

North Shore Pastoral Discernment 2024

**Submission from the Parish of Chatswood
drawn from
Conversation in the Spirit on Monday 14 October 2024 with 40 parishioners
and
Individual Submissions**

QUESTION 1:

The data highlights a clear and significant decline in participation in the pastoral and sacramental life of our communities. How does this shift impact our sense of identity and mission within our local communities? What resourcing initiatives or areas of mission should be considered to address this decline in Catholic identification in the North Shore Deanery?

This is experienced by every organisation currently. Our society is becoming increasingly secular. This may have to do with parental priorities in the upbringing of their children. There appears to be an increase in youth crime. A possible reason could stem from children socialising in groups not supported by parental or a morality-based institution, such as a Church's, involvement. These structures assume a certain expectation of moral conduct in their everyday lives. However, the existence of these structures is not enough. It is only through our generosity of we are Catholic.

Catholic Schools can foster the next generation. Parents sending their children expect a caring Catholic environment, to help form their children's character building. However, even these educational institutions depend on human beings to be on staff. Further, it is not necessarily easy to enter this educational system, and for some, to pay. We do need a good low-cost educational system for those that identify as Catholics. Are there enough schools to meet the demand? Are the costs low enough for people to afford?

QUESTION 2:

What pastoral synergies exist across our North Shore Deanery? How might clusters of parish communities collaborate more effectively? What may be possible across our cluster of parishes in our Deanery?

Such 'synergies' already do exist where parishes have joint choirs and prayer event. However, these events are usually held at a time when it would be difficult for working families to fit in their schedule. If these special events were joined to a regular Mass time, where people are already present, perhaps that would assist with people's schedules.

It could be that parishes have more social/ extra-curricular activities right after the Mass, at which they provide food, music, dances, activities or organised outings. People are already gathered for their regular weekly Mass, and these are just an extension of that time, not a separate event later on in the week when people are busy at work or study. If they can meet

their future partner at these gatherings, young people may be drawn to attend. Besides in having open friendly dialogue and relationships with other Christian Churches we can look at what aspects may have grown their congregation with young adults.

We hear from social justice groups in other parishes that they feel isolated and unsupported and even more frustration from Catholics in parishes without Social Justice groups. The only vehicle to bring us together is SJ Around the Bay. We think we can benefit greatly from the opportunities for communication and collaboration which the Deanery offers. All we need is a start, a way of bringing us together.

QUESTION 3:

What do you consider to be the most pressing issues for people living in the North Shore Deanery and how best might parish communities respond to these?

All of us in Australia are facing a future for our children and grandchildren that is reaping the consequences of serving materialism without spirituality - poverty and housing stress, anxiety, a loss of belonging and of identifying with community rather than just one's curated self and the tensions that arise from the gross and growing inequality. Psychologists of well-being are teaching young people in our schools that the way out of their unprecedented anxiety is to believe in, and attach themselves to, something that is larger than themselves.

But do we have a door that is open to them? We may be ignorant of their world, their loves, their fascinations, their aspirations, their fears, their panic. We may speak in a language to which they are deaf. We offer them worship and prayer but is it meaningful to them. Some youth are engaging in disrespectful aggressive anti-social behaviour and even crime. There is a real need for family-friendly activities to occupy youths with parental supervision (besides weekend sports), where kids can socialise and make friends.

There is the issue of relationships, or lack thereof. Building relationships and connections are key for people in the community. The strength of these relationships and connections makes the number (of people) in the community not matter so much. Growth will eventually come.

QUESTION 4:

The data highlights an increasing demand and stress on community members due to high living costs and housing distress. How can the Church's pastoral mission be adapted to address these challenges? What specific pastoral initiatives can the Church implement to support individuals and families facing financial hardship? What areas for outreach may need to be thought through and considered?

We agree that our Deanery could work more closely with others on the high cost of living from which arise worry of financial security. This is the main pressing issue. In addition, we raise isolation from community, safety, affordability of housing, loneliness and depression.

One of the main causes of homelessness in the North Shore Deanery is domestic violence, primarily coercive and financial control.

Our Deanery could work together within Local Councils to discuss the practicalities of providing more affordable housing. We could create a deanery lobby group and attend Council meetings and be a voice as locals. In terms of direct action, there is a real opportunity of influencing Councils to adopt more flexible zoning laws to allow a greater variety of housing including more affordable types of housing and to fulfil its obligation to maintain the necessary level of social housing in the area. Councils only hear from developers and environmental activists when developments are under consideration. The people of the North Shore Deanery experiencing cost of living and housing stress need us to speak for them to government, at Council level and at State level.

We ask why the Archdiocese of Sydney and the Diocese of Parramatta have an Office of Peace and Justice but our Broken Bay Diocese does not? Also, why are those dioceses members of the Sydney Alliance but Broken Bay Diocese is not. These are instruments for providing leadership and giving a voice to the Catholic response to social needs such as cost of living and housing crises

We can also re-look at what can be achieved by working closer with Catholic Care and Vinnies. Where do they see that the Deanery can provide relief and how can we support them to achieve the needs they see daily? Our parishes seem to be out of effective communion with Vinnies that actually works with the poor, the recently imprisoned and the homeless. We need in our parishes to create genuine relationships with our social arms so we can work with and through them. But first we may have to rid our parishes of the Deanery of the embedded judgmentalism of our northern suburbs and the over-prioritising of attendance at Mass that sees social justice as an avoidance of evangelisation. Social justice action is a key road to evangelisation. Cardinal Sin of the Philippines once said, "if we want to evangelise the peoples of the Philippines then we first need to feed them, help them; housing, financial services. This will bring the heart of Jesus as they will see this in the us."

A key response is having immediate, practical ways by which people who are under stress can reach out and receive a response.

QUESTION 5:

How does the current configuration of Catholic Communities on the North Shore facilitate or limit mission, ministry, worship, liturgy, and catechesis? What may need to be considered or reviewed to enhance and strengthen Catholic Communities on the North Shore?

Though a number of people travel between parishes on the North Shore, we cannot forget the importance of building a sense of belonging in and to our own local parish and having belonging to a parish translate into sharing in its goals and participating in its activities. Loss of a feeling of community is one of the great sicknesses of our times. The Deanery is too big a conglomeration to be a community with a sense of belonging, and many parishes are not readily accessible by public transport.