



# ‘Leading for Mission’: Regional Consultation Summary

On the feast of Pentecost 2021, Archbishop Peter A Comensoli invited us on a journey of reimagining our local Church in Melbourne as a series of ‘mission communities’ taking up the call to embrace the ‘path of missionary discipleship’. As Pope Francis has reminded us in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the missionary option is ‘capable of transforming everything’, and sometimes new structures and ways will be required for the apostolic spirit to gain momentum.

In the face of the many challenges facing us today, *Take the Way of the Gospel* invites us to be open to how we might reframe our current way of doing things so as to proclaim the Gospel anew, and with fresh apostolic spirit, in our own time and place.

While we know that change doesn’t happen overnight, disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic slowed things even more. We have also listened to requests that parishes be more involved in the conversations around this ‘reimagining’. Archbishop Comensoli, in outlining his vision for *Take the Way of the Gospel*, proposed that:

*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 to one another; open your hearts to where the Lord is calling us; reach out to your neighbours in faith.*

The following report is the result of a Diocesan-wide opportunity for consultation that invited and called our clergy and lay leaders to listen, learn and walk together.

Over the course of April–May 2023, four consultation sessions, one in each geographical region, were held with parishes across the regions of the Archdiocese, with 80% of parishes represented. The output of

this first session, and the subsequent two rounds of consultation still to take place, will help inform the *Take the Way of the Gospel Parish Guide* that is in development and other resources to be developed by the Archdiocese in time.

The consultation time began in prayer, calling on the Holy Spirit to guide the discussion. Following this, the ‘World Café’ method of dialogue was used, during which, over several rounds of small-group conversations, participants reflected and responded to particular questions. In this way, people had the chance not just to share, but also to listen deeply to what was being said by others from parishes and communities different from their own. Each round of the conversation was concluded with a time of silent individual prayer, allowing time and space for the Spirit to be heard more deeply.

We are pleased to report that 78% of people in this first series indicated that they were happy with their experience of the consultation gatherings. Following their further feedback, we have collated the discussions under a series of common themes.

There were two questions for discussion in this first round of consultation, titled *Leading for Mission*:

1. How might we best express the missionary vision of our Archdiocese?
2. What support do parishes need to bring about this desired future?

Although this report cannot capture the full breadth and depth of those conversations, identifying the emerging themes is helpful in understanding the needs, questions and ideas that our local communities of grace bring to the table. Above all, it is exciting to see so many wanting to experience a new ‘Gospel fire’.

## Question 1: How do we best express the missionary vision of our Archdiocese?

On this question, there was a wealth of unifying ideas. Broadly, they come under the three categories of an **outward-looking faith**, **community** and **communication**.



### An outward-looking faith

The significance of our moment as a ‘**time of massive change**’ was recognised across all regions of the Archdiocese, as well as the need for the Church to be more outward-looking, to ‘**think outside the box**’ and respond effectively to the changing cultural landscape.

- There was a real appetite for ‘**renewal**’, for parishes and individuals to take up their ‘**baptismal call**’ to missionary discipleship.
- The theme of ‘**hospitality**’ emerged frequently. People wondered how their parishes might become places of hospitality and welcome, where relationships are fostered.
- Parishes across the regions expressed concern about the Church’s ‘**relevance**’. How might communities provide opportunities for ‘**engagement**’ for those who are ‘**disengaged**’? The desire to provide ‘**encounters with Jesus**’ was often spoken about.



### Community

It was clear that parishes should be seen as places of deep connection, which can ‘**enhance a sense of belonging**’. Several groups of people were identified as needing to be re-engaged lest parishes become ‘**isolated silos**’.

- Catholic schools featured prominently, with parishes wishing to be more connected to their schools and to journey with them.
- Young people are also identified: to be met where they are and also ‘**engaged to serve**’ and ‘**lead**’.

- A desire to reconnect with families, and to draw them into the life of the parish, was expressed. People wondered how they might better provide for the needs of families.
- The ‘**cultural diversity**’ of the Church was highlighted as needing to be better recognised and celebrated, with more opportunities created for migrant communities.
- Cultivating a rich sacramental and liturgical life, through the Mass, devotions and other sacraments, was seen as ‘**central**’ to renewal.



### Communication

Good communication was seen by parishes as foundational to mission.

- Parishes expressed a need for communities to have a ‘**clear vision**’, so that there is a definite sense of ‘**direction**’.
- A need to adopt language that promotes ‘**comprehension**’ and ‘**understanding**’ of key concepts of the faith was identified.
- Establishing networks of communication between parishes and the Archdiocese was identified as being essential to feeling part of a common Church, rather than parishes being left ‘**to their own devices**’.
- Parishes should learn and adopt new ‘**technologies**’ in their communication of the Gospel.

## Question 2: What support do parishes require to bring about this desired future?

Again, there was a wealth of common concern when this question was discussed. Broadly, the responses may be placed under the categories of **formation**, **clergy support**, and **resources and strategies**.

### Formation

Across all the parishes, there was an expressed desire for greater formation, so that people are **'ready to give voice to the hope within us'**.

- Formation and training for lay leadership were identified as vital to becoming more missionary. This involved practical training for evangelisation as well as opportunities for spiritual formation, especially good catechesis and retreats, since **'we can only give what we have received'**.
- The laity more broadly were seen as being **'part of the solution'**. Beyond leadership, greater investment in the formation of those in the pews was desired so they may also go out with a **'fire in the belly'** for Jesus.

### Clergy support

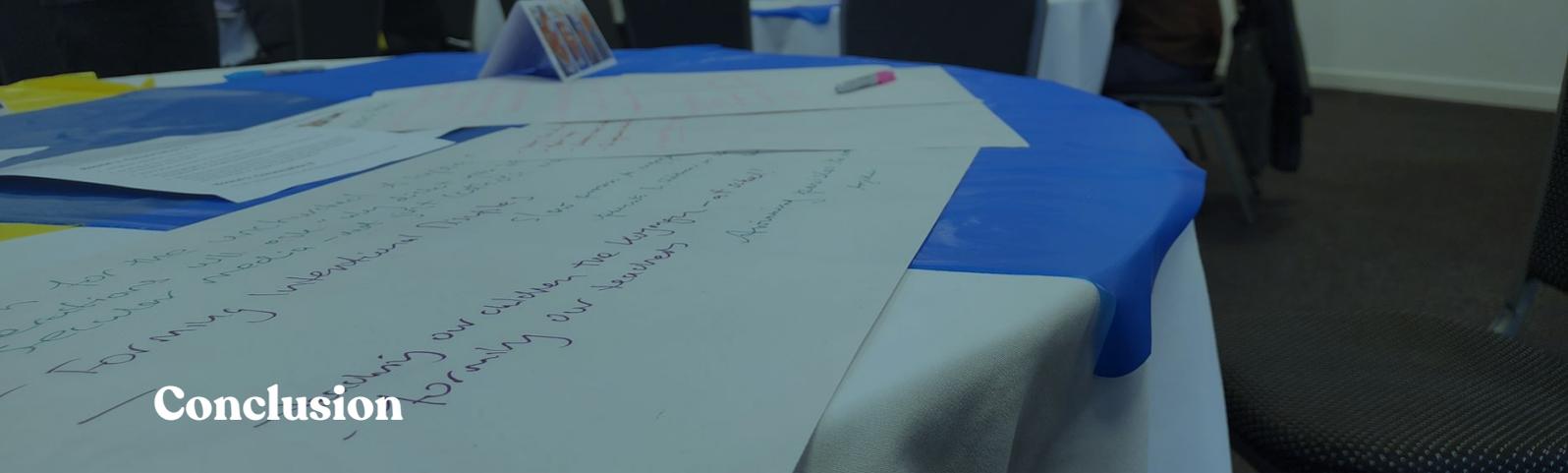
The busyness of priests was often acknowledged, with communities wanting to alleviate many of the administrative tasks that might be seen as distracting from their priest's pastoral and sacramental duties. Some suggestions for support included:

- increasing professional support in the technological, financial, legal and **'business'** areas of running a parish
- identifying lay leaders to support a priest in his leadership so he can be encouraged and inspired.

### Resources and strategies

Part of having a **'clear vision'** means developing **'strategies'** for missionary renewal.

- The provision of various tools (such as Alpha) was identified often as critical to becoming an **'outward-looking'** parish.
- Strategies also need to be developed for encouraging the **'participation'** and **'engagement'** of disaffiliated people: young people, families and school communities.
- Promoting collaboration between parishes so that they can share ideas and resources may also be necessary to bring about the desired future of our missionary communities.
- Many people expressed the need for greater **'financial support'** for their parishes.



## Conclusion

*Leading for Mission* was the first of three consultation sessions centred around *Take the Way of the Gospel* that will take place across the Archdiocese. It was a fruitful time, with many participants grateful for the opportunity to speak with those they had never met before and to establish new connections.

It became clear that this style of conversation was a helpful model of how individuals and communities might sit, listen and discern together on the path of mission renewal.

The first round of consultation provides helpful indicators to understand where we are as the local Church in Melbourne and where the Spirit may be calling us forward. This is just an initial step on the way to reimagining how we might proclaim the Gospel anew in Melbourne today.

As the disciples gathered on the first Pentecost, may we now continue to pray and discern what has been shared and heard from the consultation sessions.

As Archbishop Comensoli wrote in his *Take the Way of the Gospel* pastoral letter,

*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 the Church, pray for us.**

