



Parish of Our Lady of the Way
North Sydney | Kirribilli | Lavender Bay

Explanation of the Parish Priest's decision April 28, 2023

Since I became the parish priest in November 2021, I have held various meetings in regard to the redevelopment of the North Sydney campus, for the purpose of providing information to our community, to receive parishioners' feedback on the redevelopment proposal, inform myself on those viewpoints and to seek guidance. There have been scores of other informal meetings and written correspondences.

I would like to take this opportunity to outline what I have learned from these meetings, concerning the background to the redevelopment and the proposed operation of the new complex (both parish and school) during the construction phase and on completion.

1. The only direction in the Estate of Ron Dyer was that his bequest be spent at discretion of the Parish Priest of St Mary's Parish, North Sydney. There is no mention in the will, nor any recorded verbal instruction, in regard to building a parish centre, or any other parish activity or facility. The Dyer family has been informed at every stage about the new developments in regard to the Ron Dyer Centre (RDC) and they are supportive.
2. When the RDC was built it had on either side of it a parish primary school and a Catholic boy's secondary school. Then it was never foreseen that four years ago, these two independent schools would be merged into one parish K-12 coeducational school: Marist College North Shore (MCNS), comprising the St Mary's Campus (Primary) and La Valla Campus (secondary). The RDC now sits in between these campuses.
3. Under NSW legislation in regard to child safety and occupational health and safety in schools, to every degree they can, schools are obliged to secure and moderate access to external visitors, to be able lock down the campus in an emergency and to have the safest access possible for students and staff to all learning and other areas therein. This is not the case with the present campus where students and staff must walk from one campus to the other around the RDC via the outside lane that goes from Ridge Street to Miller Street.

The Ron Dyer Centre

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4. This year MCNS will start stage two of their redevelopment: the Carlow Street building, which is due to be completed in mid-2025. When operational it will be the main drop off and pick up for all students except for kindergarten and year one children. The staff who presently lease car parks from the parish under the RDC, and the majority of the car parks between the church and old presbytery, will then be reassigned to the new 71 spaces under the Carlow Street building. The parish will have free access to these car 71 spaces at night and on the weekends. When the Carlow Street car park becomes operational, the parish will gain full and free access to the 40 car parks under the present RDC.
5. When the Carlow Street building is completed, the College's music department will move there, and then the restoration and internal fit-out of the old Presbytery will begin, slated for mid-2025 and completed in early 2026. Until then, the parish offices will stay where they are. The name of the Ron Dyer Centre will be prominently transferred to the old presbytery. It will house the Companions Room, a mediation room and toilets that will have internal and external access.
6. Because of financial and other supply issues the College's building along Miller Street will not now commence until 2029 – 2030 with a completion date for 2032, and, even then, it will be subject to available funds. On the corner of this new building, the one nearest to the new Ron Dyer Centre and the Church, will be the name and logo of our parish, indicating it is a parish space shared with the school. It will contain a new, larger, gathering space than we presently have, two unisex toilets, an industrial kitchen which will serve as a café during school hours (to which we will have access when we need to), more toilets downstairs and access to a 2,000-seat auditorium that can be modified for smaller gatherings. Every access the parish has to the gathering space in the present RDC will be protected by a legally binding agreement between the parish and the school. Basically, this means this space will parish's space from 9am – 7pm and at other times by agreement for meetings, morning and afternoon teas, formation sessions and wakes.
7. **Most importantly**, the parish will retain the use of the current gathering space in the RDC until the new parish gathering space is completed in the Miller Street building, nine years from now, in 2032.

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8. Even though, along with others, I would like to see the Miller St exit remain open, we have been advised that the NSW Planning Authority has made it clear that because of the upgrade of Miller Street to be under NSW Government control, our Miller Street exit has to close because we have a second access point off Ridge Street that can be made to work practically and safely. We have been informed that there is no evidence from any other project with a similar dual access to an upgraded road, that anyone is being allowed to maintain dual access. We have been advised that appealing this planning law is unlikely to be successful and that, in any case, the Archdiocese will not appeal this matter to the Land & Environment Court (they are legal owners of our land and would have to mount the case).
9. In 2029/30 the traffic onto the Church site will be via a significantly widened Ridge Street entry/exit, leading to 18 car parks next to the church, six of them for the disabled, and then on to large roundabout in a much-expanded area that would see large SUVs go, either, around the roundabout and return out to Ridge Street, or proceed to the parish's underground carpark.
10. Some parishioners have expressed concern for the times when the traffic will be the greatest. Except for the rare very large funeral (five a year?) or Christmas or Good Friday, these moments will not inconvenience parishioners, but will involve the parents of the Kindergarten and Year One children, and the parish staff from 8.15am – 9am and 2.30pm – 3.15pm. MCNS has agreed to employ a traffic warden every school day to police the agreed arrangements. Funerals at St Mary's are at 10am or 1pm and the Mass is at Midday. When all the new arrangements are in place in 2029/2030 car parking around the church will go from the 20 we presently have access to on any school day, to 58 spots: 40 under the present RDC; 18 en-grade around the church (disabled and abled). On weekends, nights and school holidays the 71 places in the Carlow Street Building will be available to the parish for a campus total of 101 places. In addition, of course, North Sydney residents can gain a free pass to park in the Public Ridge Carpark for two hours Monday to Saturday, and for free on Sundays.



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11. Presently we have one, old, and therefore noncompliant disabled entry into the southern door of the church. With ageing parishioners, it is of great benefit to have another, compliant, disabled ramp on the northern side of the church. The two exits will be through the former and presently unused confessionals on either side of the Lady Chapel. The Lady Chapel will remain intact and used as it is now. Given the lower numbers of Sunday mass goers at St Mary's, the relocation of the pews in front of the old confessionals and the small loss of others, will have a small impact on seating.
12. This northern access will open on a piazza that will take up just over half of the present car park on the Miller Street end. The rest of the present carpark will remain as en-grade parking. The piazza will provide direct access to new and closer toilets at the back of the new Ron Dyer Centre/parish office (the old presbytery) and the new gathering space. The piazza will also have a podium that can be used for outdoor liturgies and fully disabled paths within a newly landscaped area through to the parish offices in the new Ron Dyer Centre and the present gathering area until the new gathering area in 2032. This development opens the parish church to the parish school which I hope will see the students make visits on a regular basis. Under no circumstances or at any time will the piazza become a playground for the students, so that during school days Funerals and Masses in the church will be conducted under the present conditions.
13. The Ridge gardens will also be renovated. This area has been effectively used for the parish Christmas party and has great potential for other gatherings.
14. When this work begins, we will also renovate the interior of the church, which has not been touched since 1978, and so, at least, attend to new lighting, cleaning, and painting.

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15. It has been suggested that we should build a new underground car park under the present car park, between the old presbytery and the church. Estimates for this development are between \$15–22 million. There has been another suggestion that we build a new building, housing the gathering space, on the back of the old presbytery or between the church and the old presbytery. The estimates for the costs of these buildings are between \$4-6million. For any expenditure over \$100,000 I must apply to the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, and they have made it clear that permission will not be granted for an underground carpark and additional buildings. They are of the opinion that other Sydney parishes have very successfully entered into binding contracts with the parish school in sharing buildings, without the loss of the parish identity, and so they are confident we can be one of them too.

I know some parishioners do not agree with some of the points expressed above. I think, however, that after 19 months of listening to a wide body of informed opinion and input, from you and others, it is opportune to summarise where we have arrived.

The Code of Canon Law says I must make the final decision about this matter and do so after seeking the final unanimous advice of the parish advisory group, the finance committee, and the Jesuit Community.

I hope that, if needs be, we can always respectfully disagree with one another, and that we can all keep our eye on the one mission of Christ which is expressed in two major ministries on our North Sydney campus: the parish and the school. I hope and pray that these concrete developments will serve our witness to Christ for generations to come.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Richard

Rev Dr Richard Leonard SJ

Parish Priest

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