

Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) report

At our April and May meetings the PPC was asked by the Diocesan Renewal Team to discuss and consider the “eight characteristics of parishes in the process of renewal.”

The characteristics are outlined in the attached sheet, and what follows is some of the thoughts, ideas, responses which the PPC had about them:-

1. **The parish is a community in which each member is called to be a follower of Jesus.**

We understood that each of us has been given different gifts by the spirit.

On the front of the weekly bulletin is the statement “Our Mission is to go into the whole world to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ”. Often our difficulty is in finding ways of using our gifts to fulfil our mission. We have been trying in many ways to do this and we were able to list a lot of initiatives which have begun in the parish. (See below)

2. **Eucharistic liturgies are prayerful and fully participative.**

The parish has been utilising the experiences of the Baltimore Parish in the USA as outlined in the book “Rebuilt” written by Fr. Michael White and Tom Corcoran.

This book emphasised the importance of a consistent theme in the preaching each Mass and the importance of good music.

Fr. Michael has been consistent in the theme of renewal, and the parish has begun a significant program to develop a parish choir and to foster a youth Mass and youth Music. There are early signs of renewal in this area.

There is a strong indication in this statement that we may need to reduce the number of Masses offered each weekend. We have not addressed this issue as yet, but it may be necessary in the not too distant future. Given that we have two churches and three weekend Masses in a very small parish, it will be a dilemma for us.

3. **The word of God is proclaimed in Good preaching.**

We did not discuss this characteristic except to say that we owe it to Fr. Michael to give him feedback about his preaching, and some people already do this. Parishioners have shown how much we value Fr. Michael by strongly supporting any efforts to raise funds to enable him to visit his home and family in Kenya.

4. **There is a warm sense of community outreach**

We felt we do this reasonably well and that we do make people welcome in the main. We are involved with other denominations in the Blackwood area; we do have links with other parishes in SA and overseas; but are we doing enough to reach out to those beyond those who come to our church? They are referred to as the “unchurched” in the book “Rebuilt”). We know there are about 2500 people living in our parish area who say they are Catholics, but only about 200 or 8% attend Mass weekly. We have to reach out to these people and reconnect. How to do this is a big issue when so many of our own family members have lost regular contact with the church. We do know that personal contact is a significant factor. We hold an annual parish renewal which is generally well attended and enables all parishioners to become informed of activities within the parish.

5. **The parish community is visibly engaged with those whose who experience poverty and need, and with those at the margins of society and church**

We have a strong St Vincent de Paul presence, we have small groups visiting the sick, elderly, bereaved and lonely, but always there is more could be done and we are not highly visible in what we do. Our parish assemblies always make it clear that a lot is being done by a few, but most parishioners are unaware of what exists and how they could be involved.

6. **The parish witnesses to God's love for all the creatures of earth**

The PPC have an embryonic plan to combine the Year of Mercy and God's love for the earth in one project. Plans are not far enough advanced and too many things could derail the project, so it will not be publicly mentioned at this time. We need to be successful if we start a project so details will be aired later.

7. **The parish is led by a pastoral team**

At Blackwood, we feel that the PPC is just one of many teams operating in the parish. The PPC role is to co-ordinate and guide parish activities and this is probably best addressed at the annual Parish Assembly.

In order to have a better understanding of what is happening throughout the parish the PPC has begun working on a plan to have direct contact with every team which we can identify in the parish. Our Parish Priest and Pastoral worker have a very good of what is happening, but we all need to share the load and the knowledge. The PPC also has a responsibility to keep the parishioners informed and this is one reason we want to make more use of the parish website, data base and electronic communication.

8. **As far as possible, Eucharistic communities that are viable will be enabled to continue.**

We are very grateful that we have the services of Fr. Michael and that he has left his native country to minister to us. Blackwood is probably the smallest "Stand alone" parish in the metropolitan area. Many other parishes have been combined and share priests. It is a real possibility that in the future we will not have a parish priest and will either combine with another parish or parishes. We are also unlikely to have three Masses each weekend. We need to be planning for such an eventuality and prepare more members of the parish to conduct liturgies of the word, communion services etc.

9. **Some initiatives taken in the parish in last few years**

- a. Renewal program/ Rebuilt
- b. Choir
- c. Mainly music
- d. Renewal of ministries
- e. Attended proclaim conference
- f. Pastoral Associate
- g. Youth discussion group
- h. Men's shed
- i. Faith discussion group
- j. Retreat in daily life
- k. Data base of parishioners for electronic communication
- l. New parish website