

OUR CHANGING CHURCH # 11 - 2015

“A delicious banquet”

Three things are identified as ‘markers’ of growth in faith, and growth in gathered faith – in other words church participation.

The surveys and studies that have been done agree that one or more of the following characteristics / demographics / actions will be present in parishes that are growing. In these parishes you will find at least one of these:

- **Recent immigrant Catholic families**
- **Young people and their families with active faith expression at home**
- **Personal testimony and invitation to those outside the Church**

In the past Catholics have relied heavily on Catholic schools to help develop and sustain faith in young people. As those young people became adults they continued to participate in the faith community of the local church. Studies show this is no longer the case. These days only around half of those young people who are Catholic or from Catholic families go to a Catholic school.* There are many reasons for these changes. Family has always been important in the development and sustaining of faith and this continues to be the case, as the studies show.

The third of the ‘markers’ is one that is well within our reach: Personal testimony and invitation to those outside the Church. This is evangelisation, literally sharing the good news. We are called as followers of Christ to share and this includes sharing why being a Catholic is wonderful, telling others, in particular young people, why it is important to you personally. This is not about what people must or should do, it’s about what will bring them joy and fulfilment. Jesus “came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Pope Francis says in *The Joy of the Gospel*:

“We cannot forget that evangelisation is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to *those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him*. Many of them are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face, even in countries of ancient Christian tradition. All of them have a right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’.” **

These words provide us with much to reflect on, personally as well as we plan in our parishes. It points us towards our mission.

Amanda Smith – Pastoral Services Consultant

* Diocese of Ballarat *Looking Forward Resource for Pastoral Planning* available on Ballarat Diocese website www.ballarat.catholic.org.au

** Pope Francis, “The Joy of the Gospel” (*Evangelii gaudium*) # 15

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124