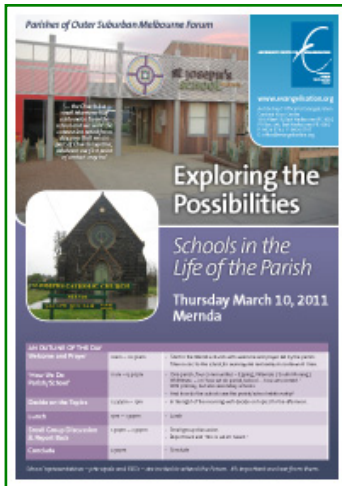


Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

Parishes of Outer Suburban Melbourne Project

March 2011 Forum

'Exploring the Possibilities – Schools in the Life of the Parish'



The first Parishes of Outer Suburban Melbourne (POSM) Forum for 2011 was held on Thursday March 10 at Mernda. It was hosted by the Epping- South Morang- Mernda -Whittlesea parish – four communities, one parish – and focused on Schools in the Life of the Parish. It was a fascinating day.

We started the day praying together in the small bluestone church of St Joseph and then drove to the new parish primary school. There, in the all purpose space, we heard from the priests of the parish, the pastoral coordinator, the three primary school principals, plus the CEO's regional manager and a pastoral research officer; not forgetting one another, 42 participants from 10 outer suburban parishes – including RECs, parish priests and other school principals - listening to

and learning from one another. It was this diversity that made it such a rich day. The summary reflects this.

One thing we're learning is how we might frame the discussion about schools in the life of the parish in such a way as to provide a credible basis for any ongoing conversation.

The POSM network of outer suburban parishes was initiated in 2007 with a view to 'facilitating support and sharing with one another some of the positive strategies and ideas' developed by the parishes in response to the extraordinary situations in which they find themselves. Certainly, this is the case with schools in outer suburban parishes. I think you'll find here strategies and ideas and much practical wisdom.

Many thanks to the Epping –South Morang - Mernda – Whittlesea Parish for making the day happen. Their hospitality and input was a highlight. Thank you too to Pauline Zappulla the CEO's manager of the Northern Region and to the three local Principals who made real the connection of Parish and School.

Don't forget you can access this summary and previous POSM Forum summaries by going to www.evangelisation.org Parish Life and Leadership, POSM Project. Feel free to contact me about anything in the summary. damian.coleridge@cam.org.au or 0407 330 404

Damian Coleridge
Parish Support Coordinator
Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation



POSM FORUM PRAYER

We began in the 127 year old church of St Joseph, on the day after Ash Wednesday.



We prayed to begin:

You help us discover anew truths
that can shape our lives:
that You have always loved us,
and always will,
and that we can be renewed in Your life
again and again.

Inspire us during this Season
with your closeness and presence.
Encourage us to try to grow
in the ways of your Kingdom.
Help us to rejoice in your life amongst us.

We prayed after the readings from Scripture:

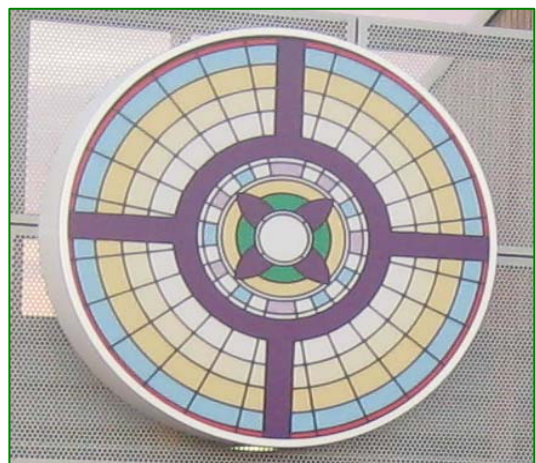
We ask for:
A sense of direction
in which to travel a bit;
a sense of humour
about our disappointments;
a sense of respect
for the elegant puzzle of human beings;
a sense of gladness
for the Kingdom of God
which comes in spite of us.

We made the sign of the cross, in ash, on our foreheads.

And sang:

Lord, to whom shall we go?
- You are our bread, broken and shared.
Lord, to whom shall we go?
- Yours are the words of life.

'St Joseph's Primary School used the Parish Church's round stained glass window as its School emblem so as to represent the relationship between School and Parish and also to consolidate the mission of the Church through the School.'



EPPING – SOUTH MORANG – MERNDA – WHITTLESEA ONE PARISH, FOUR COMMUNITIES

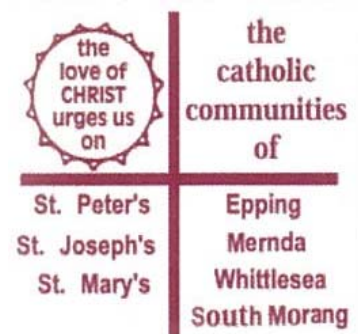
The Parish Leader Team – Fr Maurie Cooney, Fr Dispin John and Mrs Margaret Harrington - let us know something of the environment in which we find ourselves.



Maurie Cooney

Maurie is the ‘go-to’ priest for the Epping Rd corridor of the Parish

- ‘Schools are the church’? The school is the face of the church, but the school isn’t the church. However a lot of people will experience the life of the Church there.
- The fact is that for many, many Catholics their primary experience of Church life is with the School. The life of the School is to be a ‘Church place’.
- The Principal and other staff are ‘the face of the Church’ for many, many Catholics: what an opportunity, and what a challenge! They are leaders in the local Catholic community.
- The School staff are the face of the church. Principals are key leaders in parish life. They are the eyes and ears of the church. Here they have a strong sense of what Parish is. They are aware of the life of the Church.
- Phrases such as ‘Parish-School links’ express the premise that ‘Parish’ and ‘School’ are separated entities. However, in what we say we need to clearly express that the School is a vital element within overall Parish life; and the Parish leadership team and School leadership team behave in ways that express this.
- With regard to governance I am a colleague of the principals ‘in leadership in the church.’ We are parishioners here. Of course this is a challenge for us.



Dispín John

- Spoke about 'being a quasi-Parish Priest' in his corridor of the Parish – the Plenty Road corridor - and learning to work with the Principals in the primary schools there. He meets weekly with the principals of St Mary's and St Joseph's.
- He referred to his disappointment with the local Diocesan College (P-12): 'it has little connection with Parish life so that any sense of Parish is missing.' Its preferred educational model doesn't facilitate any conversation or partnership.

Margaret Harrington

Parish Development Co-ordinator

- My role is to support Maurie and Dispín, but also be aware of planning developments in a number of areas eg.: local Council, the CEO, the Archdiocese.
- Secondly I believe it important to set up a solid infrastructure so that we have access to data that is up-to-date and correct.
- 4,330 attend our schools. 1784 in primary, 2546 in secondary.
- St Peter's is stable. St Joseph's has doubled its size. St Mary's has seen steady growth.
- 1200-1500 people a month move into the City of Whittlesea. If 25% are Catholic then 330 Catholics move in - roughly 75 families a month.
- We are one parish but four communities. They're all situated very differently: rural, part rural-urban, fully urban, newly settled. However, since 1865, it has always been one parish. So St Joseph's Church is 127 years old and St Joseph's school has just been born.



'St Joseph's Church is 127 years old and St Joseph's school has just been born.'

Pauline Zappulla
CEO Manager-Northern Region



Challenges for the Community

- Being in the midst of a growth corridor
- Housing developments without full infrastructure
- People without community links and needing to build community
- Needing to be known in the parish
- Ever changing cultural mix, that brings challenges and richness
- Increasing enrolments
- Multiple schools in the one parish
- Support to the Parish Priest and Parish Team
- What does Catholic Identity look like today for these parishes?



Northern Schools in the Outer Region

- A central point of contact for the parish and community
- A voice for families in the town
- The face of Catholicity in the town
- Dedicated school leaders that have a high moral purpose and strong instructional leadership
- A belief that all students can be capable, independent learners
- Committed teachers who can improve student learning
- Parents and communities who want their children to be successful learners

Issues

- Continue to build the Catholic community with parish and within the town or village
- Access to funding/equity and social justice
- Access to individual support to students, staff, principal, parents
- Access to timely communication and professional learning
- Attraction of high quality teaching staff
- Provision of high quality teaching and learning resources across a range of media for K-12
- Access for children for special needs
- Provision for an intake of refugees and supporting their cultural needs
- Networking of schools/diversity
- Links to Government/system initiatives/University



Focus for Successful School Improvement

- Building positive relationships between students, families, schools and community;
- Developing programs that engage students to improve achievement and attendance;
- Current knowledge of teaching and learning involving strategies leading to improved literacy and numeracy;
- Well coordinated inter-agency collaboration at a local level to address the needs of students and their families.
- Timely communication & skilled support from the CEO regional office
- Networking opportunities and clustering of schools to build support, learning and relationships
- Professional learning support for the principal and staff
- Access to current Information technologies
- Government/system initiatives/link with University

'about 10% of the students show strong support for a traditional view on Catholic school identity'

Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project: Research reveals-



Student profiles:

- about 10% of the students show strong support for a traditional view on Catholic school identity
- about 40% desires a dialogical approach on Catholic school identity
- and about one third – already today – no longer supports their school's Catholic identity!

Questions asked by Pauline

- What does the Catholic identity look like for families and schools in these new urban settings?
- What type of narrative or dialogue do we need to engage in so that they can connect and belong in this Catholic community?
- In the midst of cultural diversity and beliefs what does the Catholic school look like in a contemporary setting?

'What does the Catholic school look like in a contemporary setting?'



OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES in this environment

Our discussion was framed by what the Parish and Pauline Zappulla had to say. We were describing the Opportunities and Challenges for us in this environment. Our environment. Here is what we said working in small groups.

Opportunities

Group 1

- Our Catholic identity is to accept and love people where they are. We are sowing the seeds. There is a nurturing requirement.
- We need to 'Meet people at the well' and 'Offer them living water.'
- We need to listen to the needs of the community as opposed to 'knowing' what the community needs. This means dialogue and observation.

Group 2

- Providing a sense of belonging for people.
- How do we, do they interpret that?
- The student percentages - 10%, 33%, 40% - mentioned by Pauline should focus our thinking (see p6).



Group 3

- Anyone involved in the schools to be considered as parishioners.
- The schools – the principals and teachers – to be considered as the eyes and ears of the parish.
- Development of shared leadership teams. Regular meeting of principal(s) and priest.



Group 4

- To learn from each other
- To grow together.
- To be on the same level and hold the conversation.
- Parent meetings are an opportunity.
- Celebrate diversity wherever you can.
- Acknowledge there is more than one way to look at things.

Group 5

- Leadership teams.
- Respect and celebrate the diversity of our parishes.
- Develop a shared vision and projects (time and process).
- Schools provide a framework for building community.
- Welcome and accept new people.
- Develop parish –school links eg Lenten prayer at 8.30am followed by 9am mass.
- 1st hour could be Mass and the other 167 hours in the week to flow from this.



Group 6

- Recognising it's a School that brings a sense of community and helps establish a Catholic community.
- Sacramental program – making a connection between schools and parishes.
- Connection as Catholic people to send their children to a Catholic school. They identify with it.
- School is a place where gathering together and communication are evident.
- School leadership and parish leadership are interwoven. Communication is open.

'...it's School that brings a sense of community and helps establish a Catholic community.'

Group 7

- Personnel to be seen, to be present.
- Close the gaps.
- Parish/School newsletters.
- Follow through on baptisms.
- Playgroups open to parish community as well as school families.
- Schools to become familiar with church gatherings and celebrations.
- Link the high Catholic entity of school to foster connection to identity in parish and wider church.
- Connect with Catholic Regional College.
- Recognise that staff are the eyes and ears of the parish.
- Organise joint events.
- And Church/life celebrations.
- School enrolments are a parish opportunity for our parish school.





Challenges

Group 1

- Teachers are crucial but often not connected to parish.
- How do we help our teachers undertake their role as parish leaders.
- Do teachers know their importance in the 'life of the Church.'
- Parents are busy. Many have different issues and responsibilities.
- 'Values' talk can sideline faith.

Group 2

- A lack of infrastructure and social opportunities that engage and promote opportunity.
- Lack of connection between people due to changes in our lives eg. both parents working, not knowing our neighbours. There are challenges associated with this.
- To welcome and identify new people among us. At Mass, at school.
- We need to identify and cater for the needs of the various age groupings that exist in our community.
- Financial support for parish eg. thanksgiving program
- Ensuring our teachers are familiar with the life of the local church.
- Maintaining and developing our traditions.
- Being strong and flexible enough to meet real needs.
- Using multiple sources of feedback/forum structures to inform our decision making.
- Underpinning all our initiatives in faith.

*"Values' talk
can sideline faith"*

Group 3

- Inclusive naming of the parish
- Diversity in schools
- Maintain good communication and working relationships.
- Distances.
- And resources.
- Maintaining links with families after Year 6
- Sacraments in big schools with small churches
- 'Celebrate Mass' during difficult times.



Group 4

- Dialogue is necessary to ensure that people know they belong to the Catholic community – whether face to face, or through the Internet.
- Catholic schools should be inclusive and respect cultural differences. We need to acknowledge differences and work together.
- How is information from the parish passed on to the school? As people are 'time poor' good communication is essential.
- We need to promote social justice in the light of the Gospel. We need to go on learning about scripture and our call to mission.

PRINCIPALS RESPOND



Katherine Hudson St Peter's Epping

We need to take the opportunities to be involved in Parish Life eg. Women's Day of Prayer and invite parishioners to help tell the story eg. in making the mural and sharing the stories.



Kevin Burke St Mary's Whittlesea

St Mary's Primary School and St Mary's Church in Whittlesea are located 25km from the Parish Office in Epping. As the school has been the one constant and visible sign of the ministry of the Catholic Church in the Parish over the last 28 years, it had become the main experience of parish life for many. This has created a tension between the aging 'churched' population who struggle with their identity as a Catholic Community, and a young second generation of the 'unchurched' who present with a strong personal spirituality. Providing quality and positive experiences of liturgy and parish are vital in order to encourage all in our community to come to a deeper understanding of their faith, and to inspire them to participate more fully in the life of the Church.



Daniel Thomas St Joseph's Mernda

The Parish of St Joseph's is 127 years old and the introduction of a new school and a rapidly growing Catholic community have caused significant impact on the traditions of the Parish eg. the introduction of a new worship space and additional Mass time, the Sacramental preparation and celebrations. For the first time there is a School and Parish in Mernda. St Joseph's Primary School used the Parish Church's round stained glass window as its School emblem so as to represent the relationship between School and Parish and also to consolidate the mission of the Church through the School.

FRAMING THE QUESTIONS

We were asked to frame the questions for the afternoon's discussion in a such a way that it would bring into focus some of things we had heard in the morning: so that it would give an edge to our discussion. We didn't want to leave without helping to frame the discussion in more useful ways. Here's what we came up with.

1. What drives people to have their children baptized?
2. Is the way to go ... experience community first then invite people into worship? (The parish connects up the ages. We need to invite people into it.)
3. What is Catholic ID for parents who are not part of a worshipping community?
4. What do people want to belong to? What do we want them to belong to?
5. How do we as leaders get involved in personal matters rather than be caught up in administration (the business model.)
6. Are we willing to look at new ways of being Church? ('I'm a paper Catholic.')
7. How do we best assist our teachers to undertake their role as parish leaders?
8. How do we enable people to want to be part of the Eucharist? (Being mindful we don't want to add to the pressures.)
9. How do we begin to share our Catholic identity, our Catholic story?

DISCUSSION of the QUESTIONS we asked

What drives people to have their children baptized?

- It's an opportunity to articulate something. There is a need, a memory that they can't otherwise articulate.
- A tradition they're somehow a part of.
- It reminds us of the importance of a good first experience as adults.
- And the importance of good baptismal preparation and welcome.
- There's the hope for the experience of Catholic belonging
- There's a link to the Catholic school
- Some sense of community.
- A recognition that celebration is important in our lives.
- We want the best for our children.
- People are mindful of the primary to secondary story
- People recognize there's a faith that underpins the life of the place.



*'There's the hope
for the experience
of Catholic belonging'*

How do we best assist our teachers to undertake their role as parish leaders?

- Encourage our Catholic consciousness – tell the Catholic story. Highlight faith and Gospel values.
- Invite them to be 'parishioner'
- Consider what is the parish's expectation of our teachers.
- Provide regular opportunities for teachers/school staff, parish staff and administration to come together.
- Commission staff at a Mass and present teachers to the parish.
- Invite teachers to be involved in the wider parish eg. parish core team, liturgy team etc
- Invite them to attend and participate in Mass.
- Invite them to participate in community Masses, parish picnic and parish fair.
- Invite them to be lectors, special ministers, in music ministry etc.
- Have a BBQ for teachers at the end of the year.
- Have them involved in the sacraments.
- Or a youth theatre group.
- Or as a catechist in a home based program.
- Show enthusiasm, joy, about being part of parish celebrations.
- Offer opportunities to engage in open forums.
- Affirm and acknowledge their roles.
- Acknowledge commitments and obligations that staff have in other parishes. Be realistic.





How do we begin to share our Catholic identity, our Catholic story?

- Share the rich history of the area eg. 50 plus years' tradition, the Josephites presence etc. Celebrate, articulate that history.
- Use the internet and parish website.
- Use the local paper. Could do this regularly.
- Use the take away sheet – the bulletin – to do this.
- Community Masses are part of this.
- So too are the Parish picnic, Parish fair and Parish feast day.
- Celebrate cultural diversity on these occasions eg. encourage Sudanese, Filipino choirs.
- Hand out the Parish Vision Statement to all families.

'Share the rich history of the area'

What do people want to belong to? What do we want them to belong to?

- A familiar community they are used to.
- A local community is a strong reference point.
- A community that's more catholic (universal) than their own grouping.
- Somewhere they can take ownership as a parishioner.
- A place where there is a partnership between parents (home) and school.
- A space for open learning and expression of faith.
- A community that is loving and accepting of our right and wrong doings.
- A community in touch with real needs and wants.

'A community in touch with real needs and wants'

Parish community and Connectedness

- Begins with the experience of worship. Through this we meet others and might get involved in experiencing community and engagement.
- We need to understand that people often cease regular worship eg. when the teenagers stop going. Or elderly parents need to be cared for.
- Children's liturgy important. It's an identified need.
- Our youth connect us up.
- Develop parish links to the wider community eg. sport and community.



What is Catholic ID for parents who are not part of a worshipping community?

- Profile: I went to a Catholic school. Celebrated sacraments. Married Catholic.
- Now the Catholic school the only commitment to their faith.
- Perception about Catholic schools – they're a step up from Govt schools.
- Being Catholic does not equal regular church attendance. (Church = faith?)
- 1st Gen: weekly 2nd Gen: regularly 3rd Gen: occasionally
- Sunday is not a 'sacred' day any more. There's work, sport, family time etc.
- How do we enter into a conversation with those who have this sort of lived experience?



BUILDING STRONGER PARISHES

Trudy Dantis from the ACBC Pastoral Research Office attended the Forum and spoke briefly about the Building Stronger Parishes project. Here are some details from her handout.

'The Building Stronger Parishes research project explores how Catholic parishes use their strengths and available resources to respond to a variety of challenges. The aim of the research is to identify and analyse some of these initiatives in parishes throughout Australia, which can then be implemented in other parishes facing similar challenges. (A pilot project was run in Montmorency Parish this year)

WHAT WILL WE LEARN? 'The goal of the project is to provide effective support and resources for Australian parishes, with an emphasis on facilitating the development of practical pastoral strategies.'

***For more information contact Trudy Dantis: 9953 3458 or t.dantis@pro.catholic.org.au**



CATHOLIC IDENTITY PROJECT

Pauline Zappulla referred to the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (see p 6), an initiative of the four CEO's in Victoria and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria. There will be a Parish Identity pilot project, facilitated by Fr Brendan Reed – who has been involved in the School project - beginning in a Melbourne parish this year. He will speak about the Project at both the Clergy Conference in June and the National Catholic Education Convention in Adelaide, in September.

The Project aims to re-frame the discussion about schools in the life of parishes and in turn to re-frame the discussion of the Catholic identity of our parishes. It aims to help us understand the environment we're in, both internally and externally. It offers a range of diagnostic tools to help us do this. Its research is really useful.

***If anyone would like to meet with Fr Brendan Reed to discuss the Project, please contact Damian.**



NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION CONVENTION

Workshops and discussions will focus on 6 key areas: community, governance, leadership, religious identity, learning and technology.

Community

- this strand will reflect on the social context which shapes the environment for ministry in our schools at this time including strategies and experiences which bring family and Church together in radically different ways from those we have known in the past
- recognise and build upon the capacity of families to contribute more deeply to the educational process in developing life-long and life-wide connections between school, home and Church for youth and young adults
- examine school/parish partnership initiatives which realise the core mission in our time of recognizing the rich social and cultural diversity within our communities and reaching out to those most in need
- consider possibilities for engagement with Catholic families not accessing a Catholic education and those initiatives which invite the broader community into the educational process.

***Perhaps some Parishes of Outer Suburban Melbourne might consider sending representatives to the convention.**



"Starting at the Church was great with the old Church and the input very much appreciated. I believe moving from the Church to the school was like leaving the old and moving into today's environment. The first segment was great hearing from Margaret, Maurie, and Dispin and the presentation from Pauline Zappulla was very well received. The workshop that followed was really worthwhile. And it was pleasing to see so many Priests, RECs and Principals attend."

AUGUST - CATHEDRAL ROOM

- The next forum will be held on Thursday August 11 in the Cathedral Room at the Cardinal Knox Centre
- At the end of the 'Schools in the Life of the Parish' Forum we were invited to suggest a possible focus for the next Forum in August.
- One suggestion was put forward ... Management, Leadership, Pastoral Care of large Parishes. No doubt there are others.
- The POSM Planning Team – Margaret, Richard, Arthur, RoseMarie, Anita and Damian – would love to hear from you about possible themes for the next Forum.
- Once again you're most welcome to be part of the planning team. Contact Damian if you're interested.