

Take THE Way OF THE Gospel

RE-IMAGINING OUR LOCAL CHURCH AS MISSION COMMUNITIES

A Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Peter A Comensoli
Pentecost 2021

AT PENTECOST, the Spirit of the Risen Lord came among the household of disciples gathered in prayer, filling them with Gospel power, and sending them out on mission as the Church of Jesus Christ. On that day, the Holy Spirit gave the disciples new eyes and ears, and a fresh heart to form the family of the Church, and to proclaim the Kingdom of God to all nations.

On this great feast of Pentecost, I warmly welcome you home! After many long months we are finally opening our doors more fully, and it is time we return to gather as God's people – to worship together, to pray together and to prepare our lives to go out in mission together. And I write to you today – God's family of the Archdiocese of Melbourne – to invite you into a new conversation about our common mission for the years ahead.

To begin this conversation, I called two meetings over the past month – one with all the clergy of the Archdiocese and the other with lay representatives from each of our 209 parishes. These initial meetings had one purpose in mind: to open up the question as to how our local Church in Melbourne might best be organised into the future, such that:

- The mission of the Gospel is at the heart of our life, worship and outreach;
- Local faith communities are arranged to allow for them to flourish;
- Our faith communities be effectively resourced – spiritually, ministerially and materially.

When I was appointed to Melbourne nearly three years ago, I saw a great need for us to find new and life-giving ground in which to plant the seeds of the Gospel. For decades, the clergy and faithful of Melbourne have been exploring ways to bring about a re-framing of the local Church to become more vital for God's people. The challenges, wounds and disruptions of recent years, coupled with the life-changing reality of the COVID pandemic, have opened my own eyes, ears and heart to recognise that our present way of doing things needs to be re-imagined in the face of the changing circumstances in which we live.

But what might this look like?

In discerning this question, I have drawn insight from the first Archbishop of Melbourne, James Goold. When he came to Victoria in 1848, he did not set about arranging the Archdiocese into parishes, but instead established Missions into various localities. Each Mission comprised a family of local faith communities, gathered around a shared life of faith, worship and outreach. These Missions would then grow within them more local communities as the need arose.

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When the day of Pentecost had come, the [disciples] were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

Acts 2:1-3



It is a renewal of this vision for today that I want to explore with you over the coming months and years, so that we might walk together towards a more energised purpose for our local Church in the light of Pentecost. This will be a journey that will take time and effort, and we will need to take it together.

Our local Church, in all its vast spread, is wonderfully rich and varied in its many realities – be they parishes, language communities, or faith movements. But it is also true that our accompaniment and nurturing of these realities could, and should, be more life-giving. It falls to us to take on this task as Christ's disciples today.

Let me describe this task ahead by way of asking three questions:

- Where might be the local Missions of our Archdiocese today?
- Which parishes might organically fit together to form a family of communities?
- How might we better resource these Missions – spiritually, ministerially and materially?

Why should we be doing this? The Way of the Gospel – the path of missionary discipleship – has always been adapted by every generation to fit the local circumstances. How this is arranged has varied according to time and place. Now is our time; here is our place. As Pope Francis has been reminding us, we must be open to change if renewal is to be possible, and sometimes new structures are required for apostolic spirit to gain momentum.

Our parishes will remain at the heart of the gathering of God's people locally, but we need to adapt the way we resource our local communities, including the placement of clergy, catechists and other lay leaders, to form Missions that comprise a family of faith communities.

My letter to you today is simply an introduction to this task. This is the beginning of a way of thinking and acting that will involve us all – bishops, clergy and laity. It will be a journey of listening and learning, and walking together. Bring it to prayer; begin to talk with one another; open your hearts to where the Lord is calling us; reach out to your neighbours in faith.

More information will be made available soon, so the steps of discernment and consultation are readily available for everyone. I would like to note though that this is a period of growing and learning, not of haste. It is not about change overnight, it is not about parish closures or amalgamations, but a reframing of our thinking, and a resourcing of where our current need is, not where it was, in order to bring renewed life.

As the disciples gathered on that first Pentecost, might we now start this journey in prayer – together. Let us open ourselves to Christ Jesus with a new depth of trust and conviction in his guiding hand, so that we may discern our journey with compassionate and humble hearts and come to know the Spirit moving within and amongst us, and so be transformed.

**Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful,
and enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth.**

Holy Mary, Mother of Church, pray for us.

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne



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