

24 December 2008

To The Ivanhoe Parish Leadership Team

Cc : Father John Cunningham

**Re: Knocking down Mary Immaculate Church**

Dear the Ivanhoe Parish Leader Team

I am writing to you to object the master plan on knocking down the current Mary Immaculate Church and develop it to become a shopping center.

Our family have been living in Ivanhoe since 1992. We go to mass on the weekend, not every week but as much as we could. We contribute a little bit to the church both finance and time. So I like to think that I have earned the right to express our view about the Master plan just released last week.

First of all, my impression about the timing of the releasing of the report and the quality of the report itself.

- The timing of the release of the master plan, just few days before Christmas, is very unfortunately. To me it sounds very much like the government is trying to release a very bad and unpopular policy.
- It is Christmas time, I do not have time to read every page of the report (kindly lent to me by Merl). I do not know who are the FPPV people. However, to me the overall quality of the report is poor. It is thick, very thick, yet only 16 pages is actual report. Many of their assessment are subjective, heresay, random estimation (like your guess is as good as my guess!), not based on statistics, survey, research nor facts. For a large scale of the parish master plan, the report is even worse than one that is typical for the development of a standard block into 3 townhouses!

My understanding is that one of FPPV recommendations is that we:

- demolish the current Mary Immaculate (MI) church and presbytery
- sell the current church site to developer to build shops
- money from the sales will be used to build a smaller church on the current presbytery site (on the back of the newly build shopping strip), and to finance major refurbishments of Mother of God (MOG) church.

From the report, it seems to me that the PLT and/or diocese prefer and/or have already decided to supported this recommendation. It is presented as the best option for MI. It has a beautiful draw on the report. May I ask that, do we have a hidden report already prepared for the design of new shopping center, a list of the buyers, developers, tenants etc?

In my opinion that if we go down to the path of selling the church asset then it is **better to keep MI and sell MOG or develop the site** (similar to the plan for the tennis court). Some of my reasons are:

- As acknowledge by the report, MI indicates the prominence of the Catholic in the Ivanhoe area.
- More people attend mass at MI than at MOG. According to the report:

	Mary Immaculate	Mother of God
Average weekly attending	210-230	120-130
School enrolment (2009)	165	180
Ratio mass attendant/school enrolment	1.27 to 1.40	0.67 to 0.72
Weekly contribution	???	Less than MI (from weekly newsletter)

- The main reason for keeping MOG is because of the primary school. However, there is nothing wrong with telling the student of MOG that their church is the big and beautiful church on Upper Heidelberg Road! The church does not have to be on your backyard to be your church. Think about our fellow catholic in the country areas!
- There is no reason why more people will come to mass at MOG if it has a new roof etc.
- There is no guarantee that more people will come to mass at a newer and smaller MI church built behind a shopping strip. I personally will not come.
- There is enough shops around MI, and may be more when the opposite site is developed
- Cost estimated for the refurbishment of MI is vaguely and heresay. There is no DBMAS on MI and details in costing (why? We had one for MOG!)
- Do FPPV staff go to mass at MI at all? My personal experience is that we only need a better heating system in winter for MI. Why do we need a better sound system? Why do we need a better lighting system? This is a church, not a theatre! If we have money, yes, but if we do not then we can still worship God with what we have. Think about churches that attended by millions of our fellow catholic in third world countries.
- I do not want to start another class war here but my impression (and the numbers back me up here) is that since the day of the Ivanhoe cluster was created, **MOG always take advantage of the other (less fortunate) churches on the west side of Ivanhoe**. MOG has less mass attending, contribute less, and yet spent more than their fair share of money of the parish. And unless there is a particular reason from the diocese, I think this is not fair for the people on the west side of our parish. In my view, it is now tragic and disgraceful that MI has to be knocked down to build new shops to get money so that we can keep MOG for people who are leaving in the area but rarely go to mass there.

A lot of people, dead or still alive like me would not agree with the FPPV 's subjective reaction that MI:

- "*is hard and sombre*": and FPPV advised us to built a even harder and more sombre small church at the back of a shopping strip? (yes, to me the new church drawn in the report is hard and sombre)
- "*is somewhat instrospective and unwelcoming*": well, to me it seems just that FPPV people feel unwelcome to the church, or do not want to go to mass there. The reality is that the church just have close outside of mass time, and will be the same for the new church.

- "*does not invite passer-by in*": Do we really want to knock MI down to build a church in order to invite passer-by in. Or this is just an idea of FPPV about how to attract people to the Catholic faith? So FPPV advice us that we should build shops in front of the church to attract people coming to the church. I think if FDDP is right then we, catholic as a whole, are in a bigger trouble then.

We all want to save our churches. We all know your good intention and great service to the parish. However, let me remind you that in the name of progress and survival, history is littering with all sort of wrong decisions being made and regret later. I strongly believe that knocking down MI will be one of those, in ten year, twenty year time. We own to future generations of catholic in Ivanhoe to keep Mary Immaculate church. Otherwise, John will have nothing to show to the world on the church's website!

At the end of the day, I may keep fighting against the demolition of MI. I may ask Father John to speak to people at the church. I may print and distribute a few brochures. I may get someone at The Age to have an article about "*the commercializing of a dying church*". I may try to go to Today Tonight and they may come to make a segment on how we are "*Knocking down church and build shopping center*". Or I just quietly give this away and take the whole family go to St Bernadette church for mass. I have absolutely no doubt that many other church goers will do the same. Then ten years down the track, there will not be a big job to convert that small church on the back of the shopping trip to apartments!

Let me tell all of a you a little story. Many years ago, I worked in the city and used to have a walk during lunch time. Many time I walked pass a little church at the corner of Elizabeth street and Lonsdale street. I always wonder, gee, the land is valuable, right in the middle of city. Yet the church is small and old, there is not many people coming for mass. Why didn't they just knock the old church down and build a shopping center, another Myers, another David Jones.

To this day, I still do not know the reason why they did not do that, but I always thanks God that the church is still there.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of you and your family.

Yours sincerely

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