

The Anglican Parish of South Grafton



Vacancy Consultation Report



Compiled by: The Diocesan Archdeacon/MDO Gail Hagon
23 September, 2018

Notes: 27 people in attendance
Slightly more females than males
Average age 70+

Overview: The Vacancy Consultation Process began with an overview of the life of the Church nationally. The following observations were made:

- Church in decline
- Aging Congregations
- Diminishing skillset
- Differences between urban and rural/regional ministry
- Parish Tenures
- Fewer people going into full time ministry

Some Statistics were offered in relation to our neighbouring Dioceses of Newcastle and Brisbane:

- Average of clergy
- Availability of Locums
- Restructure and the amalgamation of parishes.

Particular points were also noted about our diocesan life:

- Decline in numbers
- Age of congregations
- Fewer priests being called to Northern Rivers
- Preference for one centre parishes
- Fewer ordinands
- Number of ordained people that have left ministry in past 10 years
- The current number of vacant parishes in the diocese.

The Consultation Review itself centred around five main areas:

- The Parish **NOW**
- The Parish in the **FUTURE** (next 3 years)
- Openness to **CHANGE**
- Skillset
- Leadership

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW:

The parish of South Grafton was once a vibrant parish and exercised a number of diverse ministries. Its leaders in the 1980's and 1990's were strategic leaders giving the parish goals to strive towards and dreams to live into.

As such the parish flourished, and lay people were empowered. The commencement of a Saturday night service in the 80's, with its focus on attracting young families, saw the development of creative liturgy and a number of new initiatives evolving. A social group for young families, *Family Fellowship*, commenced as a way of drawing young families together. The parish also commenced a building programme, which eventually saw the selling of the old St. Matthew's Church, and the building of the current church on Tyson Street. This building project has been a mammoth undertaking for the parish and has taken many years to complete.

During the early 1990s the parish discerned a call upon a lay person, and supported them through the discernment process and into priestly ministry. A few years later they also raised up an honorary Deacon, one who still exercises a solid ministry in the parish today. Two other significant ministries that commenced during the 1990's were the ministry of the Family Group movement, which is still active in the parish today, and the ministry of the Op Shop. It is worth noting that since its inception the ministry of the Op Shop has been recognised as an outreach ministry, giving 10% of its income back to those in need in the community. Whilst the Op Shop makes a significant contribution to the life of the parish, it still continues to tithe 10% of its income back into the wider community.

Over more recent years the Parish of South Grafton has consistently explored ways as to how they might connect with the wider community.

It would be true to say that the aging congregation is tired and concerned about its future but they are not people without hope. There is a genuine desire to change, and to be given a vision that they can realistically live into. Evidence of this was seen at the meeting as a motion was moved from the floor that the discussions of this meeting be placed on the Agenda of the next Parish Council meeting for discussion and action.

The parish believes that the three main reasons why it exists are:

- Worship. To gather together as God's people in this area.
- Fellowship. To encourage one another
- Outreach. To be God's presence in the world.

They believe that they are well connected to the wider community through their pastoral care ministry, funeral and catering ministry and their ministry through the Op Shop.

There is currently a growing ministry to young children through a new initiative called Kids Musical Playtime. The parish is keen to explore ways in which to promote and enrich this ministry and recognise the need to invest financially and spiritually in this initiative.

Those who participated in the Vacancy Consultation were all acutely aware that their financial sustainability as a parish relies on the financial support of the Op Shop.

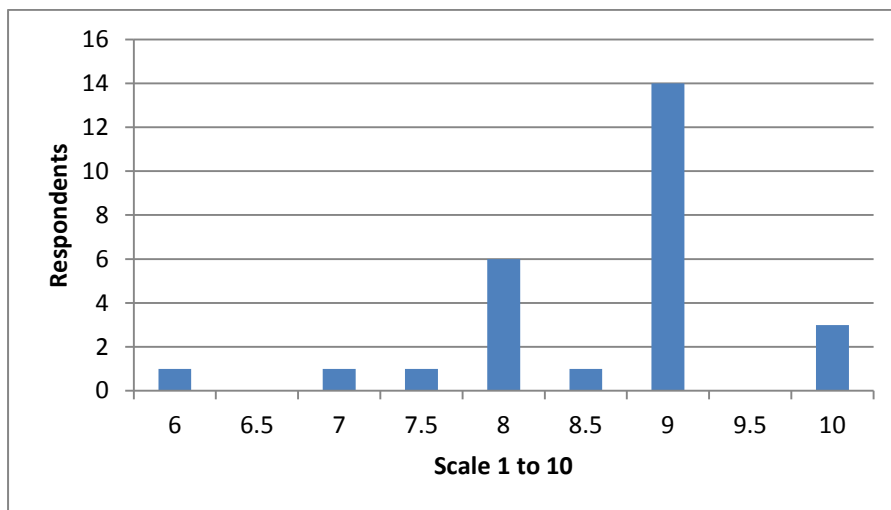
CHURCH OF THE FUTURE:

In looking at their future the Vacancy Consultation revealed that those gathered saw their main (3) priorities for the next three years as being:

- Enable to embrace the change that is needed for growth
- Investing in growing Kids Musical Playtime
- Supporting its existing outreach ministries

Those gathered saw age and health as being the biggest obstacles in being able to achieve their goals. Whilst they acknowledge that change is not easy, they believe that if change is clearly communicated and explained it will be embraced in the parish. Those gathered for the Vacancy Consultation presented a realistic view of the parish, i.e. they are an aging congregation, in decline but that there also signs of hope (Kids Playtime Ministry). They are aware of the need to change and appear ready to explore what that might mean for them as a parish.

The graph below represents the openness to change that exists in the parish.



Those gathered were also able to identify some changes that they could initiate and act upon immediately:

- Explore times and styles of worship services **
- Host combined/ecumenical services – work in partnerships with others
- Increase the use of social media
- Release the minister’s time from maintaining what is, to exploring what can be **

In exploring what skills set the parish has currently to offer a new priest, or indeed the community at large, the following things were listed as priorities:

- A modern and well-kept building that can be used as a multipurpose centre.
- A prayerful, supporting, encouraging & understanding, loving & open to change congregation

- An evolving children's ministry
- Faithful people
- Willing to try, to dream and to be involved (may need a little push or shove).
- Connected to the Community.

The leadership in the parish appears to be collaborative. Certainly there is a real sense that the buck stops with the Rector, however there is recognition that that they are all leaders, and all have a part in the decision making process.

They believe that the main gifts a new rector would need in coming to the Parish of South Grafton to minister with them is someone who is:

- A visionary, someone who can strategically plan
- Able to implement change
- Able to work in a rural community
- A team player
- Able to encourage them to use the gifts that they have.

This report has been compiled by the raw data provided from the Vacancy Consultation by Archdeacon Gail Hagon.

The raw data material is held on file in the Diocesan Office.