

Building Stronger Parish Partnerships for Mission Frequently Asked Questions

"A synodal process where all voices are heard along the way." Pope Francis

These FAQs are provided against a background of what is happening today across all parishes in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Our parishes are focussed on managing any change that is needed to continue being a vibrant Catholic faith community. The process that our parishes are undertaking will be repeated across numerous parishes in the Archdiocese. It is suggested this page be read in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Melbourne, [Take the Way of the Gospel](#)

What is being proposed?

A new model for the Parishes of Camberwell, Balwyn Deepdene and Surrey Hills Wattle Park is being proposed. Each parish maintains its identity but, where possible and desirable, works together with the parish members of our five churches to strengthen who we are for the benefit of everyone. A formal merger of the parishes is not being proposed.

Why are we looking to change?

We have, as the Archdiocese has stated for some time, a "crisis" in terms of the number of priests we have, as well as societal changes that include a decrease in religious affiliation and an ongoing decline in Mass attendance. If we do nothing then we are at risk of having a continued reduction in our Catholic community.

We, as parishioners, have a shared responsibility and opportunity to work to grow our church and continue to enjoy all that parish life can offer. Parishioners will have the opportunity to be involved in change and we already have many people from across our parishes working with our Parish Priest in determining what will work for our group of parishes going forward.

Who is making this change?

From an overview perspective, the Archdiocese has identified the need to change or adapt. The Archdiocese has also indicated that it would like parishes themselves to facilitate the change with significant lay involvement so that the Church is less institutional and more missionary in its focus. Our parishes and parishioners have taken ownership of the process to make changes needed to continue to do the many things we do today as well as position our parishes for tomorrow.

What Churches or Parishes are involved?

We have three parishes and five churches, so it involves Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell, All Hallows, Balwyn, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Deepdene, Our Holy Redeemer, Surrey Hills and Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Wattle Park.

What does that mean for me and the parishes of the future?

The outcome of any change is aimed at being able to continue with our three parishes and worshipping communities, maintaining the identity of each and continuing to support local ministries and interest groups. Pastoral care and the provision of the sacraments will continue to be a priority across our parishes. You will be able to continue to participate in parish life as you do today and with new opportunities in the future.

What is a partnership of parishes?

A partnership is a group of parishes sharing a Parish Priest, utilising the expertise and knowledge of the operational teams of the parishes to continue to deliver all the services currently provided and add new ones as needed. It will enable people from common interest groups, across the parishes, to support each other, if needed, or for parishioners to participate in other groups in the partnered parishes. It will grow the involvement of lay people working with the Parish Priest, as people share their experiences and understanding of parish life.

It is not a merger or a closure of any parishes or churches. That is not the intention of any change.

It is a word to represent groups working together. The Archdiocese uses the word Mission to reflect this working together approach.

What is the proposed new structure of the parishes?

Our new structure consists of partnered parishes sharing priests and staff.

There will be one Parish Council overseeing the partnered parishes. This council includes the Parish Priest with representatives from each parish and additional parish members who possess skills required on the council.

The purpose of this council is to provide strategic direction, support the mission of the parishes, provide oversight and stewardship of finance, assets, risk, safety of the vulnerable and communities, and overall governance.

Something new is Parish Life Teams for each Sunday worshipping community. These teams of lay persons provide support and enhance involvement in Parish life, provide the regular face to face contact at weekend Masses across all parishes and provide a point of contact for pastoral initiatives or needs coming in and out of parish life.

Aren't our parish partnerships big enough already? Why are we creating more partnerships?

Our current parish communities are relatively small given the number of parishes we have in our region. If we do nothing, we won't have the resources, including priests, to support the small numbers of parishioners. A partnership has been identified as being one positive way to be able to continue to support parishioners and enable the individual parishes to continue to operate and is modelled on the successful partnership between Balwyn and Deepdene Parishes.

Does this mean that the parishes are merged?

A partnership does not mean the parishes are merged. Each parish retains its identity. If, through time, the parishes decide that they are more viable as one entity, then they can petition the Archbishop to merge them. However, this would only take place if there was a substantial agreement in each parish for this to occur. Importantly, each parish will continue to maintain ownership of its assets. The parishes may choose to collaborate and share facilities as and when needed.

What will happen to our Sunday Masses?

We are fortunate to have a number of priests in our parishes saying Mass. Currently we have two priests appointed full time to our three parishes – our Parish Priest, Father Brendan Reed and our Assistant Priest, Father Trac Nguyen. We are also fortunate to have the assistance of two retired clergy, Emeritus Archbishop Denis Hart and Father Frank O'Loughlin. Our clergy celebrate Mass at each of our churches on a rostered basis.

What is the effect on parish schools?

Our parish schools have also undergone change over the last year. Catholic parish primary schools are now all under the governance of Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (MACS). However, the local Parish Priest remains the Custodian of Mission and will continue to be involved in the life of the parish schools. The parishes will continue to be responsible for Sacramental celebrations and encouraging the faith development of school families. We look to strengthen the involvement of parish schools in the community and to provide a channel for school families to be involved in the parishes.