish serves the whole of our neighborhoods. Its focus is to ever expand the circle of family. We have a saying in the U.S. that the parish boundaries don’t determine where a person goes to church but rather, who the parish is called to serve. The parish serves everyone, Catholic and otherwise who lives and works within the boundaries. This is what an embedded parish looks like. With the presence of Jesus, the parish is a spiritual center but it is also called to be always invitational.

One of my favourite images for the mission of the parish is found in the words of St John XXIII. He speaks of the parish as the village fountain. In our day, village fountains are more decorative and a reminder of times past. I came to appreciate their importance while I was a student doing my doctoral studies in Rome and living in Piazza Navona, home to one of the world’s great fountains. Rome is not just home to great fountains. If you have ever been to Rome you know that around almost every corner in the city you find a fountain. And those fountains were very important to the life of the community. Before the days of running water people would go each day to get water for drinking, cooking and cleaning from the fountain and to share the news of the day with neighbors. Even today, they remain a place to pause in a daily *passaggiata* to greet neighbors and to gather to share the news of the neighborhood or to watch the world pass by. St John XXIII said a parish can be the “village fountain to which all would have recourse to their thirst.” I think this resonates today because of the spiritual notion of thirst. We thirst for God. For all of us here we know that Jesus quenches that thirst and we desire to drink from the fountain of the Christian spiritual life.



The Parish That Goes Forth

We also know that we live in a world that thirsts. In an interview last winter, in the American journal *Crux*, Archbishop Anthony Fisher, OP spoke of the increasing secularisation of Australian society. He said, “We face some very big questions going forward - whether we’re going to keep secularising and pushing God to the margins in our communities and individual lives, or are we actually going to rediscover the importance of God for both our individual lives and our communities?” He went on to say --and here-- we see the attitude of an evangeliser, “I’m excited by the opportunity to present the Gospel to people who are hungry for it. It’s not that they’ve had bad experiences of the Church or that they’ve rejected the Gospel. Many have just never been presented with it. It’s often received very warmly and openly by such people - they’re not coming with issues of anger toward the Church or the left/right polarisation that some people within the Church suffer from, or preconceptions that almost vaccinate them to the Church.”

His point about encountering people who have varying degrees of relationship with the Church speaks to one of the great insights of a new approach to evangelisation. Within the work of the new evangelisation we are learning that we need to speak in a number of different languages. There is a language for people who have never had a church home, who don’t have a relationship with God. And another kind of language for those who indeed were once active in our church family but who have drifted away, or were hurt, but know some of the language of Catholic life. This invitation uses the language of reconciliation or re-discovery or “come home.” For these reasons we want to be vigilant that our parishes have a place in the life of the community and to make sure we know what that place is and can be, from God’s perspective! What is the Gospel asking of your parish for the life of your neighborhood? And to what is it calling people?

Moving from Maintenance to Mission

In the language of pastoral ministry today, this embracing of a new evangelisation is often described as moving our parishes from a maintenance mode to a mission mode. This means that in one way we can be proud of the work that our parishes do, planning meaningful and beautiful liturgies, educating youth and adults, practicing charitable works, responding to crisis within our community. When people call to ask how to become Catholic, we have a program. And it does genuinely take a lot of work to keep all these good things running. But in another way, we need to ask ourselves honestly, “are we better at keeping them running for the people who come to us than we are at welcoming the stranger or going out and invite people to ‘come and see’”.

This was Jesus’ invitation, “come and see.” In Scripture, Jesus did not find a place to open a school of discipleship and wait for people to come; he was always on the move. He was in the town square, in people’s homes, along the shore, where fishermen were working, and at prayer in the temple. Beginning with the invitation to the first disciples, every encounter with Jesus ended in an invitation to know God.

This missionary mandate has been captured by the Church in the liturgy, as every celebration of the Eucharist ends with the mandate to “Go Forth or “Go and Announce the Good News.” This is our mandate to embed the Risen Christ into the life of our communities. To be the eyes, hands, feet, mouth of Jesus at home, on the job and in the workplace.

On a Monday at work or the day after an important event at the parish you find yourself talking to friends or co-workers about what you have been doing. Do you talk about the things you do at the parish? Do you share something of the event or the liturgy that can be a door to a conversation about faith? I had an encounter with a neighbour; he was walking his dog as I was doing some gardening. He stopped and said, “I hear you work for the Catholic Church” and I said “I do.” And I was thinking “Oh, here it comes.” And he said, “Do you believe in it?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Really, you believe all of it?” Well, it is kind of hard to know exactly what he meant by “all of it” – that’s kind of loaded. So I said, “Yes. I think the Church has the best answers to the most important questions.” That is a line I found in the book *How Do You Spell God* because it is a great answer.



Missionary Consciousness: Evangelised to Evangeliser

Catholics who see themselves as missionary realise that the Mass sends us out. We GO OUT to be the face of Christ and to encounter the face of Christ in the other. Pope Francis says it best in *Evangelii Gaudium* and linking it to what it means to “go out.” “The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelising community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others” (EG 24).

In the U.S., I call we Catholics, the ‘Secret Service of Missionary Disciples’ – we are present but don’t talk. We are present but don’t want to be seen! We are called disciples because we are co-responsible for the mission of the Church, we are the evangelisers in our neighborhoods in places where priests are not typically present in the course of the day – at the breakfast table, at break for tea at the office, at the neighborhood barbeque. As a Church, we are bishops, priests, consecrated men and women and laity, co-responsible for the mission. *Heralds of Hope* is one way that Pope Benedict XVI described Christians. It seems a worthy mission for our day. We know people who are desperate to hope in something real and lasting. When he came to visit Washington, we had banners all around the university neighbourhood that said “People with Hope Live Differently.” We believed that captured the Gospel message that Pope Benedict wanted to share with the U.S.

Pope Francis highlights the personal dimension our missionary nature: “The new evangelisation calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptised. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelisation; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not



need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter

with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 120).

Assessment of Quality of Welcome: Encounter

Evangelisation begins with welcoming. How well does your parish welcome? Who are the people who shop with you in the grocery store closest to the parish? Do the people in the grocery store look like the people in the pew?

If we are missionary disciples, if our parishes are embedded in life of neighbourhood, our neighbours should be in our pews. If one group does not look like the other, we need to ask ‘why not’?

- Ministry not meeting people’s needs?
- People don’t know parish is there?
- Our neighbourhood is changing and our parish is not . . .

Now, think about coming to your parish for the first time and walking through the front door, just like guests do! If I came to your parish on Sunday, brand new, what would I see? As a newcomer, would I see a sign of welcome? Would I meet people who are welcoming seemingly on the look-out, for visitors? Would I see



helpful information for a newcomer?

I was visiting a parish in our Archdiocese near the time for registration for Religious Education classes. One church had a poster that said “Deadline is near, you must do the following or your child will not have a place in class.” At the other parish, I saw a sign that said “Welcome! We are looking forward to learning with your child.”

Taking a step back even further, before people come to the parish, where do they learn about the parish in the neighbourhood, beyond the parking lot of the parish? Is there some presence or announcement of the parish where people gather in the community? Do you find flyers at coffee shop, announcements about parish events on the neighbourhood list serve group? Does your parish take a table or booth at a community fair or festival?

These questions help us think about the caliber of our missionary consciousness and outreach. In Washington, we have developed a tool to help parishes look at this move from maintenance to mission in their own context, where the vitality present in the parish, making it strong is and where is it time to renew a particular aspect of parish life so as to be more missionary.

Assessing a Parish’s Evangelising Capacity: Indicators of Vitality

The Indicators of Vitality is an assessment that asks twelve simple questions that parishioners can ask that point to the vitality of the core areas of parish life. We have found it helpful to show two important things. Evangelisation is not the work of a single committee, or just the pastor and pastoral staff, it is the mission of every ministry; every ministry should be an encounter with the Lord or it is not ministry. I was asked to give a presentation at a parish that has a really vibrant social ministry program but they wanted to reflect on what they offer that the Red Cross does not. Lots of agencies do good social service work but the Church does it with the face of Christ – that needs to be experienced by those we serve.

While the complete assessment can be found at <http://adw.org/iov> I share here a sample question from each of the five areas of parish life as an example of the simplicity and missionary orientation of the assessment:

- Worship: Do the times of the weekend liturgy best meet typical schedules of the people who live within the parish boundaries?
- Education: Is there something for all ages; variety of experiences; at times for which can take advantage?
- Service: Is the parish meeting the needs of those most vulnerable in our community?
- Community: What regular events build a sense of fellowship and communion?
- Stewardship/Administration: Does the parish have the best match of resources to ministries?

In parishes who have completed the assessment some examples of changes that they made are adding a Sunday evening Mass as that time better met the needs of its parishioners. In another parish a men’s ministry was planned for 5:30am on Saturday morning as that was a time for many men that was free of family or work responsibilities. In a wealthy suburban parish, when exploring who were the most vulnerable in the community, they found a need to start an outreach to families caught in the cycle of domestic violence.

Conclusion

Moving a parish from maintenance to mission is not a short-term goal or a focus from today to PROCLAIM 2018. Theologians say about the Second Vatican Council that it takes 100 years for the seeds planted at a Council to take bear fruit. So, the vision of the Second Vatican Council is at middle-age! To paraphrase Pope Paul VI, he said that that the objective of the Second Vatican Council could be summed up in one



statement: *to make the Church of the 20th Century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the 20th Century.* And I say; now it is our turn to step up and claim our co-responsibility in making the Church of the 21st Century better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the 21st Century. I believe our parishes who live closest to the people are the place that this will happen. Pope Francis says this “The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelises, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 28).

References:

Thomas A. Baima, ed., *What is a Parish: Canonical, Pastoral and Theological Perspectives* (Chicago, Hillenbrend Book, 2011)

Pope Benedict XI, “Address to the Convention of the Diocese of Rome” (May 2009)

Timothy Byerley, *The Great Commission* (Paulist Press, 2008)

James A. Coriden, *The Parish in Catholic Tradition, History, Theology and Canon Law* (Paulist Press, 1997)

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

St John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*,

Donald Wuerl, *New Evangelisation* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013)



Reflection Questions

1. “The primary mission of the parish ... is to be the spiritual home of those who have been baptised and have become members of the family of God.” What does a spiritual home look like in practice? Does your parish feel like a welcoming family? What might deeper belonging look and feel like?

2. Dr Timoney offers two variant meanings for *paroika*, the Greek origin of the word ‘parish’. How are both of these meanings applicable to our understanding of parish today?

3. How would you respond to Dr Timoney’s question: “What do our parishes need to be doing if they truly are embedded in the lives of our neighbourhood?”

4. Dr Timoney states: “The parish serves everyone, Catholic and otherwise, who lives and works within the boundaries; this is what an embedded parish looks like.” What might your parish do to engage and invite the wider community into its life and service? What opportunities do you see for wider engagement?

5. “Parishes are the place where one finds Jesus.” Do you regard Jesus as at the centre of your parish? How is this reflected in your parish life, programs and activities?

6. Dr Timoney relates an image of the parish as a fountain. What does this mean and does this image describe your parish’s relationship to the wider world? Why or why not?

7. Dr Timoney asserts that our missionary mandate is to “embed the Risen Christ into the life of our communities ... to be the eyes, hands, feet, and mouth of Jesus at home, on the job, and in the workplace.” How might your parish take up this challenge?

8. Dr Timoney coins the phrase ‘the Secret Service of Missionary Disciples’ to describe how many Catholics shy away from proclaiming their faith. Do you think this describes members of your own parish community? What do you consider to be the remedy for a reluctance to embrace a greater missionary orientation?

9. “Evangelisation begins with welcoming. How well does your parish welcome?” What practical strategies does your parish have in place or could put in place to grow a sense of welcome to newcomers as well as existing parishioners?

10. Dr Timoney closes by referencing an “Indicators of Vitality” assessment tool used by the Archdiocese of Washington. See <http://adw.org/iov> for the full instrument. How might your parish engage such a tool?

PROCLAIM
2016



On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes



**THE EVANGELISING PARISH
IN THE AUSTRALIAN CHURCH:
STRATEGIES FOR PROPHETIC WITNESS**

Keynote Address by Mr Daniel Ang

Director, Office for Evangelisation, Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay



Office for
Evangelisation
CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY



Introduction

On the 24 November, 1999, on a drizzly Wednesday evening, I was baptised and confirmed in a parish in the north-western suburbs of Sydney. Heralding from a family of Buddhist and Taoist heritage, I entered the Church at the age of twenty, gathered with a priest, sponsor, fellow catechumens and a mixed group of close friends, mostly of no religious background. A small but powerful group had accompanied me through the process of initiation and I was fully conscious and grateful for the fact that in God and this community I had been granted something which I would spend the rest of my life learning to be faithful to, learning to enter into, learning to trust.

If a history of that parish were to be taken, that date in November would not have stood out for any special recognition. I am sure it was for the most part an ordinary and customary year. However, beneath the everyday rhythm of this local parish it was for me a time of great consequence, of vital, spiritual breakthrough into the life of God to discover Christ as the total meaning of my life.

I share this to affirm that amidst the unfussy pews of the parishes we know and love the grace of Christ continues to move and mould hearts to his own. The local parish, even in its ordinariness, remains a privileged location of God's transforming grace in the world.

However, as we take a wider view of the Australian parish we must admit that the possibility of personal spiritual breakthrough is not the same thing as the frequency of its happening.

This would be suggested by the challenges faced by our communities today, well known and rehearsed – declining weekly Mass attendance, now at a “critical moment” and leaning toward single digits across the nation; an ageing profile; the critical and chastening scrutiny of a Royal Commission; low morale in some quarters; low religious literacy among some of those we encounter; the pain of structural change and amalgamations directing energies inwards; and the by-product of diocesan decline, increasing managerialism within the culture of the Church that pulls towards the bureaucratisation of pastoral care.²

The Church in Australia can no longer rely on a ‘conveyor belt’ which was presumed to take Catholics from the cradle to the grave in faith, the assumption that a Catholic baptism and the mere fact of going to a Catholic school, for example, would secure a lifetime of committed discipleship. Historical circumstance and cultural momentum will no longer carry the Australian parish.

A new imagination is called forth and is demanded by the mission we have received, to make disciples and apostles of the baptised and the unbaptised, to be a leaven in the world as the sign and reality of the new freedom given in Jesus Christ. The flourishing of personal discipleship and apostolic outreach must become the motivating norm for our Church. For this to become a reality we are called to become more open and responsive to what God passionately desires to do through our parishes.

The Problematic

Reflecting on the Australian Church, I would concur that the central challenge for parish life is this: we are caught between a call and desire for renewal and the weight of our own Church culture towards maintaining the status quo. In this moment which cries out for new apostolic zeal, we can feel bound by layers of expectation that demand the continuation of the old even while new forms of parish life and mission long for expression.³

How do we address the culture of a local parish that may desire change but does not want to change, that desires to grow, be joyful and bear new fruit but contains within it organisational antibodies that tend to kill anything that is new? How do we move our communities towards radical, fervent outreach when a ‘convoy routine’ permits spiritual progress or cultural change only at the speed of the slowest ship? As intimated

² Robert Dixon, Stephen Reid and Marilyn Chee, *Mass Attendance in Australia: A Critical Moment. A Report Based on the National Count of Attendance, the National Church Life Survey and the Australian Census* (Melbourne: ACBC Pastoral Research Office, 2013), 8.

³ Fr James Mallon, *Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2014), 53.



by Pope Francis, the insistence that “we have always done it this way” – less often said than expressed in passive resistance – reveals a complacency at odds with the urgency of disciple-making which has been tasked to this generation.⁴

What are the levers or the strategies of prophetic witness that can lead us into that future which God invites, that can embolden us to ‘step into’ this future that has not yet fully arrived? The future of the Australian parish and its redemptive mission in the world are tied up with the preparedness of our local communities to take a conscious step towards their own conversion.

The Need of Vision

Such a cultural shift within our parishes demands that we reclaim the ‘why’ of our existence as local communities of faith. While talk of parish evangelisation often leaps to the ‘what’ – to programs, tools and techniques, reflective perhaps of our hardy Australian pragmatism – the ‘why’ or rationale of our parishes cannot be taken for granted.



On the ground, we appreciate the significance of the ‘why’ for our people when they receive the sacraments, those of initiation and besides. We earnestly want their ‘why’ to be Jesus, not merely school enrolment or unthinking convention. We understand the difference this ‘why’ makes to their likely future participation in the life of faith and the Church. We know that this ‘why’ distinguishes the disciple from the ‘what’ of the consumer who arrives asking ‘what do I get here’ rather than ‘who am I called to be here’. If we seek to grow our parishes for mission, we need to clarify and communicate the ‘why’ of our total parish life and this is called vision.

Fundamentally we are called to be a Church of the Great Commission. This is our vision, the ‘northern star’ guiding our resolve. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). As it has been pointed out, in our Catholic Church we have certainly learnt to “go” and can claim a presence at all corners of the earth. We “baptise” and confirm relentlessly. We “teach” and catechise great numbers in our schools and sacramental programs. However, our ability as Church to “make disciples” remains in question, as raised by the pastoral realities for the Australian Church we have explored.⁵ A local parish vision that reclaims the Great Commission as our primary calling clarifies the purpose of our community and makes it possible for others to become a part of that purpose.

It is worth noting that a parish vision for the making of disciples and of ongoing apostolic support for the laity can arise from our hopes as well as our laments. Our restlessness and frustrations too can be helpful signs pointing us beyond what we have in hand, acting as a mirror image of our deepest desires for our community. When a bold vision of spiritual vitality is discerned it supplies the energy and constant challenge to the ethos and practices of a parish as it journeys toward that goal.

Within our Catholic culture, some voices express resistance to the need of an articulate vision for our parishes and dioceses on the basis that this is a bureaucratic exercise, more at home in the *Business Review Weekly* than in our Church. Others oppose talk of setting a ‘vision’ for our communities on the basis that it second-guesses the providence of God whose Spirit indeed leads where it will.

As a community of faith we certainly do not have a road map or certainty for our future, a future that belongs to God. However, we do have a story of the kind of people, the kind of disciples, and the kind of communities we want to be as we make our journey towards that unknown future.

When we communicate a vision of the parish, how we seek to respond to God in *this* context, in *this* time, in *this* local community, when we can articulate a vision of the kinds of spiritual growth we are seeking to

⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 33.

⁵ Mallon, *Divine Renovation*, 19-20.



raise up in our people, this passionate purpose becomes the heartbeat or pulse of a parish. Conveniently, and not incidentally, a renewed vision provides the case for change.

The alternative to a parish communicating vision is a community standing in the silence of an unquestioned routine. The lifeblood of the parish might occasionally receive a boost or uptick through the initiative of individuals or the occasional event but without a sustained vision to consistently stimulate a higher life, the pulse of the parish inevitably slows and returns to maintenance, to the pace of survival rather than growth.

While no substitute for the parish, it must be acknowledged that the ecclesial movements in their charisms and narratives of holiness have shown us the power of a story to tell, as do the saints, those 'bright patterns of holiness' who image or supply a vision for the divine touching human lives.

I would like to suggest that in establishing its vision and promoting cultural change, a parish can gain much from imagining or visualising itself *ten times better* rather than only ten per cent better. This is because a small goal will tend to lead us to incremental changes that are based upon the existing rhythm, resources, programs and assumptions of the parish, leading to only slow or grinding progress.⁶ Aiming for the sky, however, forces us to question our community assumptions and the fruit of our present culture, sheds bold and even new light on the taken-for-granted details of the everyday. Jesus' vision of the Kingdom was so grand that it cast fresh light on who could eat at table. It was so immense that it gave meaning to tiny seeds. It was so extravagant it could sustain meaning in a Gethsemane night, even on the Cross.

It is no accident that the missionary determination of Pope Francis in *The Joy of the Gospel* begins with a grand dream, by looking out, not looking down.⁷ In any case, if we do not cast a vision for our parishes, the question will inevitably rise from the pews, 'Are we going anywhere?'

It is worth noting that when a parish makes a commitment to a clear vision of personal discipleship and spiritual community, presenting this before its people, other good things begin to flow. With a vision pointing the parish beyond its own concerns and circumstance, the parish can begin to move from a culture that engages people to build up the Church to become *a Church that builds up people*. When we routinely engage people to build up the Church, the focus inevitably falls on maintenance and functionalism. A parish calls people forward to maintain its own life, its ministries, functions and tasks for which there is never enough human labour. We engage people, in other words, to 'fill the gaps' and out of a mindset of deficiency, with the best of our energy, dedication and resources flowing into the upkeep of our established groups, ministries and schedules. However, our parishes are not called to be factories, to keep the cogs turning over at any cost.

We cannot confuse our means with our end which is the abundant spiritual life of our people. As it has been said, 'if you build the Church, you rarely get disciples. If you make disciples, you always get the Church.' Parishes begin to change their culture towards mission when all forms of its preaching shift from a focus on what it wants *from* people to what it wants *for* them.

When a community understands itself as existing not for its own preservation but for the spiritual and personal change of its members and non-members, then all that the parish undertakes, its programs, groups, structures, and finance, will be seen and considered in the light of its mission to make disciples. We will begin to measure our life not by the standards of conservation – the managing of internal concerns, the parish patrimony, nest egg or tranquillity – but by the standards of our outwards mission. We will begin to gauge our life not only by our seating capacity but also by our sending capacity, and the extent of the spiritual fruit and personal change we nurture into life.



⁶ The fatalistic expression "that won't work" commonly emerges from a perspective that measures new ideas by the life that we currently know.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 27.



The Need of Parish Strategy

In reflecting on the Church's living tradition and the experience and best practices of growing Catholic communities, I would like to suggest four elements as being integral to the renewal of parish culture toward deeper discipleship and wider evangelisation.

In sharing these suggestions, I am mindful that when a community or group has a vision but no strategy to achieve it, it will tend to simply add on new programs and activities to an already busy routine hoping this will affect a difference. Yet we know, even implicitly, that addition is not synonymous with increase, that 'more' is not always tantamount to 'better'.

Indeed, we are learning on a national, diocesan and parish level that a "spaghetti" approach to Church life, over-programmed with a splattering of disconnected activity, tends to encourage silos rather than unity or strength of mission. This is because events, programs and groups compete for space on the common calendar, rivalling one another for the same pool of finite resources, increasingly busy people and limited attention. If we become content with the unrolling of copious activity, without heed of the fruit these initiatives bear or otherwise, we in fact succumb to the "spiritual worldliness", or busyness for its own sake, of which Pope Francis warns.⁸

So, to four principles drawn from growing and evangelising communities that can take us beyond the comfort of routine and the opposite temptation of mere addition.

Foundations of an Evangelising Parish

1. Proclaiming Christ

First of all, at the heart of evangelising communities is the proclamation of the Good News, specifically the kerygma which is the basic truths of our Christian faith.

This word kerygma, or *keryssein* in Greek, may not be very familiar to us but it in fact appears in the New Testament some nine times, and refers to the very heart of the Gospel, the core message of the Christian faith that all believers are called to believe and proclaim.

The words of Pope Paul VI still challenge us today, "There is no true evangelisation if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed".⁹ This is the kerygma. It is explicit and focused entirely on the person and saving message of Jesus Christ.

We note that this kerygma stands apart from the catechesis or instruction in the fuller doctrinal and moral teaching (*didache*) that the Church notes is to take place *after* someone has accepted the initial kerygma and been baptised. We can in fact school people in our parishes, in the RCIA for instance, about the Church, various themes of theology, the intricacies and rubrics of liturgy and so on but with slight reflection on the life and person of Jesus whom our people are first called to encounter, though our preaching, priorities and witness. The heart of our Gospel is Jesus, what he has done, and continues to bring about for us and within us.

As Pope Francis makes clear,

. . . we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the centre of all evangelising activity and all efforts at Church renewal. This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.¹⁰

⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 93-97.

⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 22.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 164.



There is no sense that we ever graduate from hearing this Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the proclamation for which our Church exists and that calls to be preached in our liturgies, parent and children's formation, in our youth ministries and initiatives of social outreach, in the development of our parish teams and staff, our talk of parish finance, structural change and carparks. We are constantly challenged to re-centre our parishes, our total life, on this central proclamation for it is the sole source of discipleship and evangelisation. There is no other.

The heart of evangelisation is to announce who Jesus is, the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the man who is God, who died for our sins and was raised on the third day. It is to announce the Good News of the Risen Christ who is with us even now and opens up for us the way to life without end. Evangelising parishes proclaim Jesus' ascension, his seating at the right hand of the Father as King, and his sending forth of the Holy Spirit. It is this Spirit which reveals Christ and even enables us to say 'Jesus is Lord' and it is this Spirit who empowers the Church, who empowers us, to be faithful to Christ's mission in our own lives and in this moment of the world's history. Finally, this Good News of Christ calls us to conversion, to repent and believe in this Gospel, calling for a change of life in the light of what God has done and is doing in Jesus Christ whose life we share by baptism, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, in communion with his mystical body, the Eucharist, and by our communion with His ecclesial body, the Church. In prioritising this proclamation, we seek to build up a culture in which Jesus is not swept into our parish story intermittently but our parishes and lives are swept into his.

As a former media buyer, I am conscious that companies spend millions after millions of dollars each year, even each week, to get people into their shop. It is humbling, then, to recognise that each year thousands upon thousands of people come into our 'shop', walk through the front doors of our parishes, without always knowing why they are there or their stance towards the saving Gospel or proclamation which is the lifeblood of our communities.

And yet, whether entering the parish via the door of our sacramental programs or school enrolment, walking through our doors on account of baptisms, marriages or funerals, or for the sake of their children, these persons fully expect to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed by our parishes whether they ultimately accept that saving message or otherwise.

It is essential to our future that our truth is proclaimed with courage and with faith, not as something but as someone to whom we owe our life and devotion, someone who calls not to be a part of our life but our very existence and the total shape of our living.

2. Growing Personal Discipleship

However, the bold proclamation of Jesus' name, life, promises, Kingdom and mystery, in itself is not sufficient for the growth of a missionary culture in our parishes. As a second foundation, evangelising parishes cultivate personal discipleship, create room and opportunity for a personal response to the Good News proclaimed. The call to be a disciple is a gift but it also involves a choice and personal decision that cannot be delegated to any other.

In its personal dimension, the heart of all evangelisation could be described as one person telling another person how the encounter with Jesus Christ has changed their life, one beggar telling another beggar how he found bread. This is indeed the living tradition of our Church, 'hands clasping hands stretching back in time until they hold the hand of Jesus who holds the hand of God'.¹¹ Personal witness, testimony and exchange are at the heart of personal and spiritual change. It is our long and ancient experience as Church that programs do not make disciples; *disciples* make disciples.

In speaking of personal change, it is a sober reality that 60% of those who attend Mass in Australia reported only some or no spiritual growth through their experience of parish life.¹² It is clear that we cannot

¹¹ John Shea, *An Experience Named Spirit* as cited in Robert A. Ludwig, *Reconstructing Catholicism: For a New Generation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 61.

¹² NCLS Research, *Denominational Church Life Profile: The Catholic Church in Australia. A Report from the 2011 National Church Life Survey* (Strathfield: NCLS Research, 2013), 10.



adopt a mindset that assumes the sacraments, or the school RE program for that matter, will simply ‘take care of it’. While this emphasis on personal faith may seem obvious, it underlines the fact that we cannot assume that disciples just happen because we have a parish building and people show up.

An effective process of evangelisation in our communities will need to recognise the various stages of personal growth through which people journey on their way to the Gospel. A parish of personal, realised faith is something different than the motions of a crowd that produces ‘conventional sounds when stimulated by the appropriate noises’.¹³ While the conversion of our people always remains the work of the Holy Spirit, we can help or hinder that process depending on how we walk with people.

The people in our pews and those besides are at varying levels of faith and commitment. When we honestly recognise where our people are in the story of discipleship, we can begin to engage them in ways that are fitting to their disposition – building bridges of trust with those that do not yet have a basic positive association with Christ, the Church or ourselves as Christians; for the curious, asking questions to encourage their initial desire to know more and sharing with them our own story of faith as it has become central to our life; for those exhibiting spiritual openness, expressing our willingness to pray for them and asking questions to validate their openness though they may not yet be actively seeking to know God.¹⁴

The essence of evangelisation is to engage with others on the road to Emmaus as they ask their questions, leading them to an encounter with Christ who is, in fact, already present to them, already active in their lives awaiting the ‘yes’ of a spiritual awakening, an assent of faith.

Bringing together these first principles of evangelising communities, we hear St John Paul II affirm, “Faith is born of preaching and every ecclesial community draws its origin and life from the personal response from every believer to that preaching”.¹⁵ It is both the preaching of the kerygma and personal conversion that sustains and grows a missionary culture.

Parishes do not grow when their people do not, and the call to spiritual growth challenges ourselves for each of us shapes the Church and its mission by our personal participation in it. The extent to which we grow in faith and holiness will be the extent to which the Church grows in faithfulness and holiness. As we have learned from painful history, it is entirely possible for parish leaders to ostensibly live a life *for* Christ without living a life *in* Christ. Personal conversion calls for change within us as much as others in the community of faith.

3. Discipleship in the Midst of the Church

Personal discipleship also calls for the nourishment of an ecclesial community of faith. Evangelising parishes create disciples in the midst of the Church.

We know that discipleship is vulnerable without the ongoing, living support from other Catholic disciples. Significantly, a parish sustains personal faith not only through a shared life, mutual witness and spiritual support but by opening individual lives to more possibilities for the life of faith, vocation and holiness than we might otherwise recognise, to a vision that discipleship is possible even in *this* way.

In the same way as some first European settlers arrived in Australia assuming they were, if you like, dragging land and civilisation behind them, we can be tempted to consider our increasing diversity as Australian parishes as something which is being added ‘from the outside’ rather than a theological fact and principle of our life from its earliest beginnings at Pentecost. The challenge and companionship of fellow Christians, diverse in cultural expression of faith and piety, liberates and enables a faith richer and deeper than what we could gain on our own.

How might our parishes better integrate and express difference? Research and experience tells us that at

¹³ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1961), 43.

¹⁴ A helpful schema of various stages or ‘thresholds’ of discipleship is provided in Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 125-184.

¹⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Redemptoris Missio* 44.



the heart of all evangelising and growing communities are small groups as a vital instrument of ecclesial support and differentiated unity. I am not aware of any growing Christian community that does not have an economy of small groups in place to deepen at the same time its members' experience of Jesus and the Church as encountered in fellow Christians.

The experience of liturgy alone can render it difficult for persons to feel instantly at home or connect with others intimately in the context of faith. Most of us have come to the heart of the Church through a small group of some description, whether this was a youth group, a prayer group, a parent or family group.

The introduction of small groups within our parishes and an accompanying culture of invitation, one that communicates in effect that 'we are incomplete without you', will enable people to be brought into and nurtured by a supportive network of disciples.

While speaking intimately with one another about our lived experience and friendship with Jesus can be counter-cultural for many Catholics, I am heartened by the fact that no one knew they needed an iPhone until Steve Jobs invented one. We are similarly challenged to offer our people the small group of discipleship and learning that they never knew they needed, an experience of personal relationship with Jesus and his Gospel in the midst of others.

While our vision needs to be as large as the Kingdom, our implementation of that vision needs to begin small. With encouragement for us, it is worth noting that when large evangelical and Pentecostal communities are asked what they seek for their future it is to establish smaller, stable communities in the midst of a local neighbourhood, offering a consistency and intimacy of worship and local service in personal connection with the wider community. In other words, what many megachurches are seeking is a parish.

We have already in our Church the scale of community to foster powerful spiritual relationships with one another, by small groups and other means. It is not a matter of structure but our capacity for interrelationship and mutual trust in faith, our ability to grow together and also our capacity for collegiality.¹⁶

It may be news to some that a national ecclesial event, a Plenary Council, has been proposed by the bishops of Australia for 2020, a council to embrace not only the faith of the bishops but to take up the faith of the Australian Church, the collective vision, gifts and charisms for our common future. To be collegial is to be receptive of the faith with which Christ has *already* endowed the Church. As Australian Catholics we ought to place great hope in our collective ability to discern a future and are challenged not only to have faith in God but in our capacity to *respond* to God as his people.

To anchor this potential for collegiality, shared discernment and decision-making in our parishes, our capacity for co-responsibility for mission begins within the local parish team and the parish pastoral council as the most immediate opportunities for living the theology we profess.

The risk of not attending to the faith of the faithful as expressed in the local parish, as much as a national plenary council, is no less than turning away possibilities, the manifold charisms and vocations of lay men and women, which God continually offers to us. An Australian parish, and an Australian Church for that matter, that is not discerning God's call cannot hope to grow because it cannot see what God has already given and deeply invited.

4. Missionary Orientation

Finally, we recognise that the proclamation of the Gospel, the call to personal discipleship and the life of the Christian community are not for their own sake but for the sake of the world. All that has gone before must bear fruit in our connection with others beyond our communities of faith, beyond the boundaries of the parish.

¹⁶ The challenge of collegiality for our Church recalls the remarks of the late Ukrainian Catholic Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk who dismissed Roman synods as nothing more than "international study days".



In his own way I think Pope Francis has reminded us time and again, with a certain cheek, that the parish is not an organised way to avoid the issues of the world. The parish is not a spiritual refuge or a hotel for the spiritually comfortable. Rather it is a hospital or wellspring open to all who bear wounds or thirst, who await a personal answer for their hope on the road of humanity.

A premier ecclesialogist in the English-speaking world, Joseph Komonchak, reminds us:

To enter the Church is not to leave the world, but to be in the world *differently*, so that the world itself is different because there are individuals and communities living their lives because of, in, and for the sake of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

To be a community of disciples is not to stand apart from the world or hover above it but to be *within* the space of the world *differently*. To be a Catholic parish, to be a community of believers, is not to withdraw into a ghetto of like-minded individuals but to speak, witness and inhabit *this* world, a world which is very much in our hands, with a perspective and a commitment to a person whom we believe illuminates its depths and heights.

I believe parishes will move to a missionary footing when they believe in their heart of hearts that there is a harvest, that Christ is preparing people for us to reach, and that we have been anointed by our baptism to speak, live and act by God's Word in our world.

A missionary parish will prepare people for this assignment, preaching and teaching that the Christian life it is not about choosing between Christ and the world, as if they were utterly opposed. Rather, as the twentieth century spiritual master Thomas Merton observes, Christian life is about choosing Christ by choosing the world as it really is in Him.¹⁸ God's mission calls us to a constant orientation beyond ourselves, so that the world can witness the spirit of Christ in action, can see and come to believe.

Summary

So four lenses by which to review or renew our evangelising mission as parishes:

- o proclaim the name, teaching, promises, Kingdom, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God (the 'kerygma')
- o call forth a personal response to this Good News
- o foster discipleship in the midst of the Church
- o and send these disciples into the world in constant missionary outreach

I believe a parish requires all four elements without exemption, so as not to:

- proclaim the Gospel without personal conversion (we can preach the Gospel and be entirely orthodox, proclaim a sound understanding of the faith, but as Pope Benedict XVI be merely 'proper' but ultimately loveless, bearing little actual fruit in the lives of our people);
- we can experience personal conversion but minimise or castoff the influence of the Church (e.g. an erroneous sense that it would feel more like real worship if it was 'me' praying alone, or a sense that the parish community is something I could rather live without; a 'private' Christianity withdrawn from the varieties of discipleship that God offers us in others);
- we can develop an ecclesial life and participate in the Church's public life but without personal conversion and a living relationship with Jesus (merely 'attending Mass' out of custom or working within the Church or school without an attachment to the Gospel, working only for Christ but not working with him);

¹⁷ Joseph A. Komonchak, "Identity and Mission in Catholic Universities", 12. Available here: <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/hubbard-lecture.pdf>. Accessed 21 August 2016.

¹⁸ Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 153.



- or we can proclaim the Gospel, foster personal conversion and a commitment to the Church without any implication for the wider world, displaying a forgetfulness of the fact that we are 'sent' as missionary disciples by our baptism to share the life of Christ we ourselves have received.

When our communities grow in these foundations, a culture of discipleship and evangelisation begins to thrive.

Indeed, it can be seen that these foundations encourage and direct our efforts in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, in which the tenderness and compassion of God calls for announcement. An evangelising community proclaims the mercy of God whose face is Jesus Christ, nurtures our people to know themselves as personally forgiven by God and brought into the freedom of a new life, offers the experience of forgiveness and compassion within the life of the Church, sacramentally and in the companionship of fellow Christians; and equips and emboldens the forgiven to 'go out' to share mercy with others who too await someone to pour oil on their wounds, who await the Good News given in Jesus Christ, who is the promise and presence of God's mercy.

Conclusion

To conclude, we cannot change that of which we are not aware. We must name and face head on the present challenges for our culture as Australian parishes, parishes that I believe desire to be missionary and in their heart of hearts wish to receive the grace of God who still desires much for our parish life.

However, receiving this grace entails movement on our part, a shift from where we stand and a constant reaching out beyond the complacency of routine or a simplistic 'silver bullet' mentality that holds only one way, one program or technique as the key to growth. We are called to cultural change, to change together and personally which is the perennial challenge of our mission.

To build a preaching, discipling, gathering and missioning Church calls for a multidimensional approach filled with bold vision, personal faith, mutual support, and the resolve to be our deepest selves in Christ for the sake of the world.

Ultimately, it means responding with hope and trust in what God can do for us, with us and through us, even on a drizzly Wednesday night in the well-worn pews of the parishes we know and love.



Reflection Questions

1. “The flourishing of personal discipleship and apostolic outreach must become the motivating norm for our Church.” Is this growth of discipleship and evangelisation the motivating norm for your parish community? How would you describe your parish’s “motivating norm” and what might this suggest for parish planning?

2. Daniel states “we are caught between a call and desire for renewal and the weight of our own Church culture towards maintaining the status quo” before playfully suggesting that many parishes have “organisational antibodies that tend to kill anything that is new.” What are the challenges your community experiences in introducing change? How does your parish balance tradition and stability with creativity and newness? What opportunities for new apostolic zeal can you discern within your parish, and how might you play a part in this renewal?

3. Daniel speaks of the importance of appreciating the ‘why’ for our people. The ‘why’ distinguishes the disciple from the ‘what’ of the consumer. What are the motivations that lead people to engage with your parish? Is it to encounter Jesus? What difference does their ‘why’ have for their future participation in the life of the parish?

4. How does your parish carry out the Great Commission given to us by Jesus? Name concrete examples and perhaps also share suggestions as to how this mission might be lived more fully in your community?

5. Does your parish have a vision for its own life? If so, how is it shared and how are parishioners seeking to live that vision within and beyond the community.

6. If you were charged to produce a parish vision, what would you write, and how would you go about realising or implementing that vision? What priorities, gifts and abilities can you discern amongst your community to bring your vision to life?

8. Is yours a parish that tends to engage people to build up the Church, or a parish that builds up people? In what ways might the Church build up people, i.e. communicate what we want for them not simply from them? How might we better assist our people to arrive at their calling as disciples?

9. In what ways does your parish proclaim Christ, call forth a personal response to the Good News, foster discipleship in the midst of the Church, and send disciples into the world in constant missionary outreach? Which of these four tasks does your parish do well? Which element could be strengthened?

10. What has most challenged and inspired you in Daniel’s presentation? What will you do with this inspiration?

PROCLAIM
2016



On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes



**OASES OF MERCY:
PARISHES WHICH RADIATE CHRIST**

Keynote Address by
Most Reverend Nicholas Hudson
Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster



Office for
Evangelisation
CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY



Introduction: Parishes as Oases of Mercy

There are some parishes which really are oases of mercy. I can think of one in Rome. It's called *Sant'Egidio*. It was a normal parish for centuries until, in the 1980s, some of the young professionals who worshipped there began to meet each day for prayer after work. After a while, they felt they should be helping the poor whom they passed on their way to church.

They began to feed them with a soup kitchen which then developed into a night shelter. They attracted a large number of Eritreans whose real need they realised was help with literacy; so they organised themselves to educate them as well as providing them food and shelter. Meanwhile, the parishioners offered to serve food to countless homeless people. On Christmas Day, the church is transformed, after Mass, into a great dining room. And not just on Christmas Day. I had supper with a young woman who works full-time as a hospital secretary but is allowed by her boss to take a two-hour lunch-break one day each week to serve in the soup-kitchen. "How many people came there today?" I asked her. She reflected; and then said, "Well, a good two hundred, I'd say." You can imagine it's one of Pope Francis's favourite places. Because it's an oasis of mercy.

I use the phrase deliberately, oasis of mercy – because it's his. He used it in the Letter which he wrote for the Jubilee of Mercy and which he called *The Face of Mercy*. There he said, "Wherever there are Christians everyone should find an oasis of mercy... The Church is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy" (25). As soon as I heard it, it reminded me of something which St John XXIII had also said about parishes: he said a parish should be like a village fountain to which all have recourse in their thirst. A parish should be like a village fountain to which all have recourse in their thirst. Pope Francis gets even closer to this vision when he says, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, that he hopes a parish will be "a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey"; "a community with an endless desire to show mercy" (28)

If Francis gave us the image *Oases of Mercy*, it was Blessed John Henry Newman who inspired the idea of *Radiating Christ*. It comes from a poem of his, *Radiating Christ*, which we shall hear shortly. Newman was one of greatest intellects of 19th century England. He made the journey from Anglican ministry to becoming a Catholic – first a Catholic layman, priest and eventually Cardinal. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI beatified him when he visited England in 2010. *Radiating Christ* I find so striking that I believe it bears hearing in full:

Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go.

Flood my soul with Your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of Yours.

Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus!

Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine, so to shine as to be a light to others; the light, O Jesus, will be all from You; none of it will be mine: it will be You shining on others through me.

Let me thus praise You in the way You love best: by shining on those around me.

Let me preach You without preaching, not by words, but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You. Amen.

These words are powerful in themselves. I think they derive their force from the fact that they're a prayer. The fact that Newman offers them in worship to the Lord emphasises his belief that it's only with the Lord's help that we can begin to communicate Christ to others.



1. Parishes Radiating Christ

The reason I start in this way is that I am convinced that the way to proclaim Christ in 21st century England and Australia is to make of our parishes oases of mercy which radiate Christ. Pope Francis is clear as well that we are about radiating Christ. Because the face of God is Mercy; and Christ is that face. When he calls us to be missionary disciples, he means to be “missionaries of mercy”. In order for parishes to be truly missionary, he believes they need to rethink their approach: rethink the goals, structures, style and methods they employ to be more missionary. I think the rich young man of Matthew’s Gospel can help us here, with his question, “What more must I do?”

This is the question we’re being asked to consider by Pope Francis in each and every parish: “What more must I do?” Already, Pope St John Paul had urged us to put out into the deep at the start of the new millennium. And I’m sure you responded with great generosity in your dioceses and parishes.

Then Pope Francis came calling us to embark on another new chapter of evangelisation. The way he expresses is that he asks each particular church to undertake “a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform” (EG 30). He makes clear in the opening sentences of *Evangelii Gaudium* that this is about creating “new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come” (EG 1). To anyone who is tempted to say, “But we’ve always done it this way” (EG 33), he begs them to think again; to put out into the deep once more.

2. Resolute Process of Discernment

This doesn’t mean parishes starting from scratch, though. In most parishes, there is already a great deal going on which is evangelising. Part of what we should be about in this “resolute process of discernment” is to celebrate what we already do; but then to ask what more the Lord may be calling us to do in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Where I come from, parishes have found it helpful to review their evangelising activity under four headings: Prayer, Caritas, Faith Formation and Marriage & Family Life. Simply to ask themselves: if, for instance, prayer is our parish’s gift, how might we deepen the parish’s prayer-life and somehow un-tap its evangelising potential? Our Masses may be good but we may have lost sight of what Pope Francis calls popular piety. By popular piety, he means popular devotions like processions and praying the rosary. We need to give deep consideration to how we meet the prayer-needs of our youth – to ask ourselves, “Do we need to invest more resources in Children’s Liturgy of the Word and Masses for Young People? Do we need to invest in Youth leaders?” Ask yourselves what you do well; and what more, in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Lord may be asking of you.

Ask yourselves the same questions with regard to what you do in the parish under the other headings of Caritas, Faith Formation and Marriage & Family Life. Taking Caritas, for example, your parish may be strong in its care for the elderly, in organising food for the hungry but may have given little energy to the inclusion of people with disabilities, to catechesis for people with learning disabilities, to access for those who are physically disabled. You may feel the time is ripe to explore the possibility of setting up a *Faith and Light* group; organising signing for deaf people at Mass; organising better disabled access. Take stock. Ask yourselves what you do well already; and what more, in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Lord may be asking of you.

To these four categories – of Prayer, Caritas, Faith Formation, and Marriage & Family Life - I would suggest adding a fifth, namely, new Evangelistic Outreach. This I add because there will always be a danger that parishes evangelize inwardly without looking outside of themselves sufficiently. Recent research in England and Wales suggests that the majority of converts to Catholicism already have a Christian background. We need to ask where we need to go to meet those who have not yet met Christianity. Some of you may have experience of *Night Fever*, which is literally about standing on the highways and byways near your church and inviting people into your church. It may be that the place to start is with a Welcoming Group to give a



deep welcome to those who do cross the threshold of the parish. Meanwhile consideration needs to be given to how the parish reaches out to those who come nowhere near the threshold.

Once you have discerned and agreed your Evangelising Initiatives for the next three years or so, decide which activity you will pursue over the course of the next eighteen months to two years in support of your parish's mission. This way you won't be overwhelmed by novelty but, at the same time, you will have a sense of where you want, as a parish, to be getting to next.

3. Forming Evangelisation Teams

This whole process of discernment presumes you have a group to lead it. We discussed the make-up of such a group in my workshop on Forming Evangelisation Teams. The discernment about Evangelisation in the parish can begin either before or after you form a Parish Evangelisation Team. But to have a Team is essential. Pope Francis is clear about this, when he says, in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory... The important thing is not to walk alone but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and pastoral discernment" (EG 33). We should remember, the Lord himself needed a team to help him carry out his mission. Like his, ours should be, ideally, about twelve: this leaves you room to retain a critical mass even if some withdraw from the group.

Prayer is essential before choosing the group; and once the group is chosen. They need all to be people for whom prayer is at the heart of their lives. The priest should most certainly be a member of the group but does not need necessarily to lead it. The team should represent the diversity of the parish – the diversity of ages, occupations, ethnicity and everything in between.

Belonging to the team should be their main parish role – not just an additional one. It doesn't mean the team members will be the evangelisers: the purpose of the team is to help the parish be mission-focused; sometimes the team is described as the "mission conscience" of the parish. Theirs it will be to discern new evangelising initiatives for the next three years or so; and to come up with strategies to resource them. For this they will need formation and clear terms of reference.

4. The Meaning of Evangelisation

This whole process of discernment to which Pope Francis calls parishes will lead them almost inevitably to ask themselves, "What exactly do we mean by evangelisation?" I would always want to stress that everyone is entitled to express it in their own way. You know, it says in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "There are as many ways of praying as there are people who pray" (CCC 2664) Well, it's the same for evangelisation.

I like to suggest that evangelisation is, at heart, about the communication of a relationship, a relationship with Christ – in word and deed and in such a way that causes people to ask, "Who is this Jesus whom you love and worship?" Evangelisation is, at heart, about the communication of a relationship, a relationship with Christ – in word and deed and in such a way that causes people to ask, "Who is this Jesus whom you love and worship?"

And this is where I think the Year of Mercy is such a gift to us. Mercy acts like a lens through which to make our evangelising endeavours all the more Christocentric. Because if we proclaim mercy we proclaim Christ. It is striking the force with which Pope Francis urges upon us both the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. He warns us they are the criteria upon which we will be judged: and urges us not to "forget the words of St John of the Cross (that) 'as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of (them)'. 'As we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love'.





5. The Corporal Works of Mercy

Just to remind ourselves what the Corporal Works are:

Feeding the hungry

Giving drink to the thirsty

Welcoming the stranger

Clothing the naked

Caring for the sick

Visiting those in prison

Burying the dead

Before we consider how we harness these to our discernment of evangelising initiatives, it's important just to note the context into which Pope Francis places them. One story more than any other seems, to me, to capture the spirit of the Corporal Works of Mercy. It's the story of the Good Samaritan. Pope Francis is keen on this story too. He urges us to recall that Jesus told that story in response to a question. It was the question of the lawyer, who dared to ask, "Who is my neighbour?" Pope Francis says Jesus is wanting us to understand that our neighbour is not just someone in a far-off land; our neighbour is more often the person we meet close at hand and whom we find to be in need.

It's no coincidence, therefore, that, when we study the literal meaning of mercy, we find it means having a heart for the poor. We learn this from Cardinal Kasper who reminds us that both St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas point out that the Latin word for mercy, "misericordia", means precisely that: having a heart (cor) for the poor (miseri): "Misericordia", mercy. Cardinal Kasper explains this more fully by going on to say that mercy is not just affective but also effective; that's to say, it seeks to relieve the plight of the poor. All of this needs to inform our discernment of how to make our parishes oases of mercy, places which have a heart for the poor.

In terms of how we harness the Works of Mercy to our discernment of Evangelising Initiatives, I suggest this can be quite straightforward. For instance, we may take for consideration the category of Marriage & Family Life. We should ask ourselves, what do we do well already in this area; then what more may the Lord be calling us to do in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*? Having done this, then to take prayerfully the Works of Mercy and ask what more we might do in the light of these – can lead to all sorts of possibilities.

6. How to Teach the New Evangelisation

The United States' Bishop Conference website gives us a taste of what we might come up with.

It has several very down-to-earth and feasible ideas, in a section titled, "How to teach the New Evangelisation". It takes each of the Corporal Works. Under Visit the Sick, for example, it has several suggestions:

- Give blood.
- Spend time volunteering at a nursing home.
- Take time on a Saturday to stop and visit with an elderly neighbour.
- Offer to assist caregivers or chronically sick family members on a one-time or periodic basis. Give caregivers time off from their caregiving responsibilities so they can rest, complete personal chores, or enjoy a relaxing break.
- Next time you make a meal that can be easily frozen, make a double batch and give it to a family in your parish who have a sick loved one.



One can see immediately the relevance for Marriage & Family Life. Doubtless, families in some of your parishes are doing a number of these things already. But a systematic review of how we might organise ourselves as a parish to help many more families take up such ideas could lead to a much louder proclamation of mercy.

7. Visiting Mr Flood

My father showed me at an early age how such acts of mercy can become an ordinary part of family life. And, by the way, I take no credit for this story since I was simply doing as I was told. My Dad was a schoolteacher and, in those days, he taught on a Saturday morning as well as Monday to Friday. Then, on his return from Saturday school, and before going off to referee rugby, he'd say to me, "Come on, Nick, get the shepherd's pie"; and we'd take it down the road to Mr Flood, me sitting in the front of the car with a hot pie balanced precariously on my lap.

Mr Flood lived in the barest flat I've ever seen – either then or since. But his smile filled it. And we used to look out for that smile as he sat, day in day out, at his window, waiting to give me and my brothers the heartiest of waves as we wended our way to and from the sweet shop! I realise now that he radiated Christ. Of course, it's only the Lord who knows the number of families in your parishes who are meeting Christ in similar ways through living out such Corporal Work of Mercy. They will tell you, if asked, that they receive more than they give to such lonely housebound people. What Pope Francis is saying is, "Yes; and let's do more of it"; "Let's organise ourselves to do more of it."

8. L'Arche

Viewing our Evangelising work through the lens of these Works reminds us Evangelisation doesn't need to be difficult. You can begin to evangelise just by doing it. I learnt this from getting to know the communities of L'Arche founded by Jean Vanier. He says the best way to proclaim mercy is just to start doing it.

Jean was the son of Georges Vanier, Governor-General of Canada. But, at the age of fifteen, Jean felt called to cross the Atlantic to join the Royal Navy. After ten years in the Navy, he left to study Philosophy at the Sorbonne. He soon began teaching Philosophy. It was while teaching that he met a priest who took him to meet some men he had befriended in the local psychiatric hospital. It was an asylum. As he got to know these men, Jean began to feel a deep call within him to share his life with them. He bought a little house which he called *L'Arche*, the Ark, Noah's Ark. And he gave a home to two men with significant learning disabilities called Raphael and Philippe.

It's interesting to hear Jean say he had no idea whatsoever that he was starting a movement. Now there are L'Arche communities in 58 countries across the globe and spanning every continent. All he knew was that he was doing something irrevocable. He began by just doing it. He often says the easiest way to start evangelising is just by doing it.

The vision of L'Arche, the heart of L'Arche, is to be found in words we find in the Gospel of Luke:

"Jesus said to his host: 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot pay you back means that you are fortunate, because repayment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again.'" (14, 12-14)

A few moments later, Jean comments on that text. And he says something which is important for us to hear. He reminds us that Jesus says, "Do this and you will be blessed." Jesus doesn't say they will be blessed. He says you will be blessed. Why? Because, in the poor person to whom you give a welcome, you welcome Jesus. After all, Jesus said, did he not, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat; sick and you visited me"? Words which are echoed powerfully by Pope Francis when he says, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, when you



reach out to the poor, you touch the wounded body of Christ. In other words, you meet Christ, as well as proclaiming Christ. You meet Christ and proclaim Christ.

I say that. But when I reflect on all of those years of Dad and me taking shepherd's pie to Mr Flood, I wonder if he knew we were Christian? I believe we met Christ in Mr Flood and that he met Christ in us. But it seems a shame we never spoke to him about our faith. It takes us back to that earlier question of what Evangelisation is about. If it's about communication of a relationship in word and deed, don't we need to focus a little more on the words too? Pope Francis is keen for us to take this on board. That's why he gives a significant part of *Evangelii Gaudium* to discussion of how we communicate who we understand Jesus to be.

Telling people who the Lord is for us is vital, too, if we wish to be parishes which radiate Christ. I don't believe we even said grace with Mr Flood. I would now. I'd begin with that; and see his reaction. What I'd say next would depend on the way he responded. If he joined in, I might ask him if he'd like to pray a little more. If he didn't join in, I might ask him if he minded us praying. Either way, we could begin a gentle conversation – never to proselytise – but to lovingly enquire and perhaps provoke questions.

9. Spiritual Works of Mercy

It's very striking, in this context, to hear what Francis has to say about the Spiritual Works of Mercy specifically. Because they are principally about expressing our faith in words. Just to remind ourselves again of what they are:

Instructing

Advising

Consoling

Comforting

Forgiving

Bearing wrongs patiently.

Reflecting on all of these, Pope Francis speaks very strongly. He issues words of warning:

“We will be asked,” he says, “if we have helped others escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer.”

What we are being asked to realise is that we shall be selling the Works of Mercy short if we focus only on deed; we need also to focus on word – including our telling people who we believe the Lord to be. Successive Popes, from Paul VI to Francis, have been clear about this. Pope Francis even goes so far as to say, “There is no true evangelisation if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed.” (EG 22)

10. The Kerygma

Pope Francis uses that word “proclaimed”, deliberately. Because it's the word they used in the first years of the Church. The actual word they used was kerygma. Because kerygma means proclamation. Pope Francis sums up this kerygma succinctly and powerfully. He likes to call it the core proclamation; and he explains that it's simply telling people, “Jesus loves you; his self-emptying death on the cross saves you from selfishness and sin; now he walks with you every day.” (EG 164) “Jesus loves you; his self-emptying death on the cross saves you from selfishness and sin; now he walks with you every day.” He makes it even simpler sometimes – saying that all we need to proclaim is that “Jesus loves you ... (and) walks with you every day” (EG 164).



This we need to hold onto, as we reflect on the evangelising needs here in 21st century Australia, that the key to evangelisation is proclaiming who Jesus is for you in a way which leads others into a relationship with him. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI put this beautifully when he told the Bishops of the Philippines: “Your great task in Evangelisation is ... to propose a personal relationship with Christ as the key to personal fulfilment.” Those words are no less true for us than for the Bishops: “Our great task (too) in evangelisation is ... to propose a personal relationship with Christ as the key to personal fulfilment.” In other words, to announce the kerygma.

If “kerygma” is a new term for us, we shouldn’t be at all put off by it: as I say, it simply means “proclamation”, the proclamation of who Jesus is – the core message of the Gospels. This core proclamation is what Peter and then Paul were about as they sought, in the time immediately after the Ascension, to help people understand who Jesus of Nazareth was. It’s what we find Peter explaining so movingly to the men of Israel when he stands up in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and tells them:

“Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you know. This man ... you took and had crucified and killed ... But God raised him to life ... Now raised to the heights by God’s right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.” (Acts 2, 22-24)

They were professing their profound conviction, which is ours also, that Jesus who had been put to death now lives and is present to us through the power of the Holy Spirit whom he has poured into our hearts.

11. Opportunities for Kerygma

The question is how to begin to share this core message with people. Sometimes, the opportunity presents itself to us by surprise. The years I was living in Rome, I had two experiences of this. The first was when I was asked to look after three young women – the daughter of a family friend and her two girl-friends. They were all 19. I was taking them into St Peter’s Basilica when I thought I’d better just check how much they knew.

As we crossed St Peter’s Square, I reminded them about Peter’s relationship with the Lord; how, in spite of Peter denying him, Jesus made him leader of the disciples; how it was Peter who was one of the first to find the tomb empty; the Risen Lord spent forty more days with his friends and made it clear that Peter was to be shepherd of the flock; after the Ascension, Peter preached first in Jerusalem then eventually came to Rome, preached there for decades and was finally arrested and martyred here in Nero’s Circus.

We reached the *Confessio* at the centre of the basilica just as I got to telling of his death; and I was able to say, “And this is where he was buried. Right under this altar: three altars down”. One of the girls had tears in her eyes and said, “I just don’t understand why no one has ever told me this before. How come I’ve never heard this? I wish I’d known it before!” She was bright; they were all going to either Oxford or Cambridge; she’d been to a Christian school but this was a revelation to her. I also wondered why no one had ever told her.

A few months later we entertained the English World Cup rugby team - the ones who did rather well in a certain rugby match here in Australia in 2004! One of their number couldn’t resist having a go on the College organ. When they heard the sound of his playing coming from the church, other players came in. They began to look at the frescoes of martyrs from the time of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Soon they asked me, “What are these?” I told them the story of our martyrs’ heroism: how they refused to be part of a Church which broke with Rome; and were prepared to go all the way to death for the sake of Catholic truth. And one of them looked at me, with moist eyes, and said, “I don’t understand why no one has ever told us this before. This is all news to me.” How many of our own young people would say the same: “You never told us. There’s so much about Jesus and our history that no one ever told us”



12. Kerygmatic Catechesis

We needn't be downhearted – but it should be a wake-up call to us: to wake up to the need constantly to revisit this core proclamation in our catechesis and preaching. Fr James Mallon, in his excellent book, *Divine Renovation*, is clear about this: “This proclamation,” he says, “ought (actually) to be present in every homily, in every class and in every talk.” He means we should be making the story of who Jesus is and how others have testified to that a part of all the conversations we have with those we're catechising – whatever their age or stage of faith.

Since I began this episcopal ministry, I've had the joy of meeting a lot of young people preparing for Confirmation. And I've come to realise how easy it is to proclaim the kerygma to them. In meetings with them and in preaching to them, I talk with them about the promises they are going to make. But I don't just talk about the fact that these are promises which their parents and godparents made on their behalf and which they now make for themselves. I also tell them, and this is the kerygmatic part, when you make these promises, you are saying you believe Jesus is who he says he is.

You're saying you believe he was God made human; that he was a historical person; that he was born around 2016 years ago in Bethlehem; that he grew up in Nazareth; that, at about the age of thirty, he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and began a ministry of teaching and preaching and healing; he worked many miracles which proved he was divine; but, after three years, his people rejected him; they had him put to death by crucifixion. But he had promised them he would rise from the dead. When he returned to the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. And it is this same Holy Spirit who comes upon you and leads you into the fullness of life.

Now, that's the kerygma, the core proclamation. It's what we mean by kerygmatic catechesis.

And it should be part of all the catechesis we do. It should be part of the discussion we have not just in RCIA – if we discuss these things at all; and we certainly should – but in all sorts of other catechetical moments: when we meet with parents who are asking for their child's baptism, when we prepare children and adults for their child's 1st Eucharist; in marriage preparation. Dare to ask, “When you say the Creed at Mass on Sunday, do you believe in everything we say there; or are there some parts you wonder about, would like to discuss, know more about?” After all, if we can't talk about these things in formal catechesis, then when can we?

It's what Pope Francis means when he says we need to revisit this core message at all different stages of faith development. In this, he is only reiterating what the General Directory for Catechesis said nearly twenty years before him – that catechesis, at all stages of faith development, needs to be evangelising. We begin by revisiting the core proclamation: communicating a relationship, a relationship with Christ – in word and deed and in such a way as makes people ask, “Who is this Jesus whom you love and worship?”

13. Changing the World

I'd like to finish with something I learnt in my first parish. Soon after I arrived, I saw a poster at the back of the church. It said simply this: “Ever thought of changing the world one heart at a time?” It was an invitation to join a community which welcomed some of the most marginalised of people. Changing the world one heart at a time. Because one heart at a time is how Jesus began when he called Matthew and James and John and Peter and Andrew to be his disciples. One heart at a time is how he first spoke to the heart of each

one of us here. One heart at a time was how my Dad taught me we proclaim mercy to Mr Flood. I do believe it's one heart at a time that we begin to radiate Christ – showing every person whom we encounter not just that our parish is an oasis of mercy but that they'll find an oasis of mercy in us, in each of us. I think this picture says even better what I mean. It is a photograph of Pope Francis greeting a man with a completely ulcerated head. We may like just to contemplate this image for ten seconds or so.





It's significant the Pope says he had no idea whether the man he embraced was contagious. He just wanted to embrace him.

Jean Vanier had no idea how embracing Raphael and Philippe would work out. You don't arrive at that sort of spontaneous generosity by accident. It's because you've been evangelised yourself. That comes from years of meeting the Lord daily in prayer. Then you begin to radiate Christ. And it's where we need start too: on our knees. If more and more people in our community are doing the same, giving themselves daily to the Lord in prayer, giving themselves daily to their neighbour through acts of generosity, self-sacrifice, charity and loving-kindness – then, little by little, our parishes *will* become something like what Blessed John XXIII and now Pope Francis were hoping they might be - oases of mercy which radiate Christ. And we will find our Church becomes missionary in ways we never imagined possible.



Reflection Questions

1. Do you consider your parish to be an “oasis of mercy?” Why or why not?

2. Blessed John Henry Newman inspired the idea of “Radiating Christ”. Using his poem of the same name, prayerfully engage in an exercise of *lectio divina*. What words or phrases speak to you as you meditate on the text? What connections do you make with your Christian vocation? To what actions are you being called?

3. Pope Francis believes parishes need to rethink their approach, goals, structures, styles and methods to be more missionary in focus. To those that say, “We have always done it this way,” Pope Francis begs them to think again; to put out into the deep. What goals, structures and styles should your parish revisit to promote a more missionary footing?

4. Bishop Hudson suggests it may be helpful to consider and review our evangelising activity under four headings: *Prayer, Caritas (outreach in love), Faith Formation, and Marriage & Family Life*. What might you do in the parish, at home, and in the workplace under these headings? What parish actions do you discern as most urgent? What is the greatest opportunity for parish renewal?

5. To these four categories, Bishop Hudson nominates a fifth, *Evangelistic Outreach*. He states there is “a danger that parishes evangelise inwardly without looking outside of themselves sufficiently.” In your parish, what is the balance between nourishing those within the parish and evangelising those beyond?

6. Bishop Hudson speaks of the importance of having an evangelising plan and forming evangelisation teams to support the mission of the parish; to be the “mission conscience of the community.” Do you have an evangelising team within your parish, and a plan for evangelising action?

7. Pope Francis impresses the importance of enacting the works of mercy. What opportunities within parish life present themselves for this outreach?

8. Bishop Hudson stresses the need to speak of who we are in Christ in word and deed. The essential and basic proclamation, the kerygma, discloses our relationship with Christ; our firm conviction in the faith. How might you naturally express the kerygma?

9. How have you been inspired by Bishop Hudson’s keynote? What words, images and actions are calling you to share your life in Christ?

PROCLAIM
2016



On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes



Our Lady of Dolours Church, Chatswood, Sydney



Office for
Evangelisation

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY



Praisefest at PROCLAIM 2016

Engaging Young People in the Life of the Church

Ministry to young people is often identified as an area in great need of development in many communities. Collectively we recognise the immediate need for more effective and engaging strategies to draw young people into the life of the Church. It is within this context that many diocesan, ecclesial and parish communities are boldly experimenting with their model of Church – bringing in contemporary styles of music and media to complement the rich traditions that are the foundation of our faith.

For more than a decade, the Australian response to this has been developing with the advent of *Anointed and Sent*, which provides a concrete vision for ministry with young people aged 12-30. Its implementation, the initial work of the Australian Catholic Youth Council, is supported by the ACBC Office for Youth. Many projects have formed to both promote the needs and gifts of young people as well as support them in their faith and life development. Through World Youth Day and the Australian Catholic Youth Festival a national Catholic youth identity has been established. To celebrate this growth and the tenth anniversary of Sydney WYD 2008, the Australian Bishops have identified the liturgical year of 2018, beginning on the first Sunday of Advent (3 December 2017), as a national Year of Youth.

The Year of Youth invites the Church into dialogue about the importance and life-giving presence of young people in the Church and society. It calls for dialogue and active engagement focused on the reconnection and renewal of a new generation of young people in the life of the Church. The Year of Youth is focused on local renewal and engagement and aims to:

- prayerfully discern the Australian Bishops' vision for ministry with young people, *Anointed and Sent*;
- authentic and personal engagement by Church leaders in the challenges and success in young people's lives;
- acknowledging the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of young people, and young people acting upon the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church; and
- upholding the dignity of young people, ensuring a safe environment from physical, emotional and spiritual harm.

Within the Diocese of Broken Bay, Catholic Youth Broken Bay is endeavouring to empower local communities to take up this challenge. The establishment of youth Hubs, which serve a number of parishes, will enable young people to gather for fellowship and formation in larger groups and with greater quality formation opportunities than might be available within a single parish. Catholic Youth Broken Bay also offers a number of regionally-based events, including Twilight Talks for young adults over 18 and Praisefest evenings for young people aged 16-35.

CYBB hosted its latest Praisefest as part of the PROCLAIM 2016 Conference with 350 young, and young at heart, in attendance. Although every Praisefest is different in theme and make-up due to the gifts of the host parish, it follows a generic structure as follows:



CYBB Praisefest - Sample Generic Runsheet

TIME	ACTIVITY
6 - 7 pm	BBQ
7 - 7:15 pm	Opening Praise & Worship
7:15 pm	MC Spot + Item (creative arts item, testimony, etc)
7:45 pm	Catechesis
8:15 pm	Sacramental Response (Normally Adoration) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Song (+ teaching of song) - Procession - Proclamation of the Word - Creative Response - Song-Silence-Song - Blessing
8:40 pm	MC Spot & Thank Yous
8:45 pm	Praise Party
9:00 pm	Finish