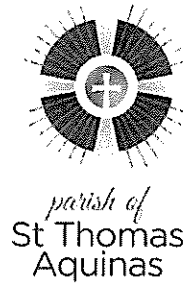


ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF A GROWING TAURANGA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

November 2017



Dear Parishioners

Kia ora tatou.

My thanks to everyone who entered into our consultation process over these past six months – for your submissions, your attendance at the two meetings held (at Aquinas College in April and St Mary’s School last month), and also the informal conversations some have had, with me and with others. It has been good to be able to have the chance to discuss all the options – as I said in the newsletter, anything that helps us to talk to each other is useful.

While I was happy with the number of people who attended the meeting at St Mary’s School in October, the demographics of the people present did not reflect the parish as a whole, which is a shame – not one of our new parishioners from other lands was present; very few young people; only one young family... and yet it is these groups who will be the parish of the future. We need to ask ourselves why they were not present – and we need to find ways to involve these people in our deliberations.

I don’t think people realise how serious the priestly vocations situation is for our Diocese. One of our current parish priests in the Diocese is 79; another has been unwell for some time; some are talking about retirement. The number of priests in the parish will have a direct influence on the shape of parish life in the future. Bishop Steve is trying hard to rationalise the number of parishes in Hamilton, but that will not be an easy process.

I’m also not sure that many people have read the reports that have been available online and in the parish office. A parishioner suggested I summarise these for you, and a synthesis of these reports follows this letter – please read it.

In reflecting on the meeting and submissions presented with the Parish Pastoral Council, it is clear that, overall, people see the need for a church in the city and the future need for a church in the southern part of the city. It would seem, then, that Option 4 – **to develop Elizabeth St and build a new church and centre at Pyes Pa Rd** – is the only option that “ticks all the boxes”.

I was particularly struck by Rachel James-Leitch’s submission (which is attached to this letter.) Rachel shared a vision for the Elizabeth St site and for the parish as a whole. Her concern went beyond the monetary value of this site to a way of being in the city. To that end, I have invited a group of parishioners to work together to develop a vision plan for the Elizabeth St site – I thank Rachel, Trish Hanlen, Patricia Brooks, Peter Chin, Flor Artus and Father Danny for agreeing to work on this. I have this group to come up with a vision plan for the city site within six months, a plan that they can then share with the parish. We look forward to hearing from them!

As well, a number of submissions spoke passionately about the advantages of a church at Pyes Pa, particularly for families to be able to gather after Mass, and their concern that the city site is not a family-friendly site.

I have spent some time discussing with Bishop Steve our situation and the submissions received, and he is happy to hear of the discussion that has taken place and the opportunity for people to express their point of view. The Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Committee have also considered our position.

In the light of this extensive consultation, I have decided, therefore, that we will:

- 1) Secure the parish's share of the property at Pyes Pa Rd (to date the cost of purchase has been borne solely by the Diocese)**
- 2) Continue to reflect on the shape of the parish in the future (in the ways described above)**
- 3) Undertake only essential maintenance at St Mary Immaculate (recladding and other repairs will not take place at this time, and cannot until the required funds are available)**

No further submissions need be made – I presume that, by now, the thoughts of those who wished to have some input have now been heard.

Whatever we do decide – and it may not be in my time here – this will be an adventurous undertaking, even foolish in the eyes of the world – but, to people of faith, an exciting opportunity to move forward in this fast-growing city. It is going to require great generosity and commitment from all parishioners – there is no intention of moving into debt. Nothing will happen unless the funds are available or pledged.

Let us pray for one another and for the future of our parish.

Yours sincerely in Christ



Father Mark
Parish Priest

SUMMARY OF BUILDING REPORTS

The Cove Kinloch report and PRENDOS report were commissioned to assess the condition of the buildings on the Elizabeth St site – copies have been available in the parish office and on the parish website ever since they were received. The following is a summary of the key points made in these two reports. As well, I have included salient points from Monsignor Trevor Murray's report

COVE KINLOCH REPORT (October 2014)

Presbytery

- water damage to the sub-floor structure
- decayed timbers require replacement
- water damage to the timber window joinery and also the enclosed timber framework

1955 building

- insect damage in sub-floor areas
- water damage to floor in toilet area

1991 building

- moisture ingress (from cracked / damaged fibre cement cladding) has resulted in damage to timber framework, corroded fixings and damaged interior wall linings – all exterior cladding needs replacement
- leaking window joinery
- flat roof areas need replacement
- box guttering needs replacement
- acrylic “sky domes” need replacement

PRENDOS BUILDING WEATHERTIGHTNESS ASSESSMENT (July 2016) – *this report concerns the 1991 building only*

- “expressed jointed fibre cement cladding system is permitting moisture ingress – this system is inherently high risk in terms of its weathertightness performance. Water ingress is widespread...”
- “The roof coverings can... be considered to be at or nearing the end of their serviceable life and are unsuitable for reinstatement.”
- “The remediation works required to the property are extensive”
 - wholesale reclad (estimated cost: **\$1.6 million**)
 - substantial replacement of timber wall framing (extent and costs unknown)
 - replace existing roof covering and gutters (cost unknown)
 - repair/replace any affected steel or timber structural members (cost unknown)

MONSIGNOR TREVOR MURRAY’S REPORT (March 2017)

- The present church is far too big for the site on which it sits. Put the other way around, the site is too small for the size of the present church.
- The result is that there is no pleasing aesthetic proportionality between the size of the building and its environs. It’s this proportionality that can enhance, or detract from, the overall impression of beauty.
- This lack of proportionality is exacerbated by the plan to increase the footprint of the church while still occupying the same site.
- Generous green spaces, together well designed hard and soft landscaping, complement the church building and present an image of God that is awe-inspiring. This is simply not the case with the existing church and on the present site.
- Car parking is an obvious issue. Experience shows that if people cannot park close by the church they will not stay – they drive around then head off home or somewhere else. If this becomes what parishioners experience week after week they simply stop coming.
- The lack of car parking close to the church also impacts negatively on older parishioners and/or those with mobility issues.

“When a parish is faced with the building of a new church or the renovation of an existing one, emotional, historical and nostalgic arguments often come to the fore. While these are legitimate viewpoints they should never displace nor outweigh the arguments of sound theological and liturgical principles.

Unfortunately, when emotions run high, the forcefulness of people’s personalities come into play and the parish’s past history is used as the yardstick by which all future parish development is to be measured – sound principles, theological and liturgical, are often the first casualties.”

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.

Rachel James-Leitch