



***Looking Forward***  
**Pastoral Planning**  
**for Parishes**  
**in the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat**



**2021-2025**

**December 2021**





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December 13, 2021

Dear People of the Diocese,

In February 2014, we published a booklet called “Looking Forward: A resource for pastoral planning in the Diocese of Ballarat”. The booklet included reflections on our mission as a Catholic community, data about the diocese at that time and ideas for future developments.

In 2019, through on-going meetings and discussions, a new edition of “Looking Forward” was released, gathering some of the fruits of these previous consultations, with principles to guide our pastoral planning, continuing data about the diocese and some proposals as to how parishes might be grouped together in ministry over the next few years.

2021 has brought about more changes in our diocese and we have come to see different ways in which we can work together. In many cases, this has involved sharing of personnel and material resources across a number of parishes. It has also involved more parishes coming together to form a new parish unit, while still nurturing the life of the local communities that are now part of a larger parish.

I hope this new edition promotes further reflection and conversation to benefit our local communities and our diocese as a whole.

May we continue to support one another on our pilgrim way, with confidence in Christ who walks with us on our journey.

God bless you all.

Paul Bird CSsR  
Bishop of Ballarat

# **The Diocese of Ballarat**

## **Vision Statement**

We are a community of communities from the Murray to the sea.  
Inspired by the Gospel and nourished by the Eucharist,  
we follow the example of Jesus  
and the guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
reaching out in joyful and humble service,  
caring for all of God's creation,  
growing in love day by day  
and looking forward to life with God forever.

## **Pastoral Planning Statement**

We are a community centred on the presence of Christ through the celebration of Word and Sacrament. We, the People of God, share responsibility for the future of the Church. Leadership and ministry in parish life is for all and we strive for this to be a recognised reality in all our church communities. Change is always with us and needs to occur in an atmosphere of respect and consultation. Our planning and structures are called to reflect our current needs and possibilities.

Good governance and management of our diocese and our parishes can contribute greatly to our mission. The sharing of resources, personnel and programs can create an economy of scale that benefits many aspects of our parish and diocesan life.

The 1996 pastoral planning document, 'A Shoot will Spring' recognised the significant changes occurring in parishes and suggested procedures to respond to them. This present document "Looking Forward", began in 2014, is its successor. "Looking Forward" is an evolving document taking into account changes in demographics, attendance and the views and experiences of parishioners. Changes concerning clergy, finances, administration and parish and diocesan personnel also affect the dynamics of the document. The Plenary Council of 2021/2022 will probably add another dimension to this document.

We foresee that the amalgamation of smaller parishes into larger entities, centred around major towns, assisted by capable community members and paid personnel, will be a step forward in

achieving our mission. Advances in technology will also greatly assist in our endeavours, as demonstrated with the East Wimmera Parish.

We are already anticipating that, in the next four years, one priest will move to minister in South America and four priests will retire, while one priest will return to parish ministry in our diocese after being on the seminary staff, three seminarians will be ordained and one priest will arrive from India. These are the developments that we can foresee. There will probably be other developments yet unknown that will call for further adjustments.

## **Key factors in decision-making**

- a. The documents of the Second Vatican Council provide direction and inspiration<sup>1</sup>, recognising that all baptised are the People of God, sharing in the priesthood of Christ<sup>2</sup>. Pope Francis' exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel" (*Evangelii Gaudium*) also provides guidance and insight into our current challenges.
- b. In developing proposals to reconfigure parishes, the people in each parish affected by a proposal be consulted and provided with opportunities to meet together to discuss options.<sup>3</sup> With the introduction of change, information and time are required for understanding and implementation.
- c. Ongoing formation is an integral part of pastoral planning.
- d. Strategic planning is important in the process of appointing priests to vacant parishes and consultation with interested parties is required.
- e. Catholics from diverse cultural backgrounds are increasingly part of our diocesan faith community and need consideration in pastoral planning.
- f. We recognise the need to foster, pray for and encourage all forms of ministry.
- g. Catholic faith has a rich tradition conveyed and celebrated in many ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican II, The Church, nn. 30-32, The Church in the Modern World, n. 43. Also Catechism of the Catholic Church, #910.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II, The Church, n. 10. Also Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1141.

<sup>3</sup> The Light from the Southern Cross, recommendation 70

- h. Changes are to focus on benefits for the community and serve the common good.
- i. The importance of local church communities and the key role they play in the faith life of the diocese
- j. The declining ability of parishes to maintain existing facilities and structures both physical and relational
- k. The desire of people to gather, pray, celebrate the Eucharist and other sacred events in their lives
- l. Amalgamating of parishes is an effective way to reduce administration, minimise duplication and make entities sustainable
- m. The closing of a church building does not necessarily mean the disbanding of the local community
- n. The need to develop new church entities in rapidly expanding population centres

## **Summary of data to inform Pastoral Planning**

The most recent Australian Census figures (2016) show a fall from 25% to 22.6% in the number of people in Ballarat Diocese identifying as Catholics. This translates as 6,347 fewer Catholics in the diocese. In a total population within the area of the Ballarat Diocese of 422,845 there are now 95,688 people identifying as Catholic. (2016 Census)<sup>4</sup>.

The 2019 Ballarat Diocese Mass Count figures (as counted in parishes) showed a total of 8,097 people attending weekend Masses (per weekend). This is 8.46% of those identifying as Catholic on the 2016 Census. Comparing the Mass Count figures of 2019 with those from five years earlier, there is a drop of 20% (from just over ten thousand people in 2014 to just over eight thousand in 2019).

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<sup>4</sup> Data from the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, configured for the diocese by the National Centre for Pastoral Research, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

The impact of COVID over the past eighteen months was revealed in the May 2021 Mass Count figures of 6,508, 19.8% down on the 2019 count. However, over the next five years, a significant decline in Mass attendance is anticipated when the current older demographic of Mass attendees will be significantly fewer. This cohort is much larger than other age groups and so the loss will be noticeable. There is also a trend of disaffiliation across most age groups under 60, so it appears the decline in numbers will continue. In comparison to the impact of immigration in some other dioceses, immigration has a relatively small impact in our diocese.

Many people speak of fewer priests. However, the diocese is also facing a significant shortage of parishioners. Not only is the number of parishioners declining, but the number of those with time and ability to undertake ministry at Mass and in other areas of parish life is also dwindling.

## ***Looking Forward***

### **Pastoral Plan 2021 - 2025**

When looking at the charts in the following pages we need to understand the following:

A parish is an organisational division within a diocese that provides support for the pastoral and spiritual needs of the local communities. Each parish has financial, compliance, insurance, safeguarding and licensing obligations.

A ministry district is a term applying to parishes within a particular geographical area where the priests and parishioners have established a sharing of resources, working in collaboration to further the mission of the church.

This plan acknowledges that many parishes have diminishing numbers of people and this impacts on ministry and finances. The increased cost of running a parish, together with decreasing income, means that many parishes are no longer sustainable. Amalgamation leads to a sharing of resources, expenses and less duplication. It is envisaged that many of these larger entities will have two priests working in the parish. Parishes may also employ associates with the appropriate training to provide pastoral care and services.

One of the observations associated with the 2021 Mass Count is that consistency in Mass time and venue leads to consistency in attendance and in some cases growth. A recommendation in this plan is for fewer Mass Centres with regularity in Mass venue and time.

The following charts indicate Ministry Districts and recommended Parish amalgamations over the next few years, as well as giving data on numbers of priests, people, Masses per weekend and churches per parish.

There are currently 26 priests in parish ministry, 34 parishes, just over 6,500 attending Mass, an average of 76 Masses per weekend across 99 churches.

Priest numbers includes Parish Priests, Administrators and Assistant Priests. 1/m = 1 Mass per month. Masses by regular visiting priests are counted in parishes where they are celebrated. The number of churches is a total for each grouping. During this time frame the number of priests is expected to remain the same.

## NORTHERN PARISHES

Ministry District	Parish of	2021 Masses Weekend	Number of Churches 2021
Sunraysia	Mildura Red Cliffs Merbein	6 + 1/m	5
	Robinvale Ouyen	3 + 2/m	5
Wimmera-Mallee	Northeast Mallee – Communities of Swan Hill, Sea Lake, and north part of Quambatook	3 + 2/m	6
	East Wimmera – Communities of Birchip, Donald, Charlton, St Arnaud, Wycheproof and south part of Quambatook	3 + 2/m	8
	Wimmera-Mallee - Communities of Horsham Nhill Warracknabeal Hopetoun	6	9

Priests 2021	Mass Count 2021	Goal by end of 2025	Expected priest deployment end 2025
2	739 72 38	Amalgamate to become one parish. These parishes already share two priests. Work with Robinvale as part of Ministry District	2 priests
1	94 41	Work with Mildura parishes in Sunraysia Ministry District	1 priest
1	326	Decreed 1/7/2018	1 priest
1	147	Decreed 1/7/2018	1 priest
2	252 20 28 30	Decreed 1/7/2021	2 priests

## CENTRAL PARISHES

Ministry District	Parish of	2021 Masses Weekend	Number of Churches 2021
Pyrenees	Ararat Stawell	3 + 2/m	4
	Maryborough	3 + 1/m	5
Greater Ballarat	Cathedral	4	1
	Sebastopol Redan Linton	6	6
	Wendouree Ballarat North Beaufort	3 2/m	5
	Daylesford Creswick Gordon	4	5
	Ballarat East	2	2
	Bungaree	1	3

Priests 2021	Mass Count 2021	Goal by end of 2025	Expected priest deployment end 2025
1	95 83	Develop Ministry District. Prepare for becoming one Parish with Beaufort	1 priest
1	111	Develop Ministry District	1 priest
1.5	735	Continue to develop Ministry District	1 priest Supported by a shared priest
1.5	241 116 88	Amalgamate to become one parish. Continue to develop Ministry District	1 priest
1	114 103 18	Wendouree and Ballarat North to amalgamate to become one parish. Beaufort to be amalgamated with Ararat and Stawell	1 priest
1	103 80 134	Amalgamate to become one parish. Continue to develop Ministry District	1 priest
1	328	Amalgamate to become one parish with Bungaree	2 priests
1	48	Amalgamate to become one parish with Ballarat East	

## SOUTHERN PARISHES

Ministry District	Parish of	2021 Masses Weekend	Number of Churches 2021
South-western	Western Border – Communities of Hamilton, Casterton, Coleraine, Edenhope and Harrow	6	10
	Portland	3	1
Southeast Coast	Colac Cororooke	2 + 2/m 2/m	3 2
	Apollo Bay	1	3
Greater Warrnambool	Southwest Coast – Communities of Warrnambool West Dennington Warrnambool Port Fairy Koroit	6 + 2/m	5
	Warrnambool East	2 + 3/m	2
Hampden	Terang Mortlake	3	3
	Camperdown Timboon	3	6

Priests 2021	Mass Count 2021	Goal by end of 2025	Expected priest deployment end 2025
2	365	Decreed 1/7/2018	2 priests
1	177	Continue developing Ministry District	1 priest
1	329 30	Amalgamate to become one parish with Apollo Bay	1 priest
1	66	Amalgamate to become one parish with Colac and Cororooke	1 priest
2	121 - 382 68 64	Decreed 1/10/221	2 priests
1	316	Amalgamation with Greater Warrnambool in 2022	1 priest
1	205 43	Amalgamate to become one parish. Further develop Ministry District	1 priest
1	124 35	Amalgamate to become one parish. Further develop Ministry District	1 priest

# Prayer in time of change

Loving God,  
we thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ  
who showed us the way, the truth and the life.  
As we continue our journey as people of faith  
help us to be people of wisdom and courage.

During these times of change,  
show us the way to strengthen our communities,  
to share the joy of your love  
and to see Christ in all people.  
We make our prayer through Jesus,  
our saviour and brother.

Amen.

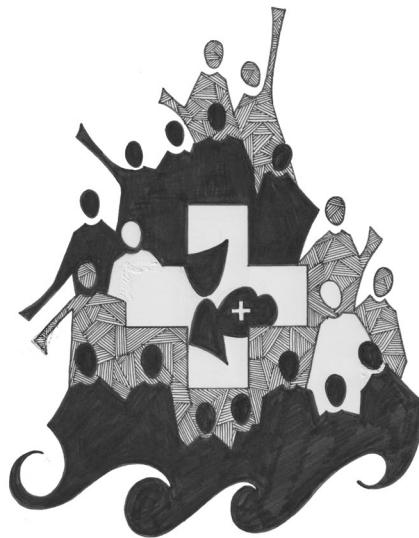


Image: Sr Anne McMillan rsm



*This document has been prepared  
by the Diocesan Pastoral Development Coordinator and the Pastoral Planning Panel  
in consultation with Bishop Paul Bird and the Bishop's Advisory Council  
drawing on feedback and insights from  
the clergy, religious, staff and people of the Diocese of Ballarat  
and the National Centre for Pastoral Research.*

*Ballarat, 2021.*

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