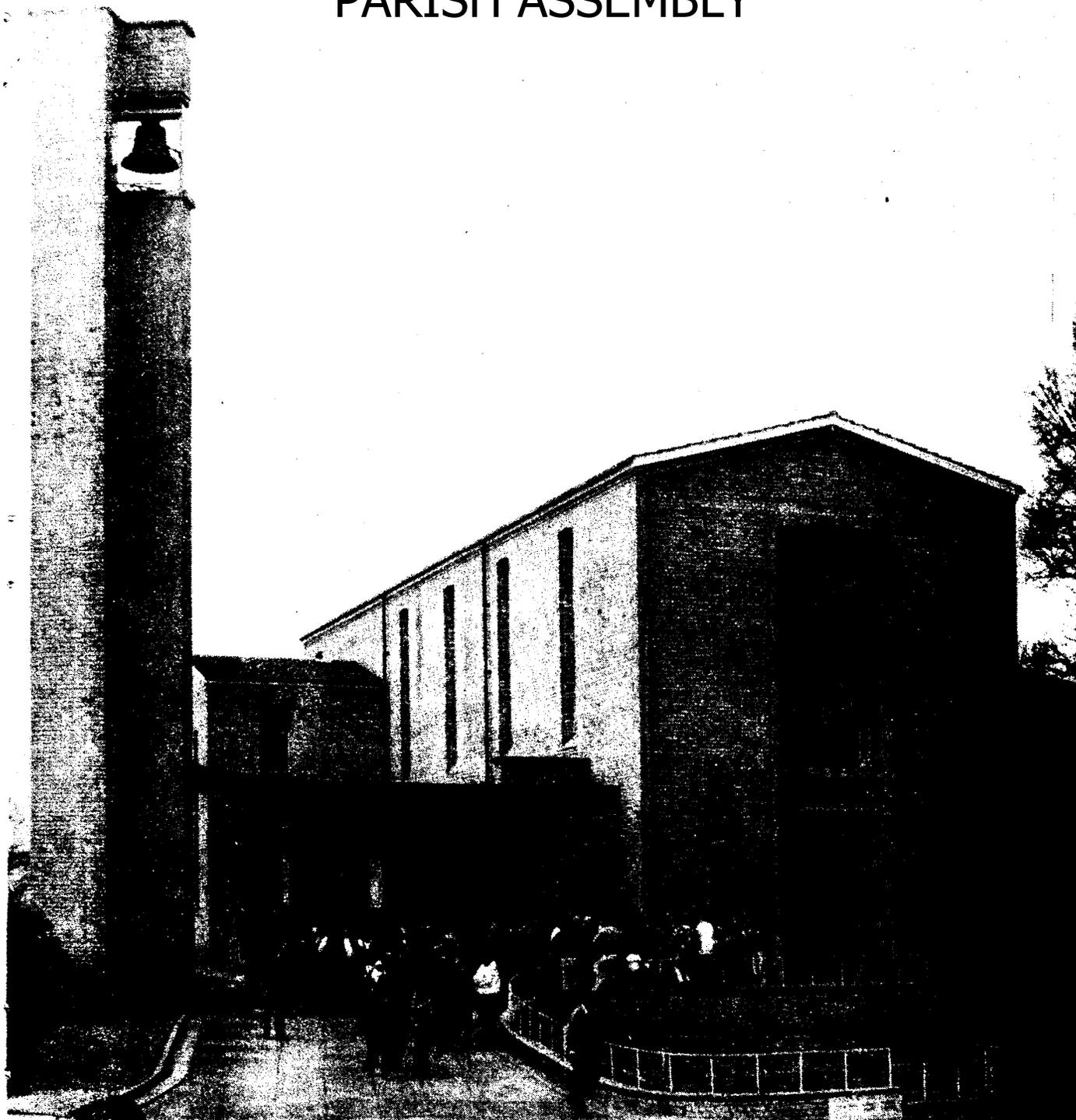


SAINT AUGUSTINE'S PARISH

(Incorporating Bowning, Murrumbateman, Wee Jasper & Yass)

PARISH ASSEMBLY



14 November 2004

FOREWORD

On the 15 August 2004, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Archbishop Francis Carroll promulgated his responses to the recommendations of the Archdiocesan Synod held from 14-16 May 2004. In promulgating these responses, Archbishop Carroll directed that: "Every Parish Pastoral Council is to study the Synod documents and hold a Parish Assembly before the end of the year".

Earlier in 2004, the Parish Pastoral Council conducted a survey among the parishioners in an effort to identify the views of the parish community in order that a relevant and meaningful pastoral plan might be developed. This survey sought information in relation to the celebration of liturgy, communication in the parish, the warmth and hospitality of the parish as well as views on religious education and prayer life in the parish. In addition the survey asked for general comments about what was good and bad about the parish and what changes parishioners would like to see in the parish.

Following analysis of the survey results, it became apparent that the vast majority of the survey responses directly related to issues emanating from the Synod process. Accordingly, the survey responses were aligned with the recommendations of the Synod and the Archbishop's responses to those recommendations. This material then formed the basis of discussion topics for the Parish Assembly.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARISH ASSEMBLY'

14th November, 2004

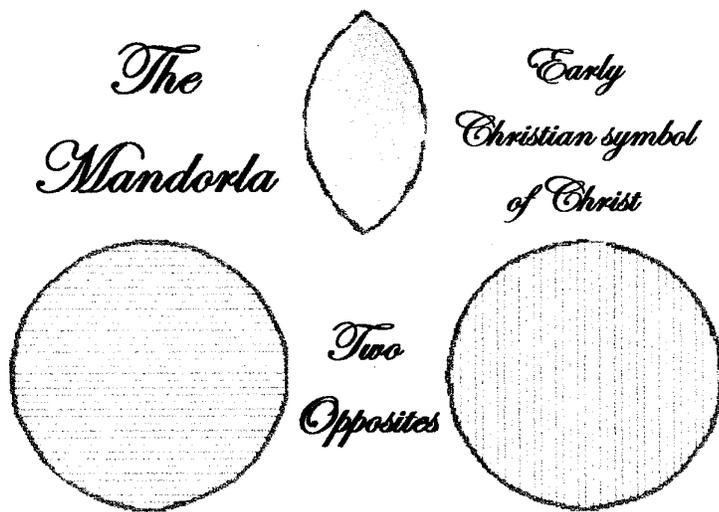
Father Laurie **Bent PP**

Some from the parish attended a gathering at Galong midway through the Synod process to discuss 'Our Parishes in a New Light'. There we formed the vision statement as a basis for enabling effective collaboration of all the baptised. It went like this:

So that we can become 'One in Christ Jesus' for the good of the individual, for the good of the Church and for the service of the world, we, the baptised of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, affirm the giftedness of all and, in response to our baptismal call, embrace Partnership in Ministry.

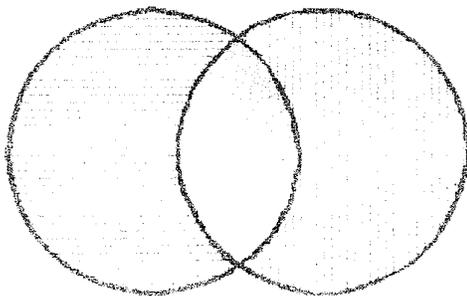
I wrote in the Bulletin this weekend about giftedness. We each have talents to be used for the good of others. Some have exercised those gifts and produced fruit. There may be some who are very unaware of their own gifts but others can see those gifts in them. Today I ask you to exercise those gifts, to open yourselves to each other, to give of yourselves.

The Archbishop in calling the Synod asked us to be *One in Christ Jesus*. And the Synod itself calls us to be - a prayerful Church, a collaborative Church, an inclusive Church, a Church that grows in faith, a Church in the world, a Church that encourages its members to use their gifts.



The two opposites may be placed so that they show the unity between them -

The Mandorla.



There is an ancient symbol called the *Mandorla*. It is an almond shape. In fact the word comes from the Italian for almond. It represents the experience of unity between two apparent opposites.

A truth emerges out of holding two things that are opposite in such a way that a third shape appears but is not a separate shape. And in the formation of this new shape neither of the originals is in any way diminished. Each opposite is completely there. But we can see in the *Mandorla* the unity that exists.

Christ is the great *Mandorla*. The first Christians used the *Mandorla* to describe the Incarnation. Jesus is the unity between God and humankind and we wish to be one together in Christ Jesus. One despite our obvious differences. We must hold ourselves together in such a way that we see our oneness - the unity that exists between us in Christ Jesus.

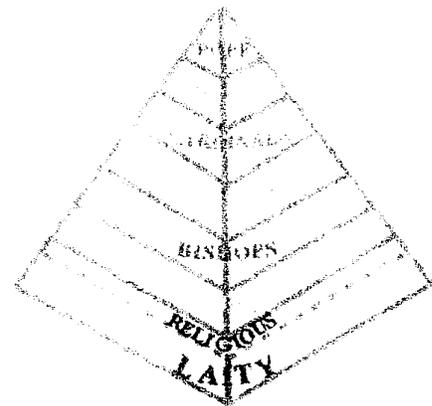
One of the strong themes emanating from Vatican II was that we are a pilgrim Church - forever travelling to the kingdom, forever coming into new ground, new aspects, but always with the journey's end in view.

Revelation is a continuing process. The whole notion of God was developing all through the Old Testament. And then Christ came - the ultimate revelation of the God for us. From that point of view, revelation has come to an end.

But our understanding of that revelation is not complete We continue to develop and refine our understanding of God and of life through our study of Christ and the Scriptures.

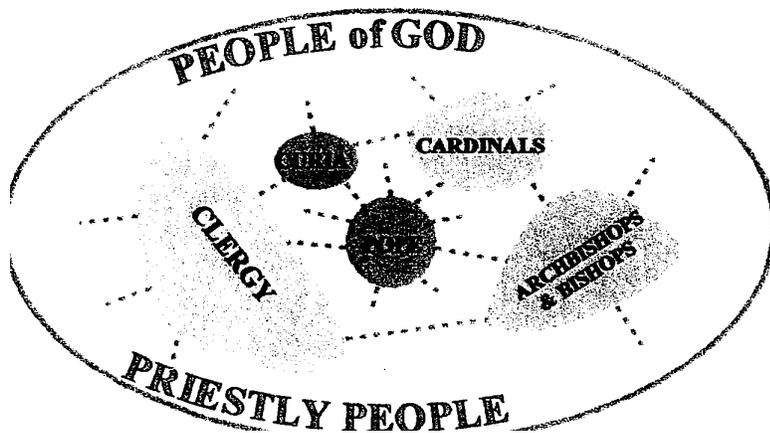
Lumen Gentium made it clear that we are a pilgrim Church. Fine words until the pain of a crisis situation reminds us of the reality that we cannot settle where we are comfortable. When journeying becomes a way of living, we are not looking for power and for order and system. We are looking for freedom and creative advance. And when we have this kind of openness, this kind of searching attitude of mind and heart, then we may be surprised. We may meet someone along the way and in our conversation we may find our hearts burning within us as we talk of our journey along the way.

Many of us grew up in a Pyramidal Church with the Pope at the apex, solidly secured in the infallibility statement of Vatican I. The pyramid grew high above its base - the laity. Below the Pope was the Curia, the Cardinals, followed by Archbishops and Bishops, then Clergy again with various rankings and finally the Laity with Religious very much the topping of these.



PYRAMIDAL ECCLESIOLOGY

It is very difficult for people who have grown up in such a Church to see it any other way. But pyramidal ecclesiology has been self-destructing for some time now towards what the Greeks call *Koinonia* or community. I have written in recent bulletins about *communio*. In *koinonia* ecclesiology, the Pope is the symbol of our unity, the hinge around which the Church can define and clarify itself.



KOINONIA ECCLESIOLOGY

In such a community Church there is still room for hierarchy, levels, one above the other, in the sense that these are links that hold the whole fabric of Church together. Hierarchy functions within, not above the community, while still leaving room for authority. Ordination, in this view, does not mean being raised to a higher level. Rather it makes one an essential,

indispensable link in this horizontal communion of people with God and with one another.

Of course, once we see the Church as Communion we begin to note that some of the same elements in our communion are to be found in other Christian communions. And we may even learn from them. Hence, the concept of Church as Communion implies ecumenism. And some of the other Christian Churches have preserved better than the Catholic experience of recent centuries the realisation that people, grounded in Baptism, are the Church.

Canon Law, reflecting Vatican II, states that the faithful have a duty and a right to participate in the inner life of the Church. As such, questions of collaboration and consultation are not questions of democracy or nicety, but a practical expression of a theological principle. All this is a way of affirming that a strictly pyramidal structure, apart from the communion of the faithful, is a contradiction; collaboration, consultation and shared decision making are true to the foundations of Christianity.

The early Church lived among the Jews from whom they sprang. The early Christians were uncertain about exactly who they were. In Antioch, they asked their resident thinker, Matthew, to draw up a basic rule of life for them. He did. He wrote his gospel which summed up two basic principles of community living. They were:

- In a true Christian community there must never be a lost child.
- In a true Christian community there must never be an unforgiven member.

The child was not a symbol of innocence, candour and unspoilt beauty. It was a symbol of those who had no rights, who were ignored, who had no privileges, the poor, the handicapped, the marginalised. In a true Christian community there must never be one of these people who are left 'lost'. *It is never the will of my Father in Heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.*

The second rule was there must never be an unforgiven member. One of the best ways to be lost is to remain unforgiven. It is not to be like this in a real Church. We, as Church, must be Christian persons for the lost ones who are all around us.

I note in the Synod recommendation 1.4 that our Father Francis refers to Aboriginal involvement in the local Church. Yass led the way in Australia in the education of Aborigines and a very strong Aboriginal Catholic Community was formed. In recent years, they have become somewhat 'lost' in our midst. In some of our discussions today we may look at ways and means of involving the indigenous people in our Church and in our worship.

And in our parish, how many baptised Catholics rarely worship with us because they feel looked down upon by the so-called righteous as a result of a relationship in which they find themselves. Or how many have been hurt by something that has been said or done in the past. These are 'lost ones'. Maybe we may see today how we can be Christ to them.

I would like to read from the First Book of Kings, Chapter 19, 11-13.

Then he was told 'Go out and stand on the mountain before Yahweh'. Then Yahweh himself went by. There came a mighty wind, so strong it tore the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake, But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. After the earth quake came a fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire there came the sound of a gentle breeze. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave.

Elijah finds God in *the sound of a gentle breeze*. The Jerusalem Bible thus translated it. The New Jerusalem Bible translated it as *a light murmuring sound*. But the New Jerome Biblical Commentary prefers the translation, *the sound of fine silence*. God is found in *the sound of fine silence*.

Today, let us be quiet and listen to *the sound of fine silence*. Let us hear what it is that the Lord is saying to us today about our local Church of Saint Augustine. And we hear that *murmuring sound* in the mouths and minds of the People of God in this Parish.

We are not here today to debate; we are not here today to argue; we are not here today to see that our point of view is adopted; we are here today to open our minds, to listen to what others have to say, to listen without judging but to consider others points of view. We can weigh these views against our own and lay them all down for record.

Today we will discover each other anew and in that renewed hospitality toward each other, we are being called into conversation. With conversation we do not need to know the solutions, we do not need to have total control. The truth will manifest itself through our conversation. In conversation we will be called to learn and develop. This does not mean that we be passively receptive. Our conversation needs to be critical and active. Conversation keeps opposites together, humbly, yet actively, seeking the truth.

Once we discern the truth, then we must act on it. But let us be open to the truth. Let us together seek our *Mandorla* - One in Christ Jesus.

ASSEMBLY PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

The amalgamation of Parish Survey and Synod responses resulted in five areas, and hence five discussion groups, being identified. These were:

Personal Prayer Life/Ecumenical and Interfaith Engagement

** Prayer in the home * education & direction in prayer * prayer groups * family based prayer programs * prayer resources & incentives to facilitate growth in prayer * build & expand on relationships with other Christian Churches * support for opportunities for ecumenical prayer and programs*

Our Parish in a New light/Information and Communication

** Effective collaboration of all the people * small groups and organisations within the parish enhancing the life of the parish * putting 'Partnership in Ministry' into practice * consultation, cooperation and sharing of resources * spiritual needs of all, ensuring no members are excluded * communication throughout the parish family*

Promoting Contemporary Liturgy/Adult Education

** Full, conscious and active participation by all in the liturgy * appropriate support for the liturgical life and ministries in the parish * pastoral care for the sick and dying * involving parishioners and making use of their gifts in liturgy * inclusion of the bereaved, disabled and their carers in liturgy * identify the faith formation needs of our parish community * support for ongoing faith education needs for all the parish community*

Our School — Partnership in Ministry/Voices of Young People

** Parish support for our Catholic school as a partnership * strengthening relationships between the school and the parish * promotion of cooperation and coordination between the school and the parish * use of Catholic Youth Ministry Team * appointment of campus ministers in our school*

Church in the World/Women and Men

** Promotion of awareness of the ministry of lay women and men * enhancement of and witness to authentic Christian living in daily life * a strong commitment to social justice * support for Catholic community service organisations that work to restore fullness of life for people in need*

Following a short presentation setting out the subject matter of each group, participants were invited to join a group to discuss topics into which they would like to have some input, or in which they had a particular interest.

It was emphasised that the raising of any issues pertaining to the life of the parish that came within the general heading or subject matter of any of the discussion groups would be welcomed. Indeed it was pointed out that it was most important that such issues were in fact raised.

Each group was asked to consider all the issues raised and then prioritise some key actions to be progressed.

The same discussion groups operated twice during the Assembly, which meant that each participant had the opportunity to attend two different discussion groups — one in the morning and another in the afternoon.

Personal Prayer Life/Ecumenical and Interfaith Engagement

Key Issues

- Prayer in the home
- Children's Liturgy
- Evangelisation
- Personal prayer
- Ecumenical involvement

The Way Ahead: Next Actions

- Produce a leaflet with all traditional prayers and short prayer services for use in the home. Distribute through school and to catechists for distribution to children in state schools.
- Investigate how to promote prayer in the home, including parish and archdiocesan resources.
- Devise a plan to inspire a spirit of evangelisation among parishioners.
- Develop a strategy to expand participation in ecumenical Lenten Groups.
- Maintain current involvement and encourage increased participation in ecumenical services, especially Tuesday morning pray with Ministers fraternal.
- Review children's Liturgy so that it is in unison with normal Sunday Liturgy.
- Look into ways for parishioners to develop their relationship with God.
- Establish 'Prayer Network' between Tuesday Prayer group, house-bound, disabled and aged.
- Consider how better to use "Our Lady's Statue in the Home" ministry.

Parish in a New Light/Information and Communication

Key Points

- In-active and alienated parishioners
- Involvement of Youth
- Communication across the whole of the parish
- Perception of exclusiveness

The Way Ahead: Next Actions

- Need to meet as a community – socially e.g. Parish Dinner, Quiz Nights, etc.
- More feedback from groups and organisations operating in the parish – results of meetings, what different groups are doing, etc.
- Introduce small groups adult education around contemporary issues and Church doctrine; on specific issues in local context.
- Encourage those who are not currently involved to become so and consider what various people could be involved in – it might help if they knew what they could become involved in.
- Devise a process of regular communication with and providing information to and between church 'goers' and 'non-goers' – the wider community.
- Identify who we are trying to communicate with and the appropriate mode of communication for different people e.g. youth, the elderly, the alienated, etc.
- Get more information on how we can reach the non-active, the marginalised.
- Make more of special celebrations such as Easter, Christmas, Pentecost – create a few more 'special occasions'.
- Extend children/family Masses to Sunday as well as Saturday.
- Have preachers from other denominations.
- Produce a regular publication to go to all parishioners.
- Study how to get people back and identify why they are not participating, maybe fear or 'nothing in it for me'.
- Invite aboriginal elders to talk to us to see how we can administer to their people.
- Need to explore door-knocking/newsletters/discussion papers/keynote speakers/social activities.
- Re-vamp family groups, new groups – maybe a school family group.
- Be inclusive – identify how we are being exclusive.
- Target communication at youth – the ways they communicate as well as places they communicate – the internet? Create interest for youth and so create involvement and hence address peer pressure.
- Survey youth communication needs through the school.
- Have regular 'get togethers' of people doing the same thing e.g. Murrumbateman singing and Pastoral Care Team with Yass singing and the PPC.
- Conduct a parish census to ensure we cover everybody right across the parish.

Promoting Contemporary/Adult Education

Key Issues

- Structure and operation of current Liturgy Committee
- Liturgical Formation programs
- Children's Liturgy
- Faith Formation needs

The Way Ahead: Next Actions

- Introduce Parish Pastoral Care teams.
- Review format and process of Children's Liturgy.
- Investigate the possible involvement of children in regular Sunday Masses – adoption of Family Mass into the regular roster.
- Publicise existing Faith Formation resources; identify and address unknown or unmet faith formation needs.
- Look at re-structuring Liturgy Committee with small units preparing for specific liturgies or celebrations and have the Liturgy Committee look at preparing for liturgies other than just the Mass.
- Have all groups/units who prepare liturgy meet quarterly (or perhaps less regularly as needed) to share resources.
- Introduce, and keep abreast of, liturgy training/workshops and refresher courses, especially for lay people to conduct church services.
- Use people we have here with gifts and talents to share with others, as well as using facilitators from Canberra.
- Have workshops delivered at a level that younger members of our parish could understand and therefore attend.
- Issue personal invitations to people to attend training rather than seek volunteers.
- Have more Communion Services in Yass to 'practice'.
- The work of the Care Group could be more acknowledged and supported.
- Investigate access to a Children's Lectionary and an inclusive language Lectionary.
- Use computer programs (e.g. power point) for visual aids during Mass and for liturgies to enhance atmosphere – such programs could also be used for reflection times at Mass and liturgies.
- Share visual aids with Murrumbateman.
- Murrumbateman requires better amplification for children.
- Reflection after Communion might be a part of Mass that children/families could be responsible for presenting.
- More cross referencing needed between rosters to ensure families involved in different ministries are not 'split up' between the weekend Masses.
- Form a group to make contact and welcome new parishioners.
- Formation of a Parish Library for those who don't feel comfortable with attending workshops, etc. This could cater for their faith formation needs by having books on prayer, meditation, Gospel reflections, etc.

Our School – Partnership in Ministry/Voices of Young People

Key Issues

- No youth ministry
- Mass inaccessible and not youth-friendly
- Youth reluctant to fully embrace celebration and connect with community
- Lack of access to students for Catechists, limited time to cover all areas and disinterest in students — families
- Children's Liturgy

The Way Ahead: Next Actions

- Reduce restrictions to make Mass more interesting.
- Cancel Friday School Mass and school to organise Family Mass periodically with youth focus.
- Involve youth in social justice initiatives at a local, regional and global level.
- Seek assistance from parish re social justice focus areas, linking in with carer's group, etc.
- School to have Youth Discussion groups centred around social justice issues.
- Create a Parish Youth group — a) Retreats, b) Youth Leaders, c) Catholic Mission.
- Centralise instructions/lessons run by Catechists.
- Have students come to Catechists at a venue during school hours.
- Have children more fully engaged in the Eucharist celebration.
- Educate the community to more fully embrace the children.
- Use children's creations in reflections e.g. drawings, liturgical dance, youth reflections, etc.
- Gather children after the procession to be blessed by the community.
- Roster children in reading ministries more fully.
- Energise youth behind outreach.

Church in the World/Women and Men

Key Issues

- Social Justice in our parish district, including aboriginal social justice.
- Catholic community services.
- Support groups for the disabled.
- Practical support for the lay ministry.
- Reaching out to new parishioners.

The Way Ahead: Next Actions

- Establish a parish support group for the disabled and their carers.
- Better publicise Catholic community support groups in our parish e.g. carers group, meals on wheels, court support group, etc.
- Take an active part in other community support groups e.g. Parkinson's support group.
- Identify aboriginal social justice issues and start dialogue (Eric Bell/Bruce Merritt).
- Expand the statue of Our Lady in the home ministry.
- Ensure all parishioners are able to undertake the ministries they wish with proper training.
- Do more to welcome new parishioners.
- Make a concerted effort to involve more parishioners in SVDP, care group (which needs male members), medical transport group (Red Cross community activity), visitation to Linton and other aged persons establishments, catechists.
- Devise ways of ensuring inclusiveness in parish including the aboriginals, migrants, new people to the district.
- Examine the possibility of involvement in respite care and fostering.
- Provide opportunities to talk about issues and be informed, because there is a feeling that 'all is not right' in our society.
- Form a parish social justice committee.
- Recruit more acolytes and readers.
- Encourage active support for Father Laurie in his ministry.

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

Personal Prayer Life/Ecumenical; and Interfaith Engagement

- Develop and implement action for encouraging prayer in the home.
- Re-structure children's liturgy so that it is in unison with normal Sunday Liturgy.
- Devise a plan to inspire a spirit of evangelisation among parishioners
- Maintain and develop current ecumenical activity.
- Identify programs for developing the personal prayer life of our parishioners.

Parish in a New Light/Information and Communication

- Develop and implement strategies for making contact with in-active and alienated members of our community.
- Implement communication processes that take account of appropriate ways to reach the whole spectrum of people and their circumstances across the parish area.
- Investigate programs that are relevant to the young people.
- Initiate dialogue with the aboriginal community.
- Identify and rectify any areas of 'exclusiveness' in the parish.

Promoting Contemporary Liturgy/Adult Faith formation

- Re-structure current Liturgy Committee, including incorporation of small units to address specific liturgical celebrations.
- Introduce liturgical formation programs.
- Introduce parish pastoral care teams.
- Review format and content of Children's Liturgy.
- Develop and implement plans for involvement of children in regular Sunday Masses.
- Identify and address unknown or unmet faith formation needs.
- Consolidate and publicise existing faith formation resources.

Our School — Partnership in Ministry/Voices of Young People

- Address the lack of youth involvement in Mass/Parish
- Organise greater school participation in parish liturgical celebrations.
- Involve youth in social justice issues.
- Establish Youth Groups on above issues.
- Review working arrangements for Catechists.
- Reorganise Children's Liturgy.

Church in the World/Women and Men

- Promote social justice in our parish area.
- Investigate the formation of a parish social justice committee.
- Establish parish support groups for disadvantaged and marginalised groups in our local community.
- Develop and implement practical support programs and mechanisms for enhancing the lay ministry.
- Improve the process for welcoming new parishioners to the parish.
- Identify aboriginal social justice issues in our area and start dialogue.
- Expand the 'Statue of Our Lady in the Home" ministry.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

An integral part of the work of the discussion groups was to identify a commitment on the part of participants to support for the advancement of issues in which they had a particular interest. This commitment was forthcoming.

The Parish Pastoral Council will now consolidate the responses made via the discussion groups and draw up a dossier of the action recommended. The Pastoral Council will take prime responsibility for co-ordinating the ongoing action on these issues.

Two member co-ordinating teams for each assembly topic will be drawn from the Pastoral Council and these teams will instigate action by establishing contact with those who expressed interest in particular issues and, through liaison with these participants, implement action to bring these ideas to fruition. Small group discussions will be the basic component of this implementation approach.

An essential element of implementation will include determining what support and advice might be available from Archdiocesan resources in respect of any of the issues subject to consideration by these implementation teams.

The nature of the subject matter was such that some issues came under consideration in more than one discussion group. These issues will be brought together as appropriate in the course of the co-ordination role to be carried out by the Pastoral Council.

Reviews on progress of implementation will be undertaken by the Pastoral Council on a regular basis. Regular reports will be made to the parish on goals achieved and future action required.

A major review of assembly achievements will be undertaken prior to the Archdiocesan Assembly set down for September 2005.

CLOSING REMARKS AT THE PARISH ASSEMBLY, 14th NOVEMBER, 2004

Father Laurie Bent, PP

In the Acts of the Apostles just after the Council of Jerusalem, the Apostles wrote a letter to the Church of Antioch. It contains a most remarkable little sentence: 'It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and ourselves....' What a good way to address our conclusions. The Holy Spirit has been very much part of our discussions today. I tried to get around to all the discussions during the day. They were very full, very earnest. We did seem to be seeking the *Mandorla*, the unity that exists between us.

There is still very much work to be done to flesh out our proposals into practicalities. There is still need for prayer, continued prayer, so that our parish may become more vibrant, more out-reaching, more enlivening. We are but a small proportion of our worshipping community which is a very small proportion of the whole Catholic community. We need to be talking to one another; we need to spread the Good News of today's Assembly to those who were unable to be with us.

I take you back to my overhead of the Koinonia Church. We are the Church, we are the People of God. My role is a sacramental and preaching role. I can do only so much and with the shortness of clergy that may eventually become more and more restricted. There are currently many parishes in the process of combining. The latest I have heard is that Binalong will from July 2005 be combined with Boorowa. I was told that gave me the let-off because it was thought that maybe Yass and Boorowa might combine. Maybe, however, Yass and Gunning may need to combine eventually and the work of the pastor becomes further spread.

And this emphasises the need for Partnership in Ministry. I think it was Judy who spoke earlier today about the possibility of lay-led funerals. During this past week I was on Retreat at Galong but, nevertheless, I had to return on Monday to conduct a funeral. That was a case where a lay-led funeral would have been very helpful.

We need more acolytes, we need more Special Ministers of the Eucharist. We are very blessed with those currently performing these ministries, but there are many more out there who could be involved with these positive areas of ministry.

You have had a great opportunity today to speak up. As I went around I was thrilled with what I heard and saw. I thank you. The Spirit has been very much part of our Assembly today. I ask that having had your say you then don't just sit back and await results. We must continue to be active. We must continue to discern the unity that is obviously present, to seek the *Mandorla* and to spread the word to others.

I thank particularly those who have done so much in the organisation of today. You have a very positive and active Parish Pastoral Council. We have discussed today's gathering for some time now. We had organised the format of today well before an Archdiocesan gathering was called to suggest to parishes how they might go about this. Gerry and Ken attended that and it gave them some ideas about how to bring it all together today. But I am sure other parishes learnt from what we had already decided to do.

So I thank your Parish Pastoral Council whose members have been very active today. Every one of them has taken part in the preparation and you can really be very proud of what your Council has been doing.

Go away from here this afternoon filled with thoughts of the possibilities. If you have more ideas discuss them with a member of the Council so that as we meet to discuss where to go from here your voice may be heard. Pray that the Spirit remain with us as we endeavour to implement your recommendations. I thank you for your presence. May God bless you.