



'Go out to the whole world;
proclaim the Gospel to all creation.'
Mark 16:15

AN INTRODUCTION

This document provides a brief introduction into this process and what this invitation means for you and your parish.

What is 'Take the Way of the Gospel' inviting us to?

We are being called – laypeople and clergy together – to a renewed sense of our missionary purpose. Exploring and dreaming a missionary way forward lies at the heart of our baptismal call to live out the Gospel. It is something that Pope Francis talks about in his Apostolic Letter, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013): 'I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open.'

But why now?

Over many years, our lay people and clergy have identified the need to find new and fresh ways to proclaim the Gospel into our local communities. One aspect of this re-awakening is to attend to the manner in which these local communities of grace – be they parishes, language communities or movements of our Archdiocese – are arranged and function so that they bring renewed and ongoing life for God's people. In the context of our current COVID reality a sense of urgency to this re-imagining has also grown.

As Archbishop Peter A Comensoli has reflected, 'The Way of the Gospel – the path of missionary discipleship – has always been adapted by every generation to fit the local circumstances. How this is arranged has varied according to time and place. Now is our time; here is our place ... Our parishes will remain at the heart of the gathering of God's people locally, but we need to adapt the way we resource our local communities, including the placement of clergy, catechists and other lay leaders, to form Missions that comprise a family of faith communities.'

So what does being more 'mission-oriented' look like?

Pope Francis offers some guiding principles in *Evangelii Gaudium* (§28) for how a parish might become more missionary. They are worth reflecting on in the context of our own parishes here in Melbourne:

- Is our parish "in contact with the homes and lives of its people?"
- Is our parish "an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration?"
- Does our parish "encourage and train its members to be evangelisers?"
- Is our parish "a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach?"



'In our day Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary "going forth". Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out ... to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel.' POPE FRANCIS, *EVANGELII GAUDIUM* §20

What exactly is a “Mission”?

A Mission is a distinctive faith locality that lends itself to being lived out in family-like arrangements in the service of proclaiming the Gospel.

A MISSION IS:

- A local area, with commonalities in history, demographics, geography
- A collaborative focus on evangelisation, worship, formation and outreach
- A family of communities, working together for viability and vitality
- A reordering of ministerial and material resourcing
- A leadership of at least two priests, working as a team
- A strategic and operational decision making with lay leadership
- An intentional co-responsibility of all of the people of God
- A pooling and sharing of resources and administrative functions
- A move towards shared arrangements across communities, working in solidarity.

A MISSION IS NOT:

- Aimed at closing down parishes
- Focussed purely on data
- Driven by clergy shortages or falling parishioner numbers
- Aimed at destroying local community diversity and culture
- Creating centralised clerical leadership
- a plan to take over parish assets and finances.



At the heart of who we are is not all the buildings but the person of Jesus Christ, who enters into our lives and who we then share with others.

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How will Missions help us to become more missionary? What are their aims?

Undoubtedly, there are many parishes who are already exploring new and exciting ways of becoming more missionary-focused. But it can also be said that the structure of parish life—our primary way to know the Lord through Word, Sacraments, and Service—is in need of a Spirit-filled renewal. Our people and our ways of “doing” things are tired and in need of reinvigoration.

Embarking on Missions is not about changing our core mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, but about the ways in which we do this that are relevant to our place and time, and with good planning for the future. We are not the parishes of 40 years ago – and we need to be courageous and creative in our thinking around how to embrace the challenges and opportunities that today’s landscape presents us with. How many of us, in the silence of our hearts, have looked at our hardworking parish volunteers and wondered who will step up and take over in the future? How many of us have looked around at Mass and wondered why there aren’t more of our local families present? Or how often have we wondered if our own children or grandchildren might experience that same joy and passion for the Catholic faith that we have?

The formation of Missions provides us with a process to work together in becoming more missionary. It has three particular aims:

AIM #1: GREATER EFFECTIVENESS IN SHARING THE GOSPEL

Coming together as local faith communities enables greater collaboration and a stronger sense of shared mission. This then enables our local parish communities become alive with missionary disciples of Jesus Christ fully living their baptismal call.

AIM #2: VIBRANCY, VITALITY, VIABILITY

Vibrant communities are filled with passionate followers of Jesus Christ who share:

- vision to grow the Kingdom of God. They have a clear direction and purpose.
- mission where each person is seen as uniquely called and gifted to share the Gospel and is equipped and sent by the parish to live their call.

Vibrant parishes have a growing number of members engaged in evangelisation, fellowship, worship, discipleship formation and outreach.

Vital communities understand:

- their surrounding neighbourhood and culture;
- that people are searching for a deeper spiritual connection in their lives where their hopes, joys and anxieties can be expressed;

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- that what happened in the past may no longer fit into where the parish is being called today. They are hospitable to new people and new ideas that are different from what has always been done;
- that new possibilities for ministry and service will emerge and they can adapt to these new opportunities in ways that are flexible.
- the importance of respecting their past while being hope-filled for their future.

Viable communities have the resources, and are able to mobilise those resources, for their common vision and mission.

- They have sufficient income streams to fund and grow their mission;
- Their buildings support the needs of their mission and ministries rather than sapping their resources;
- They can serve their communities in a sustainable way and parishioner financial contributions are respected and used prudently.

AIM #3: EQUITABLE SHARING OF RESOURCES

The formation of Missions helps to ensure that spiritual, ministerial and material resources are more equitably distributed across the Archdiocese, based on current needs rather than the needs of generations past.

This means recognising the changing needs in particular parish communities, caused by growth or decline in the numbers of people attending Mass as a result of demographic change. It also ensures that the skills, gifts and resources of all our parishioners (young and old) are both recognised and utilised to their fullest capacity, and provides for more sustainable ministry.

So what happens next?

This is the start of a long-term journey for our local Church in Melbourne. In this early stage, we are inviting parishes to begin a conversation with members of their local community.

Your Parish Priest and a parish representative would have attended a regional information session in August/September and been presented with illustrative Mission groupings. These illustrative groupings have been developed using data gathered from the ABS, Mass counts, population projections and local demographics. They also include specific benchmarks to help ensure the vibrancy, vitality and viability for the Gospel mission of that area.

Illustrative Mission groupings are a starting point for discernment and conversation; they are not set in stone. Each parish will eventually participate in a Mission and is being asked to consult, discern and plan towards this with other parishes in their area.

Consultation and discernment may result in groups of parishes proposing Mission groupings quite different to the ones initially being suggested. Groups of parishes are encouraged to develop innovative and creative ideas as they discern and work together to plan how they might share their gifts and resources for mission.