

## **One Community, One Parish, One Priest, One Church.**

The proposed Master Plan only addresses one of the three key issues that we all thought were critical when we started this journey - to build a vibrant Catholic community in Ivanhoe. The process started not because we thought change in and of itself was good but because we faced a rapidly declining number of clergy, a diminishing 'churched' community consequently a reducing financial operating base.

We asked ourselves three key questions;

- Could we realistically maintain three mass centres?
- How best to address the decline in the clergy?
- How to address the declining parish financial base?

Some of these problems could be addressed by radical measures (married or imported priests, female clergy), stronger links between catholic education and parish financial support, selling off of multiple or excess assets. Most of these radical measures are unlikely or undesirable, and thus we must face these decisions within realistic boundaries.

The situation we face in Ivanhoe requires hard decisions to be made, but the proposed Master Plan suggests that we can basically retain the status quo, that there is no need for hard decisions. The proposed Master Plan offers a little to all without addressing the long term critical issues.

1. Single Mass Centre – what account is taken of this decision which as far as I know has never been rescinded by the parish leadership team?
2. It is not clear from the plan as to how the new development can be supported, as the proposed revenue sources are long term and possibly inadequate, whereas the capital expenditure and interest expenses will start from day one. It is also interesting to note that the same problem faced by other parishes in Australia and overseas has been addressed through the rationalisation of parish property. Some of the most vibrant parishes I have visited have been ones where what appeared to be quite diverse communities that have come together at one (not always new) mass centre. Some of this was very evident in 'mid sized' cities in America, who took the hard decisions to revive a declining parish.
3. Inconsistencies in the Master Plan – building a larger church in Ivanhoe, capable of catering for a large number through some 'interesting' design options, when we are still retaining the other two churches. The interesting 'design' options would only be necessary if the other two churches were no longer available, and even then altering the existing may be a better solution. ( I wonder what the off street parking requirement would be for a new church?) The suggestion that we need to be able to cater for 1000+ people on some of the special occasions doesn't seem to be supported by recent church attendance data.
4. Korean Community – the plan is actually silent on the role that is expected to be played by the Korean community at St Bernadette's – is there a long term commitment which has financial implications? How did the maintenance issue of two years ago all of a sudden become a non issue? Is the plan silent on this issue because it assumes that those parishioners who are not willing to travel to one of the other churches (or can't) will be satisfied with a service in Korean?
5. East Ivanhoe – the only mention of any financial data in the plan is the \$500,000 required to carry out urgent repair works at Mother of God, and then hints that required changes are linked to school needs rather than parish needs (some will argue that school is parish, but by accepting State funding that argument was lost a long time ago). There is no clear indication as to how long term maintenance

will be funded, is the suggested \$500,000 coming from the sale of an asset (tennis courts) which only occurs once in a life time? All three churches require urgent maintenance, which we don't seem to be able to support from 'normal' parish income, so our solution is to re-build one, maintain the second one and ignore the third one.

6. Parish house – what is the economic/financial justification to retain one of the most valuable assets (East Ivanhoe Parish house) when there are a number of alternatives, and the sale may enhance the long term financial position of the parish?
7. Tennis Courts – disappointed that we would sell this asset, but accept that it is the right step to take, reducing parish assets to support the long term objectives. If the courts are sold, the Parish should support the tennis club in working with other clubs in the area to try and maintain the sporting options for those players currently using the facility and the outreach activities to young people in the area where suitable sporting facilities are minimal. It is interesting to note that St Bernadette's sold off half of the tennis courts some years ago and used the interest from the sale funds to support the parish, drawing less frequently on the Priests' Remunerations than the other Ivanhoe parishes. When amalgamation occurred the balance of the fund become part of the general funds, but was insufficient to meet the growing property costs.
8. Retirement Village – a good concept and should be encouraged. The financial performance of existing retirement villages doesn't seem to support the concept that it will be a 'cash cow' that can support other parish endeavours. The size, location and our desire to cater for parishioners would suggest that the 'pricing' will have a social /Christian bias rather than one that is driven by shareholder returns. Retirement villages with a 'social' objective tend to break-even rather than generating surplus funds to be used elsewhere.

All in all, the Master Plan promises much but ignores the history of our past communities and our very recent financial history. The Master Plan only requires one hard decision to be made immediately, the sale of the tennis courts, without putting forward a viable financial plan that supports the proposed short term capital expenditure (\$3-4 million plus?) or the longer term viability of the parish. The proposed plan seemed ambitious in 2008, and will not be aided by the economic conditions that we will face in 2009/2010.

What are we aiming to leave the next generation of parishioners, buildings and debt or a vibrant catholic community?

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