

## An Open Letter to our Parishioners

*"The times we live in require only active players on the field, and there is no room for those who sit on the bench. Today's world demands that you be a protagonist of history because life is always beautiful when we choose to live it fully, when we choose to leave a mark."* (Pope Francis, 2016)

Dear fellow parishioners of St Francis of Assisi Ohariu,

As you are aware, our Parish has over the past three years operated according to an alternative model of collaborative leadership involving priests and laity. While it has often been termed a "new" or "alternative" model, it builds on and is consistent with previous models which, since Vatican II, have consistently involved a vision of laypeople working hand-in-hand with clergy. The difference with previous models, in other words, is in "degree" rather than in "kind". Let's call it "the Collaborative Model"!

The approach we have embraced has been carried out in partnership with the Archdiocese of Wellington ("ADW"), the Society of Mary and parish lay leaders. The Collaborative Model was for 3 years – we are now nearing the end of that period. A decision will be made late this year/early 2022 as to whether the Collaborative Model can or should continue.

We, the parish Leadership Formation Team ("LFT"), want to report to you now - as the deadline for that decision approaches. And not least because as an LFT we are driven to the conclusion that the Collaborative Model – with its current structure and resources – is not sustainable.

Please note – we are not saying that collaborative leadership is wrong or flawed – we are simply saying that at this point in time the Collaborative Model requires more resources than we currently have available here in St Francis of Assisi Ohariu.

Review:

- The past 3 years have not been easy – for any of us.
- The world has been shocked by the challenges of climate change, a universal pandemic, confrontational politics and societies, wars and refugees. Our international institutions seem powerless to respond effectively.
- Our Church too has been rocked by problems of sexual abuse and coverups, shortage of priests, the decline in priestly and religious vocations, financial corruption, risks of schism
- In our parishes we see aging congregations, decreasing numbers of Mass goers, fewer people seeking the Sacraments, departing Catholics, declining income, mergers threatening loss of identity, change and uncertainty...
- Some of us dared to dream - of a new way of being Church in our Parish that will flourish in the challenging times in which we live!
- A truly collaborative model that would address our problems and see:
  - followers of Christ fulfilling their Baptismal calling as Priests, Prophets and Leaders
  - mandated by Vatican II and encouraged by Pope Francis
  - lay people complementing the vocation of priesthood
  - priests and laity consulting and working together, serving one another, as never before
  - lay people taking on new responsibilities including sacramental roles – priests revising their roles

- existing ministries revitalised
  - new ministries started
  - liturgy enlivened
  - new wine in new wineskins
  - a joyful, caring, visionary Christian community
- We took the first steps – the Collaborative Model
  - Some of you entered into the Collaborative Model wholeheartedly and generously – thank you!
  - Together, we achieved much:
    - The relatively smooth running of the parish administration, including the significant streamlining and updating of various operating procedures and policies
    - Normal parish and property maintenance functions have been achieved
    - We have been wonderfully served by Pete Roe SM and his fellow Marists and Sr Judith
    - Ministries have been renewed (anointing, visiting the sick, homiletics, Grief and Loss, sacramental programme, children's holiday programmes)
    - Refugees have been housed and cared for
    - Households have been fed, advocated for, supported and cared for
    - Parish assets have been utilized to house people in need and to raise income for the Parish
    - Parish relationships with our schools have become closer and more active
    - We have more Masses a week than any other parish in the ADW
    - Parishioners prepare Reflections for the Newsletter and sermon time in Mass

- Little Churches has been set up
- Parish liturgy has been centralized and organized (the “PLAG”)
- Special events and liturgies (eg Parish Feast Days) have been celebrated with vitality, art and music
- A vibrant, informative Newsletter has been put in place
- A new, informative Parish website has been set up
- Enhanced transparency in the governance of the Parish
- The Parish Office has been staffed with willing and able people whose knowledge and skills are constantly growing
- Training for different ministries has taken place and faith/prayer groups have met
- Funding has been accessed for Outreach Pastoral Projects and an additional staff member
- Others of you – a relatively small but effective number - opposed us – in word and in deed and bitterly, and took up disproportionate time and resources
- We acknowledge that there are some things we should have done better, or sooner
  - At this point we have not recruited a full time Parish Director of Mission
  - We struggled to keep governance and management separate (we were too few and the tasks too many to allow us to do so)
  - Our communications were not always targeted or fully understood by all our parishioners
- Such mistakes are inevitable when you enter new uncharted territory. Our best efforts were always well-intentioned.
- On balance, we think the Parish has been very well-served these past 3 years.

## The future?

- Much remains to be done. There is a need to:
  - consolidate and continue what has already been achieved
  - finish the Buildings Review and report to +John
  - revitalise our Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults programme
  - update and provide resources to other Ministries
  - identify peripheries in need – within the Parish and the wider community
  - continue to improve our liturgy and develop new liturgies
  - run more formation programmes to prepare parishioners for their roles in the future

The problem is – the Collaborative Model is unsustainable because:

- we don't have the capacity to move forward
- A total of 13 people has served on the LFT since February 2018. 5 people have moved on for a variety of reasons – through relocation, ill health, fatigue and burn out. 2 more, Thomas Davis and Kitty McKinley have indicated they intend to step down. We will be left with 6 people.
- 6 people is not enough to carry on.
- the LFT are busy people with busy lives – like everybody else. We were all volunteers - we have not been paid. We have tried to run what was once 3 parishes which in the past enjoyed up to 8 full time personnel (ie priests, religious and admin staff). We are all tired – and a little disillusioned.
- our priest administrator, Fr Pete, is exhausted – he, or any priest who replaces him – cannot be asked to work as he has done these last 3 years

- the Collaborative Model's achievements have been significant but have come at great personal cost
- we have asked regularly for help
- we have advertised widely without success
- we may not have the resources of the Society of Mary next year
- if you go to any other parish you will find that they are experiencing the same issues when they strive to live the mission of the Church
- there is some evidence that other parishes have made fewer attempts to adapt

The solution?

- we need a few new LFT members who support the Collaborative Model
- we need lots of people to assist with Ministries and parish services
- we need diversity that represents our various communities
- we need a mix of skills
- much of the parish potential is still with you, the people - in the pews
- the Parish needs a permanent, paid Director of Mission
- we need more people to step up and contribute their talents
- we need more people to offer to be trained to take on different roles

Yes! You're right – there is something happening in the Church. Pope Francis has said *"We are not going through an era of change – we are going through a change of era!"*

We are in an age of change and transition. One age of the Church is dying. It doesn't mean that that age was a failure. Rather, it was a success – and is now giving birth to a new age. Everything dies – and some of the Church's structures of the past are dying.

This death and resurrection process has been going on for 2000 years – the most recent surge started 60 years ago with Vatican II. New shoots are appearing – including the greater participation of lay people in the life of the Church. This is where the future lies. We believe our Collaborative Model is a “new shoot”

So, the time is over for saying:

*“It'll be taken care of...Father and the Cardinal will sort it out. I'll just keep coming along on Sundays...keep praying for more vocations to priesthood and religious life. We'll get back to normal somehow...”*

That isn't going to happen. And we cannot bring back the past. It was not ideal anyway. The past is not an option. There is only the future – and that lies with you – the people.

Please - what can YOU do for our Parish community?

We need:

Ministry leaders and workers for

- Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
- Eucharistic Liturgies
- Grief and Loss
- Children's Liturgy
- Sacramental programmes (Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation)
- Homiletics
- Ministers of the Word and Eucharist

- Sacristans
- Baptisms
- Marriage

Workers with refugees

Food bank workers

Skilled people:

- tradespeople (electricians, plumbers, carpenters, painters, landscapers),
- property managers
- musicians
- IT specialists,
- accountants, lawyers
- media experts,

Church cleaners, flower arrangers, linen cleaners

LFT Members - a few (2-3)

Before we can be a community of people that serve one another – we need more people who are ready to serve. Please – come forward - and join us! Speak with any LFT member – or contact the Parish Office on (04) 478 7137 or email [office@stfrancisochariu.nz](mailto:office@stfrancisochariu.nz) and:

1. Refer to this letter
2. Give your name and contact details
3. Say that you would like to help

With thanks and blessings

Leadership Formation Team – November 2021