



Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide

Appreciative Response

to

Parish Pastoral Visitation

with the

Catholic Community of Victor Harbor and Goolwa

30 March - 7 April 2019

Introduction

From the outset, the Catholic Community of Victor Harbor and Goolwa readily engaged in conversation and preparation for Parish Pastoral Visitation with Fr Vinh Tran, Parish Priest, eagerly agreeing and committing, without hesitation in the final days of Advent 2018, to visitation in the early New Year! As the planning process unfolded the visitation team began to understand why he was so readily able to commit; an excellent, highly professional and capable body of parishioners stand with him, each mutually enabling the other! Fr Philip Marshall Administrator Delegate and Teresa Lynch, Office for Renewing Parishes, observed this during the preliminary conversation, on a pleasant mid-week summer afternoon in late January, with all systems active from that point onwards.

We heard from the nine people who had gathered for this initial conversation about the process they had utilised with Sarah Moffatt to dialogue with each other and listen to the Holy Spirit in preparing responses for the Plenary Council. This process led to a creative synthesising of the responses with the eight Gospel pathways, assisting to identify and map progress and opportunities for further action. We were also pleased to be introduced to the recently finalised Vision and Mission statements centred in the Gospel Pathways.

As we moved towards the week of visitation, the team, consisting of Fr Philip Marshall and members of the Office for Renewing Parishes, Jill Gallio, Deacon Tim Grauel and Teresa Lynch, appreciated the careful preparation and collaborative efforts by the Parish Team and Parish Pastoral Council, noting the outstanding attention paid towards the Quick Guide responses and other information submitted. Particular thanks are to be extended to Helen Taylor for liaison in preparing the program, supported by Fr Vinh and other members of the Parish Team.

First Weekend: Visitation Introduced Saturday 30 & Sunday 31 March 2019

Upon arrival for the first weekend of visitation with the communities of Victor Harbor and Goolwa, Fr Philip, Teresa and Jill encountered a buzz of conversation as people connected with each other. As we entered the foyer of St Joan of Arc Church for 6pm Vigil Mass, the visitation team appreciated being handed the weekly newsletter and a hymn book, with smiles aplenty! We observed that many people were wearing name badges which was helpful for parishioners to get to know each other and particularly helpful for the visitation team. The welcome was very genuine and it was shared with us that a book was available in the foyer to register names of new visitors for follow-up by Fr Vinh and the Pastoral Care Team. On entering the Church, Ray Klecko, Parish Pastoral Council Chairperson, was keen to welcome and introduce us to others from the community (Gospel Pathway #4). We noted that parishioners watched out for each other, visibly demonstrated through a cushion being offered to a frail elderly person and a grandfather was supported by others in caring for his grandchildren. The Liturgy was excellently arranged and prior to the commencement of Mass Fr Vinh led the community in practising the singing of the psalm. The Filipino Choir sang beautifully and the Ministers of the Word were well prepared and read prayerfully (#3 Gospel Pathway). Fr Philip introduced the concept of Visitation and broke open the eight Gospel pathways for the community.

Following Mass it was a full house in the annexe, with hearty conversation and the opportunity to enjoy a delightful supper. Clearly, parishioners very much look forward to this point of connection in their week. We noted that they had not gathered in numbers due to our presence; rather gathering,

sharing food and laughter is simply the norm, a far cry from the notion that this part of South Australia is God's waiting room! During our conversation one gentleman, who had recently participated in the RCIA process, introduced his sponsor and his family to us. He shared that the community had been very supportive of him in his journey to the Catholic faith.

On Sunday at 9am Mass at St John the Apostle Church at Goolwa, the team experienced a wonderfully engaged and connected community. The liturgy and music were excellent and encouraged prayerful participation. After Mass we enjoyed morning tea and engaged with the parishioners, many of whom shared that they had chosen a 'sea change' deciding to retire in Goolwa. Some shared that they had been deeply involved in their previous parishes in Adelaide and now have found a home in the Goolwa community, where their involvement was seized upon, rapidly! The visitation team was pleased to hear people's stories and their connections to various groups within the parish. On this occasion there was limited time to linger in conversation as the worship space is shared with the Lutheran Community and the commencement of their prayer service was imminent; of course we did manage to enjoy a cuppa and delightful home baked goodies before returning to the highway!

The visitation team returned to Victor Harbor for the celebration of the 11am Mass and appreciated the careful preparation which enhanced the liturgy. A shared lunch followed where we connected through listening and dialogue with the community and again noted the strong relationships and genuine interest and care for each other which extended beyond the Church; one lady, whose work was in the aged care sector, engaged with elderly parishioners after Mass and enquired after those who were unable to be present. Many people spoke of how much they appreciated Fr Vinh, his cheerful personality and his efforts to get to know people and invite them to become involved (#7 Gospel Pathway).

Our visitation week began with warm greetings from one and all; we were enveloped by an overwhelming sense of welcome and hospitality. People remained in great numbers after each Mass to take the opportunity to engage in conversation, partake in refreshments and share with us their appreciation and praise of God's creation in a most stunning region of our diocese and nation (#3, #4 & #6 Gospel pathways).

'The Long Day' and Celebrating Local Stories Tuesday 2 April 2019

Our long day promised (and delivered) a full immersion into the life of the parish through a range of activities including spending time with members of St John's and St Joan's Social Clubs, with ministry teams and apostolic groups, meeting committed volunteers who pastorally care for those who are unwell or are new to the parish as well as provide much-needed services to the housebound, isolated or those experiencing other needs (#5 & #7 Gospel pathways).

Deacon Tim Grauel joined with the rest of the visitation team for the "Long Day" which commenced with the celebration of Mass. We then divided into three teams and set out, accompanied by Ministers to the sick and housebound, to visit parishioners in residential care facilities, whilst one team engaged with Parish Pastoral Care Visitors and others involved in the ministry with the sick and housebound.

We observed a real sense of vocation and commitment in the way parishioners undertake this role. It was shared that everyone on the Communion round receive weekly Holy Communion, in their homes or from Ministers to the Sick visiting the nursing homes. The accompanying ministers shared how appreciative the people are of their visits and over time strong relationships have been built. Concerns were shared about not being informed by the nursing home when a person they regularly visit dies.

Often the parish is not included in the communication loop and the visitors are disappointed that they do not have a way of connecting or engaging with the family or to offer support to them in the funeral preparations.

We were heartened to hear that the Pastoral Care Visitors and Ministers to the Sick meet regularly; collectively they not only care for those who are sick but also care, support and resource each other as ministers. Other observations and comments we noted from our conversation included:

- These volunteers share experiences of ministry and trouble-shoot as a group.
- They are highly organised and ensure that they have contingency arrangements with another minister if they are unable to attend. They stated 'we don't want to let the sick person down'.
- They are reliable and ensure the sick receive regular Communion
- Pastoral care visitors also visit new parishioners and make a commitment to do this within two weeks of their details being entered in the 'new arrivals' book, located at the entry to the church.

A deep appreciation for Fr Vinh's attendance at meetings with the pastoral care group was expressed, also for his devotion of a day and a half each week visiting those who are sick in their homes or the hospital or nursing homes. This ministry is one that Fr Vinh has grown and he has invited into this ministry people who have not been so involved in parish life. One challenge shared is the inability to gain access to some of the aged care facilities.

The visitation team met with both social clubs, St John's and St Joan's who assist in the following ways:

- Arrange functions;
- Assist at funerals with catering support;
- Catering for the Southern Deanery Annual Clergy Lunch and the annual clergy retreat organised by Fr Roderick O'Brien;
- Organise morning teas each Sunday; and
- Organise outings to places such as the Rosary Garden at Strathalbyn.

It was lovely to witness the sense of camaraderie between the two social clubs with St John's good-humouredly acknowledged as the fundraisers and St Joan's as focussed on 'fun-raising'.

The visitation team heard that the parish has changed a lot since 2012 as people are now more inclusive; this is due in part to the use of name badges.

There are various initiatives such as:

- Vinnies breakfast club
- Christmas Hampers with 150 prepared in support of Vinnies, all goods are donated by local businesses and the parish does not need to contribute any additional finances. Financial support for Catherine House and Chaplaincy (Schools Ministry Group)

The parish's commitment to offering an authentic welcome, reaching out to the community and being visibly engaged with its own members in need and those in the neighbourhood and wider world was repeatedly exemplified. Such examples shared with us included Tuesday gatherings in the Annexe to play Scrabble and share afternoon tea; a place to gather for those who may be on their own or lonely. Parish Manager, Pat Clingan's role in encouraging outreach and a sense of belonging has resulted in people spending time together after Sunday Mass, partaking in Lenten Fish and Chip night and dinners. Relationships have grown. A simple invitation extended in a spirit of outreach has evolved into "Secret Women's Business", women socially connecting and supporting each other. It is unfortunate that try as he might, Fr Vinh does not manage to meet the criteria for membership; that said, he expressed his support for this informal aspect of the community which bridges a much needed gap (#4 & #5 Gospel pathways).

A particular highlight of the visitation program was listening and dialoguing with representatives of the various spirituality groups based in the parish. Victor Harbor and Goolwa parish is exemplary in its offerings to enable each member to develop and deepen their personal relationship with Jesus (#1 Gospel pathway).

Ecumenism happens naturally and parishioners meet twice a year in Goolwa with the Lutheran community. We heard about an ecumenical Christmas meal offered at the Anglican Church hall. There are many Spirituality groups and the parish is open and encouraging of an impressive and diverse range of prayer and spirituality groups, several being interfaith and ecumenical (Gospel Pathways #1 & #4).

During this conversation the following was shared:

- A Lectio Divina group meets on Sunday evenings and members take turns to lead the gathering which is a great way of modelling leadership (Gospel Pathway #7). There is an active sense of inviting the Holy Spirit to guide the time together. This feeling is sustained throughout the week. The group appreciates the bond and connection they have with each other.
- Several parishioners commented that the RCIA has been integral to the lives of many parishioners; a new parishioner who is also a candidate in the RCIA is assisting the parish to engage with Taizé spirituality.
- The Cenacle prayer and Rosary group were described as a 'powerhouse of prayer' for the parish. An invitation was extended from our team for them to join the Prayer Partners network, an Archdiocesan prayer initiative that underpins our renewing process. Many in this group showed interest in becoming involved.
- Christian Life Communities, Anglicans and Catholics together, meet in each other's homes.
- Spirituality is also expressed in good works- faith and action through Fred's Van and Vinnies

Dialogue with the Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Managers and Parish Finance and Property Council revealed the amazing dedication of these very committed leaders with many involved in multiple areas of responsibility within the parish.

Fr Vinh was credited with being 'a great enabler, with his encouragement of lay leadership and particularly the appointment of two Parish Managers. Harnessing the professional skills of parishioners as managers working collaboratively with Fr Vinh has facilitated more opportunities for him to focus on pastoral and sacramental roles rather than administration (#7 Gospel pathway).

The PPC have been extremely active; it was interesting to hear about the process they utilised with all of the Parish groups in a two way conversation, listening carefully to groups they do not usually associate with, hearing their needs and issues and providing an opportunity to express gratitude for their ministries and contribution to the life of the parish. The intended follow up with these groups by PPC members will contribute significantly to maintain connection. Fran Hanna stated how important it was to nail down exactly what the parish is about and then to capture this in a public statement. This careful planning and foresight will contribute to guiding the PPC's informed response to continue caring, being pastoral, visiting the sick, increasing spirituality, recognising Indigenous people and encouraging new membership into the Church.

It is anticipated that the recently introduced 'Vision and Mission Statements' as living documents will consider and take on board what is heard but also be subject to scrutiny. Phil Byrne's leadership and drive in this process was acknowledged and is indicative of the parish's commitment to and expression of Gospel pathway #7. We heard that much was achieved in the development of the vision and mission statement, with clearly articulated strategies to assist progressing the mission. The eight gospel pathways are very evident in all that the parish undertakes, clearly integrated into its vision and mission. One person expressed 'this is the best PPC I have been on; there is no micro-management, there are natural disagreements but they are resolved democratically.'

The PPC also shared with us the following:

- Bishop O’Kelly has shown good leadership, especially in encouraging communities to come together and share their feelings following the findings of the Royal Commission.
- There have been some challenges particularly in managing communication. The youth outreach has also been a bit of a struggle.
- Some hopes for the future are to engage more fully with the wider community e.g. Zonta, Oxfam and environmental groups.
- A future event for the parish is the centenary celebration of St Joan of Arc who was made a saint in 1920.
- One issue that is yet to be tackled is the relevance of Church in society today, particularly for young people.

Members of the Parish Finance and Property Council shared that they approach the financial management of the Parish through the lens of needs rather than wants. We heard that much needed renovations to the St Joan of Arc Church in Victor Harbor have been undertaken and the heritage status of the Church did provide some challenges. A property development plan is in place.

It was also shared that the parish owns several blocks of land and there are concerns to be investigated around the 75 year old cemetery and the issue around ownership of some vacant blocks. An opportunity exists if funds can be raised in the rationalisation of some of this land; a hope expressed is to possibly use any such funds to engage a Pastoral Associate in the Parish.

The parish is blessed with many helpers who maintain the property, mow lawns etc. Parishioners have been generous and it has been decided to hold off on any planned giving drive at this stage (#7 Gospel Pathway).

As our day continued to unfold, a beautiful lunch provided by Fr Vinh at the presbytery was most enjoyable and afforded a time for the visitation team to reflect with Fr Vinh and share further conversation. This considerate and generous hospitality extended to the team by Fr Vinh was deeply appreciated by each of us; one member of the team was deeply grateful for the vegetarian option provided. This is not expressed lightly as this attention amidst a full program required considerable planning and timely execution. Parishioners conveyed to us that this modelling of welcome, service and hospitality by the pastoral leader is extended across the parish family, with invitations offered to newly arrived parishioners to meet long term parishioners over a meal at ‘Father’s House’ (#4 & #7 Gospel pathways).

Following these conversations we had another opportunity for a beautiful scenic drive to Goolwa to meet with more groups from the Parish in the foyer of St John the Apostle Church, with the Memorial Garden as a visually pleasing and prayerful background setting. We noted many familiar faces, having met with a number of those present during our morning meetings, highlighting for us the generosity and giftedness of Victor Harbor and Goolwa parishioners who readily commit their energies to be involved in more than one or two ministries or groups. We were delighted to hear further stories of partnerships with other groups and Churches, as well as pastoral care and engagement. Simple, positive initiatives in response to Pope Francis’ call to care for creation through little daily actions include the parish’s invitation to ‘bring and share’ fresh garden produce and also the Sunflower Project, whereby seeds were distributed, taken home, sown, nurtured and delighted in through the sharing of photographs (#6 Gospel Pathway).

Our afternoon conversation and engagement included members of the Knights of the Southern Cross, St Vincent de Paul, Catechists, Liturgy Committee and Choir members

The Knights of the Southern Cross (KSC) are indeed fortunate to have 21 members, the largest KSC group in the Diocese, with five members on the State Council. It was heartening to hear that the first objective of the Order is the spirituality of members, which underpins. The good works and support which is offered to the Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Priest, Caritas, Vinnies, Mary Potter Hospice, the local community and other faiths in the community. Whilst like numerous groups and associations many of the members are older and have health issues the branch is proud of a 60-70% attendance of members at most meetings. We heard expressed a desire to identify a meaningful project with which branch members might engage and the membership would welcome opportunities to further explore this with the visitation team (#5 Gospel Pathway).

The impact of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) for the parish is evidenced through the involvement of many previous neophytes in ministry. We were encouraged by the sharing of the Catechists present who support children after school in their religious education and the RCIA process. It was a privileged time listening to the catechists speak of deep personal sharing, hear their questions and of the uplifting spiritual support they receive from each other. One Candidate shared that 'it is a privilege to be a part of this group where there is so much growth and learning'.

We experienced through the various liturgies on the first weekend of visitation the musical abilities within the parish which is blessed through three choirs. We heard from members of the Liturgy Team that in addition to the Filipino Choir the parish has two other choirs however they are respectively experiencing some current setbacks including ill health. During our conversation, all present engaged in brainstorming ways to encourage new musicians into the choirs.

As the dialogue continued, we enjoyed being enlightened about a creative approach to homily preparation involving six parishioners who meet weekly with Fr Vinh to pray, reflect and offer input to assist him prepare his homilies which are later made available online. The parish is to be commended on their support for Fr Vinh in adopting this innovative way, based on a modified process of a summative peer review in teaching and for his courage and openness to being involved in a peer review process (#3 Gospel Pathway). This approach authentically progresses Pope Francis' invitation in The Joy of the Gospel to be "in contact with the home and the lives of its people, and do not become a useless structure out of touch with people" (par. 28).

Second Sunday Sunday 7 April 2019

On the final Sunday of Visitation, Fr Philip presided at Mass, concelebrated with Fr Vinh; Teresa, Jill and Tim were also present. We were moved by proud Ngarrindjeri woman, Leonie McCallum, who extended to all assembled a heartfelt, warm welcome to country and then stirringly commenced our celebration of the Eucharist singing Amazing Grace in her first language.

In sharing some early reflections about the experience of the week, Fr Philip invited the congregation to listen to a story about Saint Oscar Romero when he was Bishop of San Salvador and consider how it might challenge and invite us all to reflect on other ways of thinking and being church; people were invited to dialogue with those next to them and share their thoughts and insights.

Following Mass, we witnessed palpable joy-filled engagement between all who had gathered as they enjoyed a shared lunch prior to an open forum, co-facilitated by Teresa and Ray, whereby all had the opportunity to ask questions of or make comments to the visitation team.

Of particular interest was care for our common home and hearing about initiatives other parishes have taken towards ecological conversion (Gospel Pathway #6).

On behalf of the team, Teresa shared that a number of parishes have community gardens, some of which are in collaboration with schools, others with the wider community. Other initiatives include solar panels, water tanks, water recycling, grants for more sustainable lighting, use of Fair Trade products, using “keep cups” for coffee. Nazareth Community celebrates Earth Hour within the school community and uses this as an opportunity to educate parents, caregivers and the local parish.

Acknowledging the current model of Parish leadership, consultative, encouraging, enabling and empowering (#7 Gospel pathway), we listened as concerns were expressed about any change in the future appointment of a Parish Priest which might not support this model. Fr Philip’s response conceded that clericalism can occur; a challenge arises in that there are more parishes than priests which adds to the complexity of making the most appropriate appointment for a parish. The leadership of lay people could be a way forward into the future.

Further questions and comments relating to the wider Church included:

- Future options for ministry to include ordination of married men as priests, allowing former priests who have now married to return to ministry and preside at Mass,
- Accountability and responsibility by the Archdiocese and the wider church to more fully recognise women as truly active in the Church and provide opportunity for involved in real leadership and decision making within the Church,
- Openness to celebrating the third form of the Rite of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- The abuse scandal needs to be addressed more fully.
- There is a need for more accountability and transparency in the Church
- Addressing the possibility of divorcees being included more in the sacramental life of the Church, especially as the Church preaches forgiveness.

In response to the above, various members of the team spoke of the hopes for the Plenary Council 2020 whilst acknowledging that there will be limitations. Deacon Tim Grauel highlighted that Archbishop Coleridge pledged that the Bishops are committed to listening and discernment on all the issues and there is a responsibility to reflect what was said. Pope Francis’ exhortations, particularly ‘Amoris Laetitia’ can be helpful especially on marriage and divorce. Fr Philip stated it should firstly be noted that divorce in itself does not separate you from the church. He also highlighted that historically, women have shared in significant roles in the Archdiocese of Adelaide in leadership positions and as members of the Executive of the Curia.

The parish is encouraged to maintain its momentum as many areas of change and renewal do not need to wait for the response from the Plenary Council to implement change; much falls within the realm of what it is possible to do now, seize the opportunity!

Identified challenges (opportunities) which emerged during the visitation process:

- There is a desire to encourage further engagement with Gospel Pathway #6, 'The parish witnesses to God's love for all the creatures of Earth'.
- The PPC has achieved much and there is a generosity in Spirit and an openness to share their learnings, processes and resources with other parishes.
- The PPC expressed a desire to build upon the dialogue process which has been commenced with all parish groups, with intentional follow up, maintaining connection and capturing in a public statement the hopes of the parish so as to guide future pastoral care, spirituality needs and the life of the parish in general.
- There are some challenges regarding difficult decisions to be made around the possible sale of property particularly where a cemetery is involved.
- An opportunity exists, through the possible sale of property, to recruit, employ and support a Pastoral Associate.
- Communication mechanisms and feedback are areas requiring some attention.
- Some struggles with outreach to young people were named; there is great opportunity and possibility in this space, with the assistance of the Catholic Office for Youth and Young Adults.
- Navigating access to some aged care facilities is proving a challenge as is being kept in the loop by residential care providers and families of housebound parishioners when they die; support services are unable to be offered in these circumstances, often time of critical need.

Support from Leadership and Diocesan Offices

- Teresa forwarded to Fr Vinh a DVD recorded at the Archdiocesan Laudato Si Forum; this was in response to questions from Fran Hanna and Anne Weygood, seeking resources.
- Theology for Renewing, organised through Office for Renewing Parishes (OfRP), might assist with unpacking Laudato Si; please contact (OfRP).
- Teresa forwarded to the parish information and links with regard to Nazareth Earth Hour.
- Jill was very pleased to receive many requests from parishioners to commit to the Prayer Partners' Network; their names have been registered and a certificate forwarded to the respective individuals.
- Peter Bierer, Catholic Office for Youth and Young Adults, is available to engage with the Parish and review the possibilities for engaging with young people and those who wish to support young people in ministry.
- Information about the Catholic Resource and Information Service has been provided to Fr Vinh and Mary Burford in response to Mary's request for contemporary books and resources; Teresa also linked Mary with Sarah who works in CRIS as they are able to provide a tub of resources on a regular basis for parish use.
- An opportunity for engagement with Sr Meredith Evans and ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans) was communicated by Teresa to KSC (Phil Byrne) as a possible meaningful project.
- ACRATH are keen to engage with the parish and wider community to raise awareness about the Modern Slavery Act, particularly supply chains (procurement) and are open to invitation to facilitate conversations at parish and wider community level; Teresa can be contacted to facilitate this connection or the parish may wish to directly contact Sr Meredith Evans.

Conclusion

Parish Pastoral Visitation put to rest any stereotyping about God's waiting room – the communities of Victor Harbor and Goolwa are alive and buzzing and we discovered a great deal about the parish and its engagement with the Gospel pathways during our visit.

Highlights from the visitation with the Catholic Community of Victor Harbor and Goolwa included the opportunities to celebrate and appreciate the magnificent spirit of generosity that exists in the Parish, the relationships that have been built and the collaborations that have been formed with a willingness to build partnerships together.

The visitation team heard beautiful stories of pastoral care and concern for each other, outreach and openness to interfaith and ecumenical endeavours. While many of these traits can be typical within country communities, these characteristics definitely are at the hearts of Victor Harbor and Goolwa parishioners.

The parish is richly blessed with well-resourced leadership which enables, encourages, empowers and nurtures many in the sharing of their diverse gifts and charisms; no doubt the beautiful 'sea change' has contributed to a reinvigoration of energies for some!