

Archbishop Bathersby's Decisions supporting deaneries and parishes

Statement Released: Tuesday, May 18, 2004

Dear Father and Parishioners,

After a period of consultation across the Archdiocese, and after consideration of the feedback from that consultation, I have decided upon the measures to support deaneries and parishes set out below. By way of a context for those decisions I make the following remarks.

ABOUT THE CONSULTATION

Four overall key messages emerged from the feedback:

- the proposals of the Commission for Evangelisation and Pastoral Planning are worthwhile ways to implement the archdiocesan vision and priorities.
- the enhanced role of the Dean and funding for deanery projects by the Archdiocese is welcomed.
- parishes believe that they will benefit from greater collaboration with each other in the deanery.
- archdiocesan staff continue to be sought by parishes for a wide range of services.

All of the feedback submitted indicated general support for the proposals. The specific nature of the comments ranged from general statements of support to suggestions about implementation, including serious concerns about the difficulties involved. All of these comments have been recorded for taking into account in implementation strategies to be developed once this set of decisions is released.

ABOUT THE DECISIONS

These decisions, however, are not an implementation plan. Rather, they mark out for deaneries, parishes and archdiocesan support personnel a strategic pathway forward within which implementation details have to be devised as appropriate for the particular decision, setting, key groups involved and other relevant factors.

UNDERLYING ISSUES

In general, these decisions about deaneries and parishes reflect several significant issues which I now highlight:

Leading and working in a parish and deanery today has many challenges, and we are well aware that a vibrant future for the local Church requires that we address these challenges effectively. Our recent Synod highlighted many such matters.

Our overall challenge is communicating the Christian faith to the people of South East Queensland. This is our mission as a local Church. The Jesus Communion Mission vision provides us with a simple way of capturing that message in all its richness.

This mission is the task of the members of our parishes and the role of leadership is to prepare and support the people of our parishes for this task. The nine

archdiocesan priorities arising from Synod identify key elements in that preparation.

Parishes that prepare their members for mission in the world need visionary leadership, life-giving ministry and sound administrative support.

The key leadership role of the priest is vital and will continue to be so, but the numbers of clergy available for parish ministry continues to decline. Despite ongoing and successful efforts to attract vocations to the priesthood there will be fewer priests available to serve parishes in the medium-term future. Nevertheless, the promotion of vocations to ordained ministry will remain a priority at archdiocesan and parish levels.

Lay pastoral ministry in a variety of roles, in both volunteer and employed positions, has been a feature of our recent history and must become an even more vital part of our future.

It is clear that parishes must work together more and more to carry out their mission. In part, this is due to 'decline' factors. Overall, we have fewer priests, smaller congregations, fewer volunteers and less money. Our parishes need to work together to provide essential services for their members, services that parishes may not be able to provide individually. At the very least, decline factors are a signal telling us that we have to do things differently. We must be ready in practical ways to deal with such changes.

On the other hand, the need to work together is also caused by 'increase' factors. There are increasing numbers of people moving into South East Queensland. The cultural diversity of our parishes is increasing rapidly. Our Catholic ethnic communities are growing. There is an increasing broad interest in the spiritual, new opportunities for the Churches and a need for new ways to connect with people who are seeking deeper answers to today's malaises. There is growing interest in the permanent diaconate. There is increased awareness of the need to be creative in the solutions that we pursue, and strategic in our use of resources. There are not as yet answers to many questions but we must seek those answers together.

I believe therefore that it is very important to utilise the deanery as the vehicle through which parishes work together to carry out the mission of the local Church, and to provide the deanery with a leadership structure and supporting resources.

Pastoral planning continues to be an essential tool that assists us to be intentional and strategic in what we do. Moreover, parishes must do their planning together with the other parishes in the deanery. Furthermore, the planning in parishes and deaneries should harmonise with the overall archdiocesan direction provided by the Jesus Communion Mission vision and the nine priorities that emerged from Synod 2003 and presented in the soon to be released vision, priorities and planning document being prepared by the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and the Council of Priests.

The decisions presented here seek to support deaneries and parishes to engage with the realities outlined briefly above. In so many ways the Church today and the challenges it faces are very different to the Church that many of us have known over the years. Yet I believe that ours is the story of the Church in every age – meeting the challenge of following Christ and transforming the world in our own times.

My decisions are:

ABOUT DEANERIES

That

1A.

The basic clustering of parishes in the Archdiocese is to be in deaneries, with an expanded deanery role for purposes of mutual support between parishes, joint planning of key elements of pastoral life and mission, and sharing of resources.

1B.

The parishes of the Archdiocese are arranged into thirteen deaneries taking effect from 12 April 2004.

ABOUT PLANNING

That

2A.

The Jesus Communion Mission vision and the nine archdiocesan priorities announced at the Synod promulgation find a central place and practical expression in deanery and parish life and mission.

Deaneries and parishes actively promote an awareness and understanding of the vision and priorities.

Priests in parishes, ethnic chaplains and other pastoral leaders avail themselves of formation opportunities addressing the practical application of the vision and priorities to the deanery and parish setting.

2B.

Each deanery develops joint initiatives to assist its parishes to implement the vision and priorities. Support funding will be available from the Archdiocese for up to five years as well as assistance from archdiocesan staff when needed.

By the end of 2005 and within archdiocesan parameters to be developed, each deanery formulates a plan for the future pastoral leadership and operating structure of its parishes to 2011. Archdiocesan assistance will be available as needed.

2C.

In collaboration with the deanery, each parish and ethnic community plans over the next five years to act upon the Jesus Communion Mission vision and archdiocesan priorities in a way that is relevant and effective for its local people and circumstances.

In collaboration with the deanery, each parish examines and plans for its pastoral leadership and ministry needs to 2011.

2D.

The Archdiocese supports planning in deaneries and parishes with resources and personnel across a range of pastoral and administrative areas.

ABOUT LEADERSHIP ROLES

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3A.

Deans are supported at deanery and archdiocesan level in their role of leading the deanery. Support measures include:

- options that relieve the Dean of part of his parish duties
- active support by the Bishop in the Region and archdiocesan staff
- formation opportunities with myself and the Auxiliary Bishops that assist the Deans in the exercise of their role.

3B.

Pastors, in their role of leading parishes in the new deanery structures, are supported by opportunities to address the practical impact of the new circumstances. I will work with the Council of Priests, Deans and Director of Continuing Education to provide ongoing assistance and formation for Pastors.

3C.

The Bishop in the Region plays a key role in supporting the Dean and deanery projects. A role description for the Bishop in the Region in relation to deaneries and parishes will be developed.

3D.

Lay pastoral ministry, particularly the position of lay parish pastoral director, is promoted and encouraged through policies, formation and training opportunities, appointment processes and support structures.

The Archdiocese provides education about lay pastoral ministry in general and about the purpose and role of the lay parish pastoral director in particular.

Each parish and deanery is encouraged to call forth suitable lay people for ministry roles and support them in their formation and training.

Deaneries, in their planning for the pastoral leadership of their parishes, explore the option of the lay parish pastoral director.

3E.

Each deanery has a forum under the leadership of the dean, such as a pastoral council or deanery project body, to facilitate and plan joint pastoral initiatives to support its parishes. The tasks of this forum include:

- selecting and planning joint projects to assist parishes to implement the vision and priorities; assisting the Dean to apply for archdiocesan funding.
- facilitating the sharing of resources and pastoral programs among parishes.
- preparing a plan for the future pastoral leadership and operating structure of parishes in the deanery to 2011.

ABOUT RESOURCING

That

4A.

Resourcing of joint initiatives in the deanery is supported by archdiocesan grants from 2004 to 2008.

Archdiocesan grants support approved deanery projects that assist parishes to take up the vision and priorities. Up to \$20,000 per deanery will be available for the second half of 2004, and up to \$70,000 per deanery per year from 2005 to 2008.

The archdiocesan grant strategy is reviewed in 2008 as part of the major review of the vision and priorities implementation announced in the Synod Promulgation.

4B.

Each deanery plans where possible to share personnel, major facilities, parish programs and resources in a way that has clear benefits for its parishes.

4C.

In collaboration with the deaneries, financial measures to support new and developing parishes are established at archdiocesan level.

Finally, it is vital that we undertake the above measures with the aim of building vibrant communities of faith that will promote the mission of the Church. That mission and our responsibility are much too important to hide under a bushel. Our light must shine.

Thank you to all who contributed to the consultation process and to the Commission for Evangelisation and Pastoral Planning for guiding the project on my behalf. I ask you all to hold these matters constantly in your prayers for it is only by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit that we will flourish.

I commend all our endeavours to Mary, the first evangeliser and faithful helper of Christians today.

Yours sincerely in Christ

+John Bathersby
Archbishop of Brisbane