

## **Report to St Marys Parish Council following parish and community consultation in May 2023**

- Following the recent consultation on our future, I've been asked by the Parish Council to make a report regarding the responses that came back through the consultation.
- Priorities for the parish on people focused initiatives are summarised in the attached two-page document. The intent should be to do more - options are presented – as if we only do what we have been doing, we will continue to reap the same meagre fruits.
- Also attached is a PowerPoint presentation prepared by Nigel, that summarises the consultation responses.
- Priorities for our building assets are discussed below.
- The general state of our building assets at our Sewell Street site can be generalised as aged and deteriorated. They require major expenditure in the near to mid-term, and it is probably more prudent to use that money to replace these assets with low maintenance ones.
- Regarding these assets, our recent consultation showed that our current worshipping parishioners favoured wanting a new Chapel or Church (that we own outright), rather than continuing renting the leaking Seaview Chapel. Whereas the wider community preferred restoration of the old St Marys Church.
  
- **Imperative #1 Demographics**
- We face a looming demographic and income cliff, as many of our parishioners will likely die, or move away over the next 10-15 years due to their advanced age. Consequently, our planned giving and ability to fundraise from among ourselves is likely to decline significantly over that timeframe. If we are to do anything, we need to do it very soon while we still have some numbers. Within this year, we should be recommending to our Bishop, what our renewal plans entail.
- We need to do what we can feasibly afford to do, and without undue risk to the parish's future - that is, we should proceed with the most financially viable option(s).
  
- **Imperative #2 The spiritual life of our community**
- The Parish has had no functional Church for the last 10 years. It has affected the worship life of the believing community significantly. There is a dire need to enhance, support and sustain the pastoral, liturgical and sacramental facets of our faith, and the work of evangelization as the main mission of the parish.
- Father Joaquin has told me only there are only about four or five Hokitika parishioner's a week, who regularly visit the Presbytery Chapel outside of scheduled Masses. Our public prayer life is at a minimum, and parishioners are abandoning to loneliness, the Real Presence of the Lord in the Tabernacle. Whether it be at the Presbytery Chapel (not visited) or Seaview Chapel (not accessible outside of Sunday morning). Our Lord's presence in the Blessed Sacrament is basically being ignored, partially through not having our own worthy place of worship. And I fear this would continue, until we have a spiritually satisfying building that we can use any day and that has sufficient beauty to attract people to come.
- Stations of the Cross at our current Presbytery chapel, use paper numbers on the walls or plain wooden crosses outside to represent the stations. Where is our beauty of symbolism to make us think of Heaven and our God? Some of our faith community may not find these practices of piety important, but do they have a right to diminish them, to those who do?

- The purpose of a Church building as pronounced in our current Catechism “visible churches are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the Church living in this place, the dwelling of God with men reconciled and united in Christ” (CCC 1180).

- **Considerations regarding a restoration of the old St Marys Church**

- **Risk #1 Affordability**

- We have a slim chance of affording a costly restoration project for the old church – presently costing between \$6-12Million (respectively from FOSM and Diocese reports, plus inflation since their writing).

- **Risk #2 Cost blow outs**

- The other current earthquake restrengthening projects in Hokitika show the financial risks of engaging in such works (The Carnegie building restoration estimated in 2016 at \$0.5M, is still unfinished at July 2023 at \$2.9M and the Seddon House/Government Building estimated in 2022 to cost \$22M, has just one year later been raised to \$33M).
- Our parish cannot afford to engage in such financial risk, it could expend every cent we collect/fundraise and still be left with an unfinished asset.

- **Risk #3 Ongoing expenses**

- The parish cannot afford to upkeep/run assets costing more than approximately \$3Million, possibly slightly more if they have very low maintenance costs. For example, a restored St Marys Church valued at a low figure of \$6M, would cost us approximately an additional \$20K annually to cover insurance and electricity costs. To afford this the parish would have to nearly double its planned giving income. (Recall that the parish has to give 1/3 of collection income to the clergy fund and a further percentage of giving to cover the costs of running the diocese).

- **Risk #4 Decline in parishioner numbers**

- Especially those who are below pension age i.e. still on a good income. Our parish Mass attendance has declined by approximately 50% in the period 2011 to 2022. See attached statistics graphic provided by the Diocese.

- **Risk # 5 The standard of restoration**

- The costings obtained so far, relate only to earthquake strengthening to 34% of current national building standard. See BECA data attached. A building at 34% is expected to have a design life of < 55years before being ruined in an earthquake in the magnitude 6 range. 34% of NBS is designed to allow occupants to survive a major earthquake, but from such an event the building is likely to be beyond repair. And current probability for our district is a 75% chance of experiencing a Magnitude 8 earthquake on the nearby Alpine Fault within 50 years.
- If you want to preserve the old St Marys Church beyond 50-60 years, it should be restored to 65% of NBS or higher. (This is why the Carnegie building has been strengthened to 65% NBS). This would entail a significantly higher restrengthening cost.

- **Risk #6 Borrowing**
- The parish cannot afford to borrow. Borrowing costs on just \$1M, would at current interest rates amount to \$85K/year, which is more than our current annual income.
  
- **Risk #7 Inflation**
- High current inflation in NZ is escalating costs. This has already added \$1-2Million to the costings presented in the FOSM and Diocese restrengthening reports.
  
- **Risk #8 Fundraising**
- This has failed before. The parish has over the past decade failed to gain sufficient outside fundraising on several occasions (despite good submissions) and local fundraising only collected a maximum of approximately \$300K.
  
- **Conflict One - Mission**
- The mission of the church is to go out and make disciples (Mt 28:19), not to go nowhere and continually fundraise. Consultation responses from active parishioners were predominately related to evangelisation and pastoral care. See the people priorities summary from our consultation.
- Our resources are meant to be used for mission not maintenance. We should focus on goals that are more realistic for our numbers and finances.
  
- **Conflict Two – Size of facilities**
- The parish does not need large facilities except on a few days a year. Statistics obtained from the Diocese show that our parish October Mass count has almost halved in just over a decade. From around 160 in 2011 to just 80 last year. Approximately a quarter of the parish is at the Kokatahi and Ross Mass centres, leaving around 60 at Hokitika. Of this number approximately 1/3 attend Saturday night and the remainder go on Sunday morning i.e. a regular attendance of about 40 people at the largest service. Good Friday 2023 saw attendance for the whole parish in one service at Seaview Chapel, Hokitika and was only in the 50's.
- The most common use of a large church building would be for funerals, where some West Coast priests have advised me, that we need a minimum capacity of one hundred, (because of our wet climate, everyone has to be undercover).
  
- **Conflict Three - Debt**
- Current debt for the parish with the diocese, for works done to date with the old church, amounts to approximately \$600K. How are we going to repay this, on top of astronomic building costs?

#### **Recommendation**

**I am recommending that the parish undertake two concurrent proposals to engage both worshipping parishioners and the wider community.**

- **Proposal One**

- Risk can be removed from the parish by leasing the old St Marys Church to a Charitable Trust – for example formed and run by the Friends of St Marys (FOSM) - for a symbolic sum. If this trust finishes the restoration of the old church, the parish could then rent the restored church for occasions requiring large capacity (whole school masses etc).
- Such a lease agreement would need to have the Trust take over the building's financial burden e.g. rates and insurance. As well as a small annual rental to the parish to cover the electricity and maintenance costs for the illuminated Cross and possible floodlighting & pending fire alarm. Such an agreement would need to have a sunset or surrender clause (returning the building to the parish), if such Trust makes no progress in restoration over a certain time-period, or it ends up dissolving. And the lease would have to have strict conditions that the building would only be used for purposes in alignment with our faith.
- **Proposal Two**
- Replace our current assets with low maintenance modern buildings - as soon as possible, due to our spiritual needs and pending demographic change.
- The Parish Council and Parish Priest need to decide which of our building assets need replacing first, considering the pending school building renewal project, scheduled for completion within the next five years. Either
  - (a) replacing the Presbytery
  - (b) building a new Chapel/Church (approximate capacity 100 people) that can be done within a building cost of \$2-3 Million and
  - (c) a new Parish Centre -possibly attached to a new Chapel/Church.

I recommend the parish undertake all three asset replacements in a staggered timeline approach. Out of the three, the Parish Centre should be the lowest priority, as it is presently the most functional.
- If the parish manages to reduce its regular outgoings associated with the old church and Seaview, it could put that money towards investigating or saving for new replacement assets.
- Failure to achieve nothing – as per the last decade - will probably see our parish in time amalgamated, divided up between the neighbouring Greymouth and South Westland parishes.

Yours in Christ  
 Peter McLaughlin  
 Kaniere  
 6 Aug 2023