

1 August 2020

Dear parishioners,

The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church

This is the title of a document issued by the Congregation for the Clergy, approved by Pope Francis, on 20 July 2020¹. The document recognises the fast-changing situation of parishes in many parts of the world, and offers us challenges and ideas.

The document itself says *parish communities will find a call to go out of themselves, offering instruments for reform, even structural, in a spirit of communion and collaboration, of encounter and closeness, of mercy and solicitude for the proclamation of the Gospel.*²

It is almost as if the Instruction was written personally to us, at Greythorn, Balwyn North/Kew East; or to Brunswick West, Brunswick/Brunswick East and Moreland; or to Gardenvale/Brighton, Hampton, Sandringham and Ricketts Point; or to Deepdene/Balwyn, Camberwell, Surrey Hills and Wattle Park. We are all pioneers in the vision of forming new and energising pastoral clusters or affiliations as we progress, not *remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security ... within habits that make us feel safe*³, to be a people who will allow God to renew us and to renew our commitment of making the Good News present in our localities.

The document goes on to recognise that increased mobility and the digital culture mean that we are rarely confined to one locality (except at the moment in Covid-19 times!) How many of us only shop/bank/socialise or go to medical appointments or sport in our own suburb? How many of us have had our whole education primary, secondary and tertiary in one suburb? We haven't, but we have continued often to confine our breadth of Church to one suburb. That, of course, has a positive aspect – we identify with a community, and feel at home in it. However, if that inhibits us from also responding to the signs of the times that call us to broaden our engagement and form new pastoral structures to meet our present times, then there is a downside to this identification solely with our particular church community.

¹ <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bolletino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a>.

² Instruction, n.2

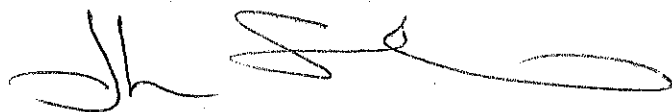
³ Instruction, n.3

There are parishioners in all our church communities who remember the early days of those respective communities: the excitement, the challenges, the extraordinary sense of common vision and goals. That is the sentiment I would like us all to carry as we move forward. Pope Paul VI and Pope Francis have both spoken of the conversion of people that leads to the conversion of structures. That should be our programme.

It is difficult in this Covid-19 crisis time for us to engage. However, I will in the weeks ahead write of some of the issues, challenges, concrete decisions and aspirations that we will have. That said, I take to heart the emphasis that Pope Francis has given in other contexts to a gradualism that does not act hastily or without flexibility⁴. I wrote recently in the bulletin about the recognition of our four church communities: St Joachim's, St Anne's, St Bede's and St Bridget's.

Each has a specific identity, culture and history – which needs to be nurtured, but also be in communion with each other so that sometimes the individual community and sometimes the communion of all will come to the fore.

In the meantime, have a safe and peaceful week.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Salvano', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Fr John Salvano, PP

⁴ Instruction n.36