



St Greg's and St Kevin's Progress Report Parish Planning / Future Thinking

After time spent in discernment with the Holy Spirit, and much help and advice, I spoke with four parishioners back in mid-September 2022: two from St Greg's parish (Alfred Ablaza and Margaret O'Donnell) and two from St Kevin's Parish (Carmel Purdey and Tiziana D'Costa). My aim was to have a small group of people willing to put large amounts of time (roughly four hours a week) into helping me as our two parishes seek to understand what it means to have a single parish priest, what it means to come out of Covid-19, what it means to seek to rejuvenate our ministries and faith life, what it means to be the light of Christ in these suburbs, what it means to seek to be disciples who go and make disciples.

The purpose of this group is not to put forward a final plan of action that is foisted upon the parishes. Rather it is to put significant time into discernment of ways in which we might journey forwards so that we can have a real basis for conversation.

The time is now ripe, possibly a few weeks late if things were happening in an ideal world, to inform you of our thinking and outline our thoughts on how things might progress from here. We haven't finished but we have some ideas. We have two wonderful parishes of St Gregory the Great and St Kevin's – Doncaster and Templestowe with devoted and willing parishioners: we seek your thoughts and participation.

Our first effort as a team was to spend time learning about each other, learning about our gifts and skills and interests, learning if we could work together in a team which lives the love of Jesus Christ through respect, open communication, trust, willingness to challenge, readiness to make suggestions, honesty, humility, acceptance of correction. We learnt a lot. We are highly diverse and came to understand that the Holy Spirit is indeed working with me, with us and through us.

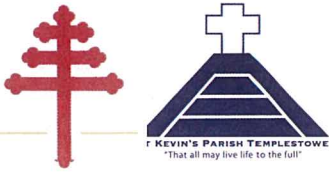
Our work is grounded in the culture of St Greg's and of St Kevin's, and in the various pieces of discernment already done the parishes. It is grounded in the Parish Forum at St Kevin's a few years ago that looked at the future of the parish assuming there was no parish priest, work which led to the employment of Gerry Lewis followed by Tiziana D'Costa as our Lay Ecclesial (church) leader. It is grounded also in the four pillars of the pre-Covid strategic plan of St Greg's. It is grounded in the report of 29 interviews that Gerry Lewis did with parishioners of St Kevin's seeking their ideas about the nature of the parish. It is grounded in the work done at St Greg's through the Parish Pastoral Council and the 2022/23 Parish Ministry Forums. It is grounded in feedback from the two Parish Pastoral Councils and the three School Principals. It is grounded in feedback from the staff of both parishes.

While we have focussed upon what we can do now within our parishes, we are aware of the broader church. We are deeply aware of the implications of the 2021/22 Australian Plenary Council and its decrees and of the potential that can arise from Pope Frances' Synod of Bishops happening in 2023/24.

We sought advice from other parishes (Parishes of Greater Box Hill, Parishes of Camberwell, Balwyn & Deepdene, Surrey Hills Wattle Park), and from a parish leadership specialist Ron Huntley who has been forming and coaching us. We included data from the Melbourne Archdiocese 'Take the Way of the Gospel' project. I have kept Archbishop Peter and the Vicar General and the Proclaim team up to date with our thinking.

So far our thinking has led to the following suggestions:

- That we recognise and accept that we are now linked, on a continuing basis, sharing a parish priest.
- That we actively strive to build greater community between St Gregory the Great and St Kevin's. We considered identifying the commonality of our parishes through a title such as "The Community of Parishes of St Gregory the Great and St Kevin." We realised that this presumes a future while in



St Greg's and St Kevin's Progress Report Parish Planning / Future Thinking

fact our parishes are still discerning the future. Instead, we are using the more accurate statement that we are linked on a continuing basis and are striving to build greater community.

- That our parishes need to keep local identity and community while at the same time seeking cross-fertilisation/cooperation/commonality/sharing/integration where possible.

Structure: We, as parishes, need to discern the needs of our parishes and how best they can operate to support all the calls to ministry. There is presently a large amount of administrative work that rests on Fr Charles, in addition to the Pastoral/Sacramental/Liturgical/School/Funerals work, and then the work to discern future needs and directions. It would be easy just to employ someone to take on pieces of administration and do some pastoral work. It seems to us that there must be a way to work more effectively. We are beginning to look into those possibilities – starting with what is, looking at what we see as the outcomes the parishes need, and then looking at how the outcomes might be delivered through a relevant structure. When we have something to share for discussion, we will do so.

Eucharist: We need to continue to grow the work of the past to enable our celebration of the Mass to be a moment of grace and encounter with Jesus Christ for everyone who joins. Celebration of Eucharist is central to who we are, a celebration by the community for the community. It is the source of how we live our lives all day every day, and it is the summit of how we give thanks to God. We haven't even scratched the surface of this area of thinking yet. But we know it is vital.

Ministries: Enabling the Holy Spirit in / Revitalising / Growing the ministries we already do so well. The new ministries started at St Kevin's and the ministry forums at St Greg's are a part of going down this path.

Evangelisation: my experience, a report about St Kevin's prepared by Gerry Lewis, the call of Pope Francis, the discernment done by Archbishop Peter, the sense of the members of this small team, the sense of our parish pastoral councils is that this is a crucial area for us to grow in so that we can more fully live the call Jesus makes to "go and make disciples." There will be many facets to this effort: our schools and our diverse cultural backgrounds will be crucial in this effort.

My intuition and that of others suggests that if we can get better at being people who bring people to Jesus then that will enliven everyone in our communities and will facilitate progress in all other areas.

Our insights as a team at present, looking forwards are modest:

1. Foster existing and new ways of working together such as joint events; encouraging each other to attend weekday masses at each other's parish; Fr Charles meeting the three principals together (instead of one-on-one); alternating Reconciliation Services between parishes.
2. Meet with you and discuss the progress of the group, seeking comment, suggestions. We'll start with small groups and Parish Pastoral Councils and Finance Groups.
3. Plan for parish wide forums at St Kevin's and at St Greg's to canvas our suggestions and your thoughts. As appropriate, hold joint parish forums.

If you have any questions, ideas, concerns please contact Fr Charles.

Templestowe@cam.org.au 9850 5983 or Doncaster@cam.org.au 9412 8425

God bless,

Fr Charles, Parish Priest