

Rachel James-Leitch

Firstly, we are the Catholic church in Tauranga, and when people, whether they be parishioners, visitors, those searching for answers are looking where to **find us**, they will look to the city centre (where churches are all over the world). We currently have a prime hilltop site and we should be claiming it, raising a visible cross and “proclaiming from the hilltop”. A classical church on top this site would be the icing on the cake, but I think it is what we do from this site that is really important. As others have mentioned in earlier submissions. **It is the place to carry out our mission:** particularly reach out to the lost, serve the poor, connect the youth, grow the church, through corporal acts of mercy and the celebrating the sacraments. For this reason, as well as historical and heritage reasons, I think we need to maintain a liturgical church on this site, but not one that fits the estimated 700 people and not our current auditorium.

I do not believe in selling the land but in using it to its best purpose. This site needs a lot of creative vision to build a place/s where alongside a beautiful, practical church there are offices, meeting space, shop facilities, parking, a kitchen that not only serves those who come into the church to celebrate, but also opens to the outside to serve the wider community.

I understand there is also a need within our parish for a church building that encompasses all the faithful who come and share in our liturgy, a church building that incorporates future growth (not just due to migration but our Spirit led evangelisation). I think this needs to be built on another site and the Pyes Pa site next to our Catholic School makes sense to me. There can be crossover of facilities (such as the carparks) and would be of benefit to our young people to have a church to celebrate the sacraments in. I do see real possibility in the initial Preliminary Development Strategy, (and I pray that issues such as “traffic management” do not stop the growth of Catholic schools and churches in Tauranga). Starting from ‘scratch’ on a site like this might be easier or less disruptive to build first, but even this is still a project that takes time/years.

So that leads us back to square one, what to do with our current leaky St Mary’s building? I think we need to fix it, just to a standard that it can be used as our major church site for another 10 or so years. Yes, that will take funds and be disruptive, but during that time we will no doubt learn more about patience, but also the consent and building process, we will be consulting our community and gathering around us a group of experts who are willing to join our vision and **give** of their expertise, we will talk to and learn from other Catholic communities who have recently built new churches, we will be raising funds, and praying.

Building a physical church can be a time of community growth and strengthening and I pray that it might be so for our Parish of St Thomas Aquinas. I think that it is exciting and a great responsibility to be building schools and churches for my children.

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