

Parish Pastoral Council Survey Feedback Phase (2018)

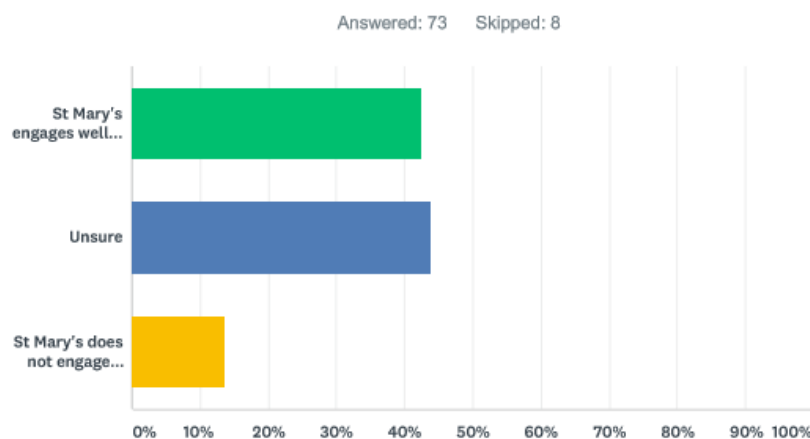
Feedback Topic 5: Q5 How would you judge St Mary's Parish in terms of the second part of our Vision Statement ... Engaging with the World? .. and related comments.

SUMMARY INFORMATION ON Q5 - Second Part of our Vision statement:

Like Q4 this question has two parts. The first asked for a response to the question "How would you judge St Mary's Parish in terms of the second part of our Vision Statement: ... engaging with the world?" The second part to the question asked for comments so that the response might be better understood.

Our vision statement, which you see displayed each week on our Parish Bulletin, in our Parish Directory and on our webpage, was adopted by the parish, following an extensive consultation process, in 2000. Since then initiatives in our parish have been guided by it and it is pleasing that so many respondents were motivated to give their impressions (73 out of 81) or entered comments (51 out of 81) on how we are in relation to this vision. Thank you for your words of encouragement and appreciation and for the challenges you put forward.

Q5 How would you judge St Mary's Parish in terms of the second part of our Vision Statement: ... Engaging with the World?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
St Mary's engages well, with the world	42.47% 31
Unsure	43.84% 32
St Mary's does not engage well, with the world	13.70% 10
TOTAL	73

This document, as with previous feedback documents, sets out the parishioner's responses under headings. At times, there is a comment from the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) for a specific response or, to save repetition, throughout the document a "General Comment" at the end of the document that relates to a number of responses from parishioners.

The survey respondent's identification number. All responses assigned to, for example, #1 are from the same respondent. Italics used to indicate these are respondent's words including uppercase text when used by respondent. "Parish Leadership" includes the Parish Priest, Assistant Priest, Pastoral Associate, PPC and leaders of Parish groups.

COMMENTS GIVEN IN RESPONSE TO Q5

ST MARY'S ENGAGES WELL, WITH THE WORLD

#3 I think this happens naturally due to the various nationalities making Greensborough their home. I hope they feel most welcome when they arrive here. They as well as our three priests who were all born overseas enrich our culture and help us to see the broader world view of our Church.

#4 We run the Caritas fund-raising for communities all around the world, during Lent, and we provide food and gifts for all sorts of families at Christmas. We often have Nuns and Religious from organisations around the world selling their products to raise funds for their Parishes overseas.

#11 Again compared with other parishes, I think we are way ahead. Society changes are looked at with sympathy and approached with respect.

#18 The gospel (good news) is what people are in need of. The world has plenty of bad news. Let's speak of the good news, the gift of God to the world, His beloved Son Lord Jesus Christ and why He came into the world. But before we can speak let us believers, know in our hearts, what is the good news.

#19 The overhead slides and videos shown at mass through the year, regarding how our donations are helping to improve the lives of people overseas show we are engaging with the world. Often our mass and prayers are offered for people overseas less fortunate than us.

#20 The number of community groups is evidence of this

#22 St Vinnies and other committee groups help out the disadvantaged in the local community. World issues are remembered in the Prayers of the faithful. School community shows respect and concern for indigenous and refugee groups.

#23 The ppl of the parish are welcoming and friendly to each other Also Fr. Steve and Fr. Dong are both approachable.

#27 Like the previous question, I think we are vibrant and engaging but again, with our numbers decreasing and all other reasons, our reach is not as strong as what it has potential to be

PPC Comment: See General Comment 2

#29 As per Question 4. St Mary's parish does engage with the world as far as its social justice arms, and ecumenical involvement are concerned. But does St Mary's parish reflect the fact that many Catholics who have left might have left because the Church has traditionally taken a stance of Church against the secular world - "in the world, but not of the world".

PPC Comment: See General Comment 1

#34 Through literature available, interchurch council and the various opportunities to hear speakers from a variety of sources.

#49 There are so many groups that seek others to join and be part of the parish life .

#55 The Social Justice Program does the perfectly

#57 St Mary's as a community with the help of the Social Justice Group "tries a to engage with the world" but is sometimes held back by the bias of some members

#58 I think St. Mary is parish is significant in the neighbourhood and shows awareness of would and problems.

#69 All the Parish Groups are very enthusiastic in their various commitments and I find this very inspiring. The School Masses are always an experience of School Masses are always an experience of faith and hope for me.

#70 world issues are often spoken about in the homily, through the committee & connection with the global church.

#80 We give it our best shot with a small volunteer base. We need to somehow engage better with our own parishioners and encourage active involvement.

PPC Comment: See General Comment 3

UNSURE given as response to Q5 "How would you judge St Mary's Parish in terms of the first part of our Vision Statement: ... Engaging with the World?"

#7 I think St Mary's does well engaging with the broader community but not well engaging with it's parishioners. What support do we offer families with young children? Is it possible to have an activity/colour in sheet based on the gospel each week for the children to do when they come to church? All Saints Greensborough is a great example of a church offering a range of programs to support families and teach children as young as preschool through to early adulthood about God and the Gospel. Vinnies does a great job of connecting with the broader community.

#16 I'm not sure as I haven't really seen any engagement outside the school.

#17 See the previous comment. It is a great parish but there is a discord between the parish and families at the school. The school appears to be thriving but not the parish.

#21 I think that St Marys tries to engage with what is happening around the world, through stories, updates and supporting poorer communities, but perhaps that could be a stronger link, although I think we need to make sure we also address our own local issues and challenges

#24 It depends upon the objectives behind 'engaging'. What is this 'engaging' supposed to result in? What's the objective? Yes, St Mary's engages well with the world because of the initiatives to involve others, encourage help for the poor and refugees etc, so if this is the objective then the parish is fairly good at it. And I really do value that. If 'engaging' is supposed to result in an increase in numbers, an increase in Mass attendance for example as a (general) measure being a change of life through belief in Christ and the Church, (particularly with school families) then we are, quite frankly, failing. And this breaks my heart, on a daily basis.

PPC Comment: The reasons for declining attendance at Mass are very complex. That in contrast, for example, with evangelical Protestant churches such as Hillsong, Catholic Church is failing to attract increasing numbers is seen as a sign of failure. What we at St Mary's can do about this is not clear or simple, when as Catholics we may have a different theology. See also General Comment 1.

#25 Again not sure on the whole as to how people actually move out into the wider community. **PPC Comment:** See General Comment 1 Certainly, some groups in our parish are always open and ready to reach out to those in need. I don't think these groups are always supported by the wider parish family. **PPC Comment:** See General Comment 3

#26 I am not as informed on this issue as some of the parishioners would be as I am reasonably new. I know that other parishes with which I have been involved support a sister parish in a third world country. I am not sure if this has happened at St. Mary's. I can see that the people who do attend St. Mary's are quite multi-cultural and all appear to be at home and comfortable with each other. If that is engaging with the world, you have it happening very nicely from my view.

#33 Other than the efforts of St. Vincent de Paul members and the Prayer Shawl group, I am not aware of practical work done through St Marys. **PPC Comment:** See General Comment 1

#38 I think St Mary's does engage with the local community. It seems very inclusive of all sections of the community, and is non judgmental. No one who attends Mass here would have any cause to feel embarrassed by their lifestyle.

#39 I think St Mary's tries to engage well with world. However, I think engaging young people will be an incredibly difficult task whilst they are still discriminating against homosexuality, only allowing males in the church heirachy, not allowing priests to marry etc. I feel that the catholic church has become out of touch with the young people of today, thus becoming irrelevant in their lives. It is

interesting to note that Pope Francis has recently called for feedback from young people and that ideas being put forward are being heard. However, the Church moves very slowly towards change and we can be thoughtful and informed agents of change. In Australia, the forthcoming Plenary 2020 is provided by the Bishops and they have said everything is "on the table". Whilst we know that some responses some people put forward might not produce the result desired, it is important that we each express our feelings and thoughts in this process. The parish will be providing opportunities for participation this year.

42 *As noted in the response above and More youth participation is required.* Over the years there have been countless attempt to engage the youth of the parish. This will continue, but is always a challenge.

#47 *Don't understand question.*

#48 *Does it?*

#50 *Again acknowledgement of what groups continue to do this work*

#54 *I THINK WE ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD SPIRITUALLY WITH OUR PRAYERS AND THOUGHTS, BUT UNLESS WE ARE STRONG TOGETHER, THAT PART BECOMES MORE DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE*

#59 *I'M NOT SURE. I THINK MANY PEOPLE ARE EMPATHETIC TO WORLD NEEDS, BUT DON'T KNOW HOW THEY CAN CONTRIBUTE EXCEPT FOR MONETARY DONATIONS*

PPC Comment: See General Comment 1

#60 *I'm unaware how St Mary's engages with the "world"* **PPC Comment:** See General Comment 1

#77 *We hear nothing of any such 'engagement' - why not a quarterly reporting, perhaps verbal, to those who attend and care?*

PPC Comment: The Parish AGM, held in the first half of each year, provides details of various Parish initiatives that describe some of the ways that we set out to engage with the world and at that time we specifically seek input from parishioners. The Parish newsletter and various speakers at weekend Masses, invite parishioners to participate in these initiatives but perhaps there could be more reporting about events and initiatives. We are also currently working on the development of a new website. This, we hope, will provide further interest and engagement around the activities and thinking of groups in the Parish. See General Comment 4 for further thoughts on this point

ST MARY'S DOES NOT ENGAGE WELL WITH THE WORLD

#6 *While there are Groups in St Marys who do this very well, the average Parishioner appears not to do this at all (based on conversations with many of them). I see little will within the Parish to mobilise on the major issues of our time (though this might be a case of the pot calling the kettle black because, though I get do involved in some of these issues, I do it through groups outside St Marys).*

PPC Comment: See General Comment 3

#28 *I don't think so; we do have a couple of visitors from overseas and hear what they are doing elsewhere and support disaster and other needs overseas but does that qualify as 'engages with the world'?* Yes, this does apply to engaging with the world. Overseas concerns are very important. We are called as followers of Christ to engage wherever there is suffering; in our parish, our families, our communities, our workplaces and in the world, on issues such as homelessness, domestic violence, religious and racial bigotry, materialism etc.

#30 *There are several parishioners, apart from the priests and parish staff, who engage outside of the parish activities, eg. social justice, St. Vinnies, Ecumenical groups, sporting groups, but not a lot are involved in the wider community.* **PPC Comment:** See General Comment 1

#53 *PARISHIONERS DO NOT SUPPORT OUTREACH WITH OTHER CHURCHES VERY WELL.*

#14 PPC Comment: (Comments made here about parish staff have been noted and passed on, but not included here because of their sensitive nature)

#35 *We do try hard and I feel our pastoral associate has worked exceptionally hard to try to get St Mary's to be part of our environment and its problems, but we tinker around the edges.*

#46 *Other than through the school, there have been limited opportunities (occasions) for engaging with the community. This is as much a reflection on the expectations of the community as the willingness for us to reach out.* **PPC Comment:** See General Comment 3 & 4

#76 *I would like more focus on this more aspirational part of our vision moving us past simply being comfortable and well served within our parish – rather than a focus on maintenance, being energised to engage in mission in the world. It is intrinsic to and a vital measure of the effectiveness of our parish and personal lives. It is how the rubber hits the road for our faith in action. Perhaps a focus on this aspect of our vision similar to the recent exploration of welcome would be helpful, in whatever way might be seen as appropriate through preaching, seminars or otherwise, to further understanding of this for all groups and personally to connect faith to the real lives we are all involved in in the world. The Blue Knot day events and our Loud Fence are good examples of how we as a community can engage with the world.* PPC may be able to take up this suggestion.

#78 *No practical evidence of engagement with the world. Prayers and reflection for world affairs are few.* **PPC Comment:** See General Comment 3 & 4. Additionally, the Liturgy Group has recently been asked to include prayers of intercession for various areas in the world that are suffering, so this occurs. However, we are still working on a way to include issues that occur after the prayers are written, such as for the boys and rescuers in relation to the cave in Thailand. As you may have heard, Fr Steven asked for prayers at the beginning of Mass that weekend. If there are particular issues you would like included in the prayers of intercession, these could be communicated, via the Parish Office, to the Liturgy Group for consideration.

Q5 Category not chosen or comments about “vision” given elsewhere

#2 *In particular I think the Social Justice Group does a marvellous job of keeping us engaged with the wider world and they are to be commended. Also we are blessed to have a PP who allows us to broaden our parish perspective - not all parishes would be so open*

#62 *I don't recall the 1st and 2nd part of our Vision Statement.* Perhaps we could find ways to enable our Vision Statement to be more visible. However, it seems not all parishioners are aware of our Parish Vision, therefore we will do what we can to try to make it more apparent.

#68 *We seem to fit in with the present “world “view. However I believe St. Mary's should not follow blindly this belief. If we believed less in our world view and more in our Christian view I believe our “vision” would be clearer.*

PPC Comment: See General Comment 1. If you would care to follow up with a member of PPC or Fr Steven or Jacinta Bright, we would like to hear more, so that we can understand your point and address any issue that might emerge.

#73 *I think to become a Vibrant Catholic Community comes before engaging with the world, we are not there yet.* **PPC Comment:** See General Comment 2.

#74 *As for engaging with the world I do that every day of my life and for the most part in Non-Catholic company through my interests and involvements, I would imagine that is true of most parishioners of St Mary's.* **PPC Comment:** An insightful comment. See also General Comment 1

#79 *Engaging with the world is not the object. Engaging with the Lord should be the sole object.*

PPC Comment: See General Comment 1

General Comments from PPC that apply to a number of responses, on the same point.

1. Individuals in the world and our parish Engaging with the World

The final words of the Mass are "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" and so our faith is not a private faith; we are sent out into the world to love and serve the Lord. Our mission is apostolic; we are sent out just as the apostles were sent out; into our families, our workplaces, our communities and the wider world to live our faith.

A Catholic Parish, as an entity, should, of course, exercise this ministry of loving service, through its people, for example via its St Vincent de Paul Conference. However, the liturgy sends parishioners out, as individuals and families to this mission. We have listened to the Word and been nourished by the Eucharist to be transformed as the body of Christ, for the world. Hopefully our parish, via our parishioners, do just that as they are dismissed at the end of Mass and go out into the world.

We can see examples of this mission of love and service, most immediately, by viewing the way that Pope Francis engages with the world, stopping to embrace and look into the eyes of the most vulnerable and forgotten or discarded people, inviting the homeless to a meal at the Vatican, providing showers for them, etc. Pope Francis is sacrament of God's love in this way and the eyes of the world are on him. The people he touches and those who watch may never come to Mass. That is not the purpose of his reconciling, loving and inclusive service to the world. The aim is to reach out to the world as Jesus teaches does (Luke 4:17-21), in word and example. So, our 'engaging with the world' is about cooperating with God in building God's Kingdom. This is God's mission for the Church, rather than increasing the number of people at Mass. However, having identified the purpose, it would be hoped that seeing the connection between faith and life and the Church as a community of love, then others might want to be one with us and want to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Tertullian, an early Church theologian, is quoted as saying of the impact of the early Christians "Look," they say, "how they love one another" (for they themselves hate one another); "and how they are ready to die for each other" (for they themselves are readier to kill each other). Apologeticum ch 39, 7. To be a community as described by Tertullian is our challenge, as it will be in every generation. One parishioner expresses this challenge as follows:

29 The future of the Church in Australia depends greatly on us integrating our personal / familial involvement in Church with our everyday involvement in the secular world in this, perhaps very, secular nation of ours.

Earlier, Pope Francis' work was identified as providing an obvious example of how we are called, as Christians, to engage with the world, which means to engage with the joys and sorrows, the hopes and anxieties of the world outside the Church, which necessarily affects parishioners, because we too are in the world. However, we can also consider the work and initiatives by groups such as such as St Vincent de Paul, those who collect for Hotham City Mission, Blue Knot Day and the Loud Fence, Big Group Hug, awareness raising activities such as the showing of the interview of David Letterman with Malala, Caritas and the loving care given by the funeral ministry Team to all people, regardless of their perceived status of belonging to St Mary's Parish, as some other ways of engaging with the world.

2. The Parish Vision Statement

A Vision Statement is an aspirational statement that expresses the ideal towards which we strive, rather than a description of how we currently see ourselves. Given we are a human organisation, there will always be challenges as we continue to strive to be a vibrant Christian community engaging with the world.

3. The low response of parishioners to calls for involvement in Parish initiatives and how our school families have responded.

Some respondents have lamented that things were much better, with a much stronger volunteer base in years gone by. There has been much societal change in our wider community and our Mass going community. In relation to the low response to parish initiatives, perhaps the following could be considered as contributing factors:

- Some parishioners see their commitment to the Parish as solely being attendance at Sunday Mass and we can't really know why this choice is made.
- Others have been involved over the years and age or other circumstances make involvement difficult at this time.
- Perhaps people are involved in the wider community, but not on behalf of the parish, e.g. in support of social initiatives or charity work happening elsewhere. (see comment #29 under point 1)

It is disheartening that we have not been successful involving more people in the Parish initiatives, but we do the best we can with the resources we have.

#80 We give it our best shot with a small volunteer base. We need to somehow engage better with our own parishioners and encourage active involvement.

The diminishing and generally aging population at weekend Masses means that our volunteer base is limited. People are, unfortunately, busier today than in previous eras. Many mothers go out to support the household and this impacts on just how much we can achieve together, as a Parish. The PPC is currently exploring ways to encourage and enable parishioners to consider becoming involved, in whatever way is possible. Stay tuned for our Parish Time and Talent initiative and for other opportunities to contribute to the life of the Parish. For those who are no longer able to contribute physically, thank you for all you have done for us.

However, you may be heartened to know that our school parents, many of whom are not with us at weekend Masses, do volunteer in Parish initiatives. Apart from organising and working, together with other parishioners, on the Parish Fete and providing much for the Parish through the Maintenance and Development Group, when invited, school parents have filled the gap left when a large number of older volunteers retired from the group that caters for the bereaved, after funerals.

4. Criticism of the Parish leadership for not doing what some expect

The PPC welcomes constructive criticism as we continue to find ways to nourish, support and depth our Parish in God's mission.

Some people, however, seem to look at the Parish leaders and blame them for what they believe is not happening without any indication of support or hope. It is easy to blame someone whom we do

not like, for something we see as lacking. The invitation is to move towards that person, or group in order to find the goodness and to build a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation. To say, in a critical tone, that the parish does not do this or that, denies the reality that the Parish is the people, not simply the leadership. This would be similar to believing that the Church is made up only of the Priests and Bishops and the Pope.

We all have a responsibility to contribute to building the Kingdom, which quite naturally includes engaging with the world in our everyday activities and encounters. If you would like to see new initiatives, then you would be very welcome to approach the Parish leadership with your ideas.

A further point to make is that there seems to be an assumption by some that nothing happens, without questioning if this assumption is correct. However, there seems to be a preference, from some, to criticize rather than enquire. If you are feeling concerned or unhappy about something, please come and raise it with the Parish leadership.

Many people comment that the parish leadership at St Marys' is such that it enables and empowers people to exercise various forms of ministry. However, the lack of awareness, from some, of what is happening in the Parish, suggests that we may need to improve our communication processes.