



Not from the Pulpit: Fr. Andy Bullen SJ

But maybe this time from my desk after some time in various prayer spaces.

We are blessed here in North Sydney with a vibrant parish community: welcoming, generous and engaged with the full spectrum of our faith. Even on an ordinary day so much is happening all at once; and then we are busier again on weekdays, and Easter, and now Christmas. It is a wonder to me that thanks to the labour and generosity of parish staff, parish volunteers and the people in the pews so many people are brought to worship our God and to care for each other. Gratitude is the proper and only angle to ready ourselves to look to the future.

Because like any other living community, we face some significant challenges:

- How will we operate with fewer Jesuit priests (and possibly just one, more probably two)?
- How will the laity, and particularly women, help meet the needs this change will open up?
- How do we better connect with our youth and young adults?
- How do we better respond to the needs of those on the margins of society?
- How do we nurture our Ignatian traditions?

These are big questions which imply change to much of our current thinking and established practice.



Recently I took Daven Day SJ and other members of the parish administration to Villa Maris, the Jesuit retreat house in Gerroa. We were joined by Chris Gleeson SJ who helped us imagine how St Ignatius might approach these same questions if he were among us today. He would, we felt, approach these challenges of leadership with humility but also with hope and great purpose, always focused on God's loving and creative gaze. The answers to these questions, he would say, lies in discernment – that process which leads us to God, that promotes the greater good, built on conscience, free from the 'baggage' that blocks adaptive responses, alert to the movements of mind, imagination and heart, especially the gentle ones. Finally, Ignatius would say that being at peace with a decision, however difficult, invites us to action and to trust in God's grace.

In addition to the legacy of St Ignatius, we have the wisdom and work of past parish councils to build upon.

So let me invite you to peace, hope and action as I outline the road ahead.

1. The Sacraments

Whilst we are somewhat from having only a single priest in the parish, we have nonetheless drawn up a plan of how the sacraments would be conducted in such circumstances. Key to this will not only be a sustainable schedule of liturgies but also increased involvement of the laity in supporting the sacraments. With luck we may have the opportunity to secure new priests, even temporarily, but this is by no means assured.

Liturgies: Given other pastoral commitments, one parish priest can celebrate two Masses each weekday, one in the morning and one in the evening. On the Sabbath, one priest can feasibly celebrate three Masses (a Vigil, one Sunday morning Mass and one Sunday evening Mass) and three baptisms, or two baptisms and one wedding. With some support from Jesuits in community but in other ministries, we should be able to cover days off, vacation and retreat time. If the parish priest is unwell there will be some scrambling to cover these commitments.

Currently we celebrate 23 Masses each week across three churches, a schedule which is unsustainable. Due to illness and other commitments we are regularly operating with just one or two priests within the parish.

As a first step, early in 2018 we will be moving the 7.00am weekday Masses and the 8.00am Saturday Mass at St Mary's to St Francis Xavier in order to increase the availability of Jesuit clergy (non drivers, and those in residence but in other ministries which often takes them away). A new audio visual system at St Francis Xavier has been installed to stream and record this Mass to the significant and growing Mass on Demand community.

In due course, in line with the reducing availability of clergy, we will need to consider further changes, including the number and timing of the Sabbath Masses. Central to our thinking will be how to respect and nurture the various and distinct Mass communities within the parish. Physical considerations will necessarily also play a part. Already we make frequent use of Communion Services on weekdays, and undoubtedly this form of worship will become more frequent in the future; through them local communities within our parish can continue to gather as distinctive worshipping communities; in country dioceses and an increasing number of city parishes they are already the lifeblood of many worshipping communities.

Baptisms: Baptism is the foundational sacrament, not only as the doorway to a Christian life but in a very practical way it brings new life into our community. Each year more than 350 infants and children and a further 20 adults from the RCIA program are baptised in our parish. Almost all of these are separate ceremonies, each providing an intimate opportunity to reach out and spread the joy of the gospel to dozens of family members and friends. We will do our utmost to continue with baptisms in this way but when we have just one priest (or even two), we will need to baptize two or three new Christians within the one ceremony. Lay sponsors (from the parish staff or volunteers) will support families through preparation and on the day itself, leaving the priest to undertake only the central functions of baptism. Importantly the sponsors will also provide follow-up in welcoming families into our parish community.

Weddings & Funerals: Wherever possible our parish priests or other members of the Jesuit community preside over weddings and funerals. A significant number of weddings in our churches with our priests as celebrant come from way beyond the bounds of the parish: [in the future couples with a connection through our schools or the parish itself will have a special call on this ministry]. In some cases, moreover, we cannot accommodate requests due to other liturgical or pastoral commitments. To date in such circumstances people have been able to secure a priest from another parish or community, but as these become less readily available, we will need to look at alternate ways of supporting these sacraments in the Catholic tradition. Given that few funerals are Requiem Masses and even fewer weddings are Nuptial Masses, we are looking at how to train lay ministers, both women and men to support these services. There is plenty more thinking and preparation required to give effect to this but we are putting our minds as to 'the how'.

2. Youth Engagement



We need young people of faith: they are the future of the Church and this parish. Creating a lifelong bond between Christ and young adults has always been a challenge but particularly so in today's increasingly secular society. Whilst we are making headway in drawing young people into parish life (witness the 6.00pm Youth Mass of a Sunday or the large parish contingent attending this year's Australian Catholic Youth Festival) we have much more to do to create sustainable pathways for engaging youth and young adults.

To address this, in 2018 we will be substantially increasing our investment in our youth programs, the parish's relationship with the local schools and young adult activities – including moving the current Youth Minister into a full time role and initiating a programme for students from the Australian Catholic University to complement our catechetical programs within government high schools.

3. Pastoral Care & Social Outreach

The gospels tell us that we find the face of Christ in the poor and marginalised within society. Reaching out and helping others must be a central part of our parish life, but how, in our privileged place here in North Sydney, can we give meaningful effect to this?



Although we do have pockets of poverty and loneliness within North Sydney, in the main the answer lies outside the parish itself on the fringes in places like Emerton & Wilmott, and across the developing world. We have therefore allied ourselves more closely with the frontline Jesuit social ministries - Jesuit Social Services, Jesuit Refugee Services and Jesuit Mission. We are also aware of the call that our Provincial, Fr Brian McCoy, has recently made for Jesuit ministries to respond to the two neglected 'book-ends' of Australian society: our indigenous brothers and sisters and the asylum-seekers who knock on our door. Meanwhile, we also lend support to local initiatives such as Mary's House, St Vincent de Paul and Theresa House. Additionally, our pastoral care activities with the sick, aged and housebound are increasingly needed and important.

Ultimately however, the success of all these ministries depends on the energetic involvement of parishioners. If you have the time, skills or resources to assist, please get involved (by contacting the parish office or the Jesuit ministries directly). Our privilege calls on us to do more, and we surely must. Let us be grateful for the many signs that our parish is not turned in on itself (a death-wish) but turned outwards towards our neighbours and so meet the Lord who especially identifies himself with the most lost of them. "Where is this God of yours?", our secular society asks with raised eyebrows; whether or not we have something to say in reply, we have somewhere to point.

4. Lay leadership

There is no doubt that the key to sustaining the vibrancy of our parish community – and the church more generally – will be lay leadership. In the New Year, I will be forming a new parish pastoral council. As this letter suggests, they will have much to do. Additionally, I will be creating new forums for pastoral and ministry leaders to collaborate with each other and the parish administration. More on this later.

5. Faith Formation

The practice of our Christian faith is enhanced not solely by the celebration of the sacraments or the practical support for social justice but also through the thoughtful understanding of the teaching and example of Jesus and our call to reflect on how they reverberate within our contemporary society, and on what action they spur us to. As a Jesuit parish, we are guided by the example of St Ignatius who found prayerful discernment as the means of finding God and leading us to action better lives for ourselves and others. This nexus between prayer and action is central to our Ignatian charism.

Ignatius understood that finding God often involves disrupting established patterns and biases in our own lives, let alone the lives of others. We are therefore reviewing faith formation within the parish with a view to bringing the contemplative and the active into closer alignment. The starting point will be our lived experience: finding God in all things. More on this in the New Year, but why not think about undertaking, and diarising, an Ignatian retreat or reflection programme in 2018, in the parish or beyond?

We intend to be more active in relaying within the parish community the Ignatian 'voice' wherever it is found – from within our schools, in our social ministries, from here or abroad. We also have much to learn from the greater *catholic* church, and energising our ecumenical links will be another important initiative for 2018.

So herein lies some of the challenges before us. With Ignatius' example, and your support, we approach the future with hope and great purpose. I seek your prayers, counsel and fellowship as we continue on our journey together.

With blessings

Andy Bullen SJ

Parish Notices



Tidings of Comfort and Joy – THIS WEDNESDAY

Wed 13 Dec @ 8.00pm, St Mary's North Sydney

Join the Parish for Reflections on Advent, accompanied by Chamber Choir and Orchestra. This is a not-to-be missed event. No bookings required.



An Ignatian Journey with Fr Andrew Bullen SJ and Alex Gorman

5 February – 26 March 2018, St Francis Xavier Hall, 17 Mackenzie St, Lavender Bay.

Course duration: 8 weeks, Mondays 7.30-9.15pm; Program cost: \$250.00

This course is designed to present participants with the key foundations and practices of Ignatian Spirituality. Participants will be invited into meditation, reflection journal writing and discussion through an "Ignatian Process".

The course will cover the life of its founder, St Ignatius, Ignatian images of God, our response to God, types of Ignatian Prayer, the Daily Examen, Gifts and Talents, Dreams and Desires, Detachment and Discernment.

Participants will also be introduced to the links between Ignatian Spirituality and Positive Psychology, a new emerging field that looks at the conditions in which people flourish and thrive.

Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their own spiritual journey in relation to the key Ignatian constructs in the hope of building greater love, joy, peace and gratitude in the lead up to Easter. In order to gain the most spiritual nourishment from this course participants are strongly advised to attend all 8 sessions. We look forward to welcoming you to this course.

Bookings: <https://www.trybooking.com/TIAU> | Enquiries: Alex Gorman 0415 768 330

Fr Andy Bullen SJ and Alex Gorman



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Emerton/JSS Christmas Appeal THIS WEEKEND

Dave Hammond will speak at all Masses outlining the ministry and asking for donations for the Christmas Appeal. Please be generous so they can

continue their work, assisting the vulnerable and the needy. We welcome gifts of unwrapped toys for children of various ages (as below) which can be left in the sacristies or under the steps in the Ron Dyer Centre. Toys should be new and gifts of food non-perishable.

- Toys & games - Babies through to 17 yrs.
- Christmas party food: Cakes, sweets and biscuits
- Cash donations will also be most welcome. For cash donations please use the appeal envelopes located at the back of all churches. All Donations are 100% tax deductible. Please include your name and address. Thank you from the JSS team.

+ Please note the following that there will be no 9.00am Family Masses at St Mary's over the Christmas New Year period Sundays: 24 & 31 Dec, 7 & 14 Jan

Sunday's Readings

First Reading

[Is 40:1-5, 9-11](#)

In the desert make ready the way of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm

Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Second Reading

[2 Pt 3:8-14](#)

The Lord shows great patience.

Gospel Acclamation

[Lk 3:4, 6](#)

Gospel

[Mk 1:1-8](#)

John the Baptist proclaims the coming of the Messiah.

In Our Prayers

Baptisms

Henry Birdsill, Zosha Hammond, Harry Beram, Ania Wielopolska

Sick

Ron Whitmore, Sr Natalina Todeschini, Brian McClosky, Craig Chase, Rosa Maria Santos, Vedran Simunovic, Bruce Horsfield, Tony Breslin, Gavin O'Connor, Fr Tony Smith SJ, Joseph Meagher, Sharon Collins, John Fitzgerald, Sandra Tsui, Neave Mackey (17yrs), Mee-Na Cheok, Mary O'Connor, Sister Anna Ventura rsm,

Recently Deceased

Madeleine Cullen, Madeleine Baker, David Lidbetter, Leonard Colwell (Father of Lisa McLean) William O' Donnell, Mark Sullivan

Anniversaries

Alice Ho, Katrina Dawson, Joy and Cecil O'Dea