



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

PARISH VISITATION REPORT

St James the Apostle Parish, Hoppers Crossing North,

1 - 3 December 2023

Parish Community of St James the Apostle Parish

Dear Fr Jude and Parishioners of St James the Apostle Parish.

Warm Greetings to you all,

I was very pleased to visit your Parish recently and I thank you, Fr Jude and Fr John for your warm welcome towards me. Over those days I met up with quite a variety of Parishioners from different cultural backgrounds and Parish groups. I was able to hear some of your stories and particular aspects of the life of your large Parish community. I was also able to hear of your hopes for St James Parish into the future. I am most grateful to you for providing me with the many opportunities to come to know how the Spirit has been animating you as a vibrant faith community.

Following a brief meeting with Fr Jude to review the schedule for the days themselves, I travelled to Thomas Carr College to meet up with the Principals and Religious Education Leaders from the four primary schools and also from the Secondary College:

- St James the Apostle, Hoppers Crossing North
- St Clare's, Truganina South
- St Francis of Assisi, Tarneit
- St Teresa of Kolkata, Tarneit North
- Thomas Carr College, Tarneit

During that time, each school shared some of its own story and how you seek to imbue the Catholic ethos within the uniqueness of their school and also within the diversity of the cultural and faith backgrounds that is also a part of these schools. They also described the hopes and challenges for their school communities at this time.

Following this I went to the Parish office to meet up with the Parish Staff. There is a very good team approach in place, the roles are shared between the four staff, with each having a particular responsibility, three of whom were present on the day. They each work well and support each other in the overall running of the Parish office. I was also able to review the Parish Registers, which are all up to date. Following

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the meeting in the Parish office, we visited St James Church, which is next door. and all is kept tidy and clean with the help of a team of Parishioners.

This was followed by lunch with the staff at the Parish House. Later, I had the opportunity to visit one of the parishioners who was ill, bringing her Holy Communion and praying with and those with her. This was followed by a visit to St Vincent's Care Home, Tarneit, where I was introduced to a number of residents. The facility also has a chapel, where Mass is celebrated once a month by the local priests from different Parishes including Fr Jude and Fr John from St James. It seemed to be a very caring and supportive environment for the residents.

In the evening I met with the Parish youth group (Years 7-12) and also, I met with members of the Young Paulists Group. These young people were very open to share what their faith in Jesus meant to them. This faith strengthens them in reaching out to organize various community and faith sharing events. It was wonderful to experience their youthful enthusiasm along with Fr Jude and their Group Leader. This Youth Leader is truly committed in assisting them in growing their faith as young disciples. One of the youth, summed it up beautifully saying that they see themselves as missionaries doing things with their faith.

On the Saturday morning following breakfast with members of the Parish Pastoral Council and members of the Parish Finance Committee, the morning was spent with them, sharing the vision and activities of the Parish, now and into the future. The Chairperson of the Pastoral Council led this process in evaluating both the strengths and the challenges of the Parish.

In the early afternoon following a BBQ lunch, I was pleased to meet the co-ordinators of the many Ministry Groups in the Parish. You have at least 30 Ministry Groups with up to 400 volunteers serving across the Parish. Among the many Ministries that were present, co-ordinators of the Worthy Women's Group, the Baptism Team, and RCIA Team shared their specific Ministry activities with the entire Group. The feedback from those present, was how much parishioners appreciated the work of the various Ministry groups, not only in responding to needs within the Parish but also in having that sense of missionary outreach within the broader community.

The Open Forum was held after the 10.30am Sunday Mass, with refreshments and a large number of Parishioners attended this event. In the main, people shared the great love they have for their Parish. Parishioners spoke of how welcoming their faith community is in so many ways and a number of them shared examples of this. They also spoke of how people can be involved in the Parish and are encouraged to do so in all kinds of ways. A number of them gave personal examples of this too. Fr Jude as your Parish Priest is highly regarded and much-loved, his personality and leadership draws people into belonging to the Parish and also invites them to contribute to their faith community in ways that suit their giftedness.

Following the 5:00pm mass, I was pleased to be able to meet with the Youth Group (Years 7-12) and spend some time with them. Again, it showed how committed your Parish is in providing a sense of belonging for youth of all ages. Much effort is put by the Youth Leaders in preparing for these meetings.

Being able to celebrate the Eucharist with you over the weekend itself was also a special time for me as it was an opportunity to join you all in the most important faith event of our week. It was also wonderful to be able to meet many of you after mass and during a cup of coffee at the Open Forum.

It was wonderful for me to be able to be with you, over these few days in all kinds of settings. I hope that my time with you will be a source of encouragement to you, in living out your faith. Indeed, your faith has also been a source of encouragement to me.

The following reflections are offered to you to be both a source of affirmation and encouragement for you to reflect upon and consider going forward.

You are a very large multi-cultural Catholic faith community and you come across as very vibrant and engaging. Also, it is with a great spirit of generosity that you serve the overall mission of the Parish. You have a strong commitment to being welcoming, seeking to care for all those in need of assistance. Having a Welcoming Committee is a real sign of how much you desire that people find a sense of belonging within the St James community. You pay special attention to new Parishioners inviting them to enter fully into the life of your Parish. During the year, every quarter, you have an evening for all newcomers to the Parish. Feedback from some of those newcomers – they appreciated the efforts being made to provide them with a sense of belonging to their new community. You are very intentional in all of this and I commend your efforts, now and into the future, as you are still a growing Parish with young families continuing to find a home here. The number of House blessings that take place, also gives evidence of this. Your Parish bulletin with its three pages is informative and provides a picture of a faith community that is reaching out generously in so many ways.

Your Parish Schools and Regional College are an integral part of the Parish community and you have a new primary school St Teresa of Kolkata about to open up in 2024. It was obvious from my meeting with the school leaders that there is a strong partnership between the Schools and the Parish of St James the Apostle. The Principals have also acknowledged that Fr Jude's leadership is a very positive influence in the relationships with all the schools in the Parish. You are also conscious of the diversity of students, not only coming from a variety of multicultural backgrounds but also coming from a diversity of faith backgrounds. These families also have a desire for Catholic education for their children. You spoke of the Catholic ethos of your schools affirming the dignity and respect given to each child. In our eyes, they are all children of the God. At the same time, you continue to catechise all the children in coming to know the Christ of the Gospels. It was good to hear all the efforts you are making in nurturing the faith development of the children within your schools. You have shared some concerns about the difficulties that some of the families have in enrolling their child in a Catholic Secondary College. I would encourage you to speak to those in MACS, who have responsibility in this area.

Your Parish finances are in a good position and your faith community is financially supportive for the various projects and pastoral initiatives being carried out in the

Parish. You have paid back a good percentage of the Loan taken for your new Church extensions and moving forward into the future, you are confident that you will also be able to finance your proposed Parish Community Centre.

I commend you as a Parish community for your commitment to creating a culture of safety and care for the children, young people and vulnerable adults. The members of your Child Safeguarding Committee play an important role in all of this as they assist in the developing and implementing of policies and practices of safety within the Parish. You have ensured that all partaking in the various ministries within your Parish, have a Working with Children Check and also attend the various workshops around child protection. Notices in your Parish Bulletin and around your Parish are also signs of your dedication to the safety and care of all and especially the most vulnerable in your midst.

Your Parish Pastoral Council is obviously a most significant group in the life of your Parish and you take a real interest in how each aspect of this diverse, multicultural community is living out its faith. While I was with you, there was a real honesty in the sharing of the strengths and challenges and it was obvious how members have a real sense of commitment in creating a welcoming and hospitable community. At the same time, it is more than that. You desire also to continue to create a more Christ centred and missionary Parish community, where each Parishioner is called to play their part in the life of the Parish. You take seriously the commitment to draw forth the giftedness of people within your community. In all of this, I commend you for providing and supporting a variety of formation programmes each year. They all help to deepen parishioner's sense of discipleship, giftedness and commitment to the Gospel. They also encourage you to being a witness to Christ within your family, the faith community and the world around you. A number of your Ministry Groups including your youth groups and the Young Paulists have a very intentional faith aspect to their gatherings and at the same time are seeking to reach out to others giving witness to the Gospel of Jesus in the world of our time.

As a Parish Pastoral Council, you desire to assist more people on the pathway of discipleship and missionary outreach. Building on the present vitality of your Parish and the many faith-filled members who have made this happen from the past and up to the present day, the challenge is to keep going further. It is to continue to be more faith-filled disciples with a desire to be more fruitful in the exercise of your spiritual gifts.

One example to consider in regard to the above, within the overall mission of your Parish and school communities is how to draw more of your young families into the knowledge and love of the Lord and into the life of your faith community and its mission in the world. Much effort is already being shown by people in various ministry groups and within your school communities. Some of the examples where people's Ministry gift is being shared, is in the areas of Welcome, Baptism Preparation, Sacramental Preparation for Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation for children and their families, Alpha and RCIA. People's gifts are being generously put in to practice in all of these areas. Yet, we realise that there is more that needs to happen too. What other kinds of gifts do we need to nurture to respond to our situation at present?

Who might have a particular gift for inviting families on a journey of faith? Who might have a gift to accompany them in encountering the person of Jesus and his life-giving message for their lives? Within the Parishes of our Archdiocese of Melbourne this is an ongoing challenge for all our Faith communities. So, I do commend you for considering to have a Leadership Summit in your Parish for 2024. In part, you are taking seriously that every Ministry or activity requires a certain kind of leader with particular gifts that suits the task at hand. This includes forming people to be disciples of Jesus and leaders who have the capacity to do this.

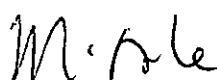
I commend you for the lively and faith-filled liturgies. They are central and an important element in celebrating and deepening the faith of your community. At each of your masses the music and the singing by the members of the congregation was prayerful and uplifting. I believe that the effort you put in to the preparation of the weekend liturgies helps to deepen your faith community's relationship with the Lord and at the same time affirms their deeper appreciation in being the Body of Christ.

As I went around your Parish community, there is a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation for your Parish priest, Fr Jude. Over many years now, his encouraging style of leadership has played a big part in the development and growth of your faith community. He has drawn forth the giftedness of many to be co-responsible for the life and mission of the St James's community. Members of the faith community also appreciate his homilies. At the same time Fr John Taliana, who like Fr Jude is also a Paulist Missionary has become your new Assistant Priest and has found a warm welcome amongst you all. He enjoys placing his priestly ministry at the service of the faith community and his homilies are also appreciated by people. You are also grateful for the presence of Fr Brendan Byrne, SJ on the weekends and the way his homilies draw you closer to Christ and nourish you all on your pilgrim journey.

I have been blessed to be a part of your faith community during this Parish Visitation and to be able to meet and spend some time with many of you. May the celebration of the birth of Jesus affirm you in the joy of God's love for you all. May the grace of his Spirit continue to accompany you in giving witness to your faith in Christ to the people around you and the broader community.

Every good blessing to your Parish.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Ashe'.

+Martin Ashe

Auxiliary Bishop for the Western Region.