

Open Forum – Thursday 29th August 2024 Minutes

Present: Fr. Tru Nguyen msc, Fr Chung Tran msc, office staff, parishioners of St John's Kippax.

Forum Opened at 7pm by Murray Bruce.

Acknowledgement of Country and opening hymn, *Song for the Journey*.

Prayer led by Di Bruce

Outline of the forum given by Murray Bruce

- Forum was being recorded
- Listen and share respectfully

Welcome by Fr. Tru Nguyen, msc

- An explanation was given regarding what has occurred between the Archdiocese and the MSCs.
- MSCs have had pastoral care of St John's Kippax for over 50 years
- MSCs have had pastoral care of St Thomas Aquinas Charnwood since 2023
- From 1st Jan. 2024 the 3 MSC priests have begun providing pastoral care for both parishes for the next 5 years
- The Archdiocese wants PPC, Finance Council, and other community leaders (eg schools) to establish coordinating groups
- In terms of day-to-day operations each parish has a separate finance account.
- This was laid out in the letter of appointment from Archdiocese and MSCs.

Floor was opened

- ➔ Elizabeth MacDonald: 2 parishes, but 1 coherent community; what exactly does that mean?
- ➔ Fr. Tru responded that this is how we start but we have to discern how this will actually look as time goes by.
- ➔ Ted Kildea: Why are we doing this? What is the driving force behind this?
- ➔ Sabina Van Rooy: Why has it taken so long for any communications to be shared about this?
- ➔ Anthony Noakes: expressed unhappiness with any idea of amalgamation; feels betrayed by this decision, and that he's on a train he can't get off.
- ➔ John Hogan: Jesus told us 'Do not be afraid'. Does not believe that this is a big deal. Believes our parish won't change; in fact, it's an invitation to extend MSC spirituality to Charnwood. Gave example of North Canberra all being cared for by

the Blessed Sacrament Priests from the Philippines. Believes this is the future of the church in Australia.

- ➔ Fr. Chung: reminded the forum to please use “I” not “we” or “you” as we are only speaking for ourselves and sharing our own feelings.
- ➔ Judy Netting: foundation member of SJA. Was reminded of those original settlements in Jerusalem who grew together in one congregation. Is excited to grow with Charnwood.
- ➔ Terry Fewtrell: a long time parishioner but also former parishioner of Charnwood. Believes that the church needs to rationalise its resources, which is what we can see happening here. Although the term “coherent community” was used, believes the reality is that in a few years we will be 1 parish with Charnwood. Don’t be afraid, but rather discerning in the essences of both parishes. We don’t want to lose our MSC essence.
- ➔ Helen Kennedy: thanks to Fr. Tru for tonight, but would like more communication regarding this issue as it unfolds.
- ➔ Kerry Yard: is concerned that in 6 years-time there may be no MSC priests. Shared her annulment experience that she went through with the MSCs and how supportive and kind they were to her.
- ➔ Anthony Jayawardena: wants clarification in regards to finances, especially concerning the maintenance of priests and what planned giving will look like when it is already on the decline.
- ➔ Matthew Garton: the forum group is not as diverse as our parish – where are the voices of diversity and how are they being heard?

7:40pm Small group time

The large group was broken into 9 smaller groups of 5-6 people to share and discuss. 20 minutes given for this.

8:00pm Large group reconvened with each group giving a summary of their thoughts/discussions

Group 2: Elizabeth Macdonald: we need to be generous in spirit; STA is a caring community; accept change/it’s inevitable; regular updates to be placed in COMPACT to facilitate communication re issue; keep the MSC charism alive.

Group 3: Joy McInerney: Is it just older parishioners who are concerned? Change is inevitable. Looking forward to meeting new people, but finances/money is of concern. How will the details of it all look? Will we lose the MSCs and become an Archdiocesan church? Australian spirituality is unique and international priests can often bring in differing ideas/spiritualities.

Group 4: Irene Higgins: discussion re large group; communication of activities is very important; felt blessed in this parish; change is difficult but we must accept it; need to move forward but change makes people feel awkward; discussed examples of Adelaide churches who are joining but successfully maintaining own identities; the demographics of Canberra are important (ie we're a very diverse city), therefore how can we communicate to these diverse cultures to commit to long-term parish life?

Group 5: Mercia Needham: MSC spirit is very important; lack of communication is a concern; concerned over the relationship between the schools; also concerned about finance management; recognises the reality of our times – ie limited priests and declining congregations.

Group 6: James Nield: communication has not been traditional MSC communication, but rather is top-down instruction without discernment; notion of spreading MSC charism is a good one; this idea of amalgamation is the future; future finance arrangements need to be clarified; priests shared between 2 parishes; suggests a liturgy to recognise these changes.

Group 7: Carl Madsen: change is inevitable; each parish has its own ethos (Charnwood and its independence); other churches are joining with positive outcomes; finances are of concern; gratitude for our MSC priests; need for better and ongoing communication; embrace the idea and go with it.

Group 8: Pat Gilchrist: concerns raised over the idea of losing MSC nurture; would like to be part of the decision-making process; concerns for the work load on the parish team and priests. Positives include acceptance, gratitude for new MSC priests; would like to know how Charnwood feels. Include the younger members of the parish – how to encourage them to take part?

Group 9: Maria Scarr: Heart Spirituality is what we most value; 2 different identities; fear of losing MSCs in 5 years; losing youth and young families is also of concern; diminishing communities; people are fearful of amalgamation

Group 10: Anthony Noakes: questions, issues and concerns were raised in their small group. Clarification required on when the 5 years actually starts and ends; general lack of communication led to misinformation and even rudeness – should be more timely and more general communication. What is the end goal of the agreement with the Archdiocese and the MSCs? Discernment re what we want, what God wants, what the bishop wants. Lack of priests leading to international recruitment of priests; other parishes in Canberra have religious orders. How do Charnwood people feel and can we make them feel welcome? Staff and priests → Sharon at Charnwood (who is paying her salary there?); how do our MSC priests feel about this proposal? – workload, emotional, mental...

Marian England addressed the question of communication, informing the group that the information they know is what the administration know. Information had not been deliberately kept from parishioners. As Fr. Tru was a newly appointed parish priest, he did not know the parish nor the parishioners. It was wise for him to be given time before we embarked on a major project of bringing two parish communities together.

Fr. Tru also added that he will continue to share information as it comes to hand, and will address the questions and concerns raised tonight when he has clarification. Fr. Tru thanked everyone for coming and appreciated their insights and participation in the process.

Conclusion – Murray Bruce summarised the night, thanked everyone.

Forum closed with the Our Father at 8:30pm