

Parish Vacancy Consultation Report



The Cathedral Parish of Christ Church Grafton NSW

Venue: The Edwards Hall (Cathedral Precinct)

Date: 23 January 2022

Conducted by The Venerable Judy Edwards

Cathedral Parish Vision Statement

We seek to be a generous faith community centred around the person and teachings of Jesus, open to new insights from the natural and social sciences, and engaged with the wider community in compassionate action for the common good.

Brief context

In addition to the Sunday Eucharist usually attended by 30-40 people, the Cathedral also has a midweek Eucharist with an average attendance of 15-20 people. There are also many on-line participants for whom this is their only connection with the Cathedral.

The church at Copmanhurst has recently been sold and the Church at Lawrence is being prepared for closure and sale in the early part of 2022. There are no other worship centres.

Apart from the Dean the clergy team consists of two honorary clergy- Rev Grant Sparks (Cathedral Deacon) and Rev Canon Camellia Flanagan.

The Consultation took place following the Sunday service at which the bishop preached. 24 parishioners attended the consultation together with Bishop Murray and Rev Grant who acted as recorder.

Of the participants, there was one under the age of 40, six between 40 and 60, five between 60 and 70, five between 70 and 80, four over 80 and two over 90. Of these, seven have been associated with the Cathedral all their adult lives, and four, for less than four years.

From the individual feedback given, 70% of those present were actively involved in multiple roles and activities in the life of the parish.

The general mood of the meeting was positive, and parishioners participated enthusiastically. Part of the Consultation was conducted in a general discussion format with the aid of a power point presentation. There were two sessions of small group work with plenary sessions following each. At the end of the consultation, an opportunity was given for comment without clergy being present. This resulted in affirmation of the clergy team with no other comments.

Findings of the Consultancy

Participants describe themselves as a parish which has a generous heart, is inclusive and adaptive and seeks to minister to the wider Grafton Community. They believe themselves to be people who seek solutions, are bearers of fruit, listen well and engage easily in conversation with others. Despite a large 'virtual' community, they lament decreasing numbers and physical capacity due to their age. They acknowledge that as a Cathedral parish, they have a special place in the Diocese and therefore feel part of something bigger.

The role of the parish in the general community is perceived by participants as providing a gathering place and a safe haven which encourages faith development and allows the wider community to celebrate and commiserate, supported by a compassionate clergy team and congregation. It's involvement in welfare through the Op Shop and Parish Pantry is considered an important part of its ministry as is the forum it provides for social justice and environmental engagement.

The Cathedral parish sees itself as being a resource for both the Diocese and the wider community in modelling traditional Anglican worship and offering an alternative to the secular community. It is proud of its ecumenical activities, its excellence in liturgy and music and its high standard of online offerings and information technology capacity. It also acknowledges its role in education particularly through its relationship with the Clarence Valley Anglican School.

Amongst things named as being of most value in parish life are

- the sense of belonging to a family which is socially progressive and provides non discriminating fellowship, friendship, mutual care and peace
- a strong sense of duty and obligation
- stability and permanence
- the liturgy and style of worship and its underpinning by scripture
- a cathedral prayer which embodies the life of the parish
- A high standard of teaching with thoughtful and deeply considered theological, challenging, and relevant sermons
- Wisdom of leaders

- Holy Communion
- Participation in reading, welcoming, intercessions and providing hospitality
- The pleasant and peaceful surrounds of the cathedral and memorial garden

Several skills and strengths are identified in the cathedral community

- Willingness to volunteer
- Livestreaming
- Parish administration, financial management
- Caring ministry through the Op Shop, Bookshop and Pantry
- Organizational skills and life experience of clergy team
- Domestic skills
- Musical abilities
- Dedicated verger
- Pastoral care and Solace and comfort through funeral ministry
- Capacity for physical work - gardening cleaning
- Theological skills
- Educational skills
- Diplomacy

When considering how well the parish engages with the Five Marks of Mission, it appears that many of the participants have not related ministry in this context. However, they acknowledge that Covid prevented effective engagement in the community and that much of the previous mission and ministry such as Earth Hour and their response to the Christchurch massacre, was initiated by clergy. Sadness is expressed at the absence of previous 'baptism families' in the current congregation.

A discussion undertaken about what is considered important in parish life in the future resulted in the following comments being offered

- Laity need to speak out more and push much harder
- There is a need both as individuals and as the parish community, to trust God and commit to the prayer of faith – to believe before we see
- Plans that were aborted due to Covid need to be revisited
- Regular 'think tanks' could assist the parish with communication, vision and action plans

While those present agree they are generally open to change, a desire is expressed that the congregation's opinions be listened to and that if change is needed and agreed upon, it should not be rushed. It was noted that 'Sometimes the voice of the people can be suppressed by the clergy'. Little energy is evident for specific implications regarding the Diocesan Strategic Plan, although people are generally content to share resources with South Grafton.

Participants are agreed that it is hoped the next Dean of Grafton will be a person of reconciliation, inspired by God, socially aware and theologically progressive with a heart for mission which enables a realistic and creative engagement with the Grafton community.

Due to the nature of the Dean's role, the capacity to work in both parish and diocesan contexts with a clear understanding of the boundaries of both, is essential. There must also be a realization that current honorary clergy commitment levels may change over time and are not a permanent resource.

It is envisaged the next Dean will possess significant life experience, highly developed organizational ability, and the people skills necessary to form authentic, cohesive relationships and achieve excellent communication on all levels. Pastoral sensitivity and willingness to be an integral part of the cathedral family, open to both receiving from, and offering ministry and hospitality to them, will be highly valued.

Those present give the impression they would like their new Dean to work with them in building the mission and ministry of the Cathedral Parish in the Grafton community in a similar direction to that established over the last few years.

Closing Comments

It has been a privilege to conduct this consultation and I thank those who participated for their openness to the process and for their valuable contributions. Please be assured of my continued prayerful support as you undergo transition to new leadership and continue to grow God's mission and ministry to the people of Grafton.

Rev Canon Judy Edwards
Archdeacon (Acting) for the North