



Archbishop's Office
GPO Box 3089
Canberra ACT 2601

1st July 2025

Fr Tru Nguyen MSC
Moderator
West Belconnen Catholic Community
25 Blackham Street
Holt ACT 2615

Dear Fr Tru,

For the last year the Parishes of St John the Apostle, Kippax and St Thomas Aquinas, Charnwood have been exploring their future alignment under your careful guidance, along with Fr Chung Tran MSC and, previously, Fr Gerard McCormick MSC along with your Provincial, Very Rev Fr Stephen Hackett. I have been attentive to the movements of the Holy Spirit and the discernment taking place at the local level.

After exploring the matter with the Council of Priests, I believe that this is an appropriate time to formally consult with the parishes about their future configuration and canonical status.

My intent in commencing this stage of consultation is not to forego or dismiss any of the excellent pastoral activities of the parishes over the last half century, but to seek to cultivate a bigger Pastoral garden that might better serve the needs of parishioners today and into the future.

Cognisant of the requirements of universal law (nb. CIC 50 – 51 and 515) and the custom of the Archdiocese, I have given consideration to the future of these parishes and believe that their spiritual, pastoral and financial needs are best served by coming together in a canonically appropriate manner, not excluding extinctive union. As Pope Francis reminded us, the essential strength of the parish as such, is its flexibility. Parishes "can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community" (E.G. n. 28)

I have determined that there is a just cause for this consultation: it is for the good of souls and the good of the faithful in order that these communities of communities might be both genuinely evangelising as well as sanctuaries where the thirsty come to drink. My judgement on this matter stems from, but is not limited to the following:

1. The contemporary connections between the Parishes and distinct community of West Belconnen created through transport, educational and community intersections which were not the case 50 years ago at the formation of these parishes;
2. That both parishes are currently being under the pastoral care of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart;
3. Altered patterns of mass attendance in both current parishes while there is also burgeoning growth in population, Catholic school enrolments, as well as



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4. alterations in the profile of parishioners suggest a new pastoral model of living communion, participation and mission-orientation is warranted;
5. Existing strong pastoral collaborations within the communities of the parishes, for example in the St Vincent de Paul Society Conference, the Catholic schools within the parishes, and shared parish staff;
6. The financial situation of the parishes individually and together is on a trajectory which is not viable in the longer term;
7. That a synodal ecclesiology suggests the exploration of new pastoral models to more effectively serve the pastoral needs of the faithful and to become more truly evangelising communities.

For these reasons, I now instruct you, in conjunction with the Vicar General and Chancellor, to enter into a formal process of consultation with the parishes entrusted to your care.

In order to best inform me prior to any decision, the process of consultation will need to adequately hear the concerns and mind of the parishioners. You should, therefore, engage with the parish communities, both through the formal organs of the Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Councils, but also through less formal avenues such as the combined parishes Steering Committee you formed in 2024. Explicitly seeking the views of the whole of the parish communities is encouraged, though the specific means will be for you, your brother priest and your parish councils, in liaison with the Vicar General, to determine. Necessarily, I am seeking the discernment of the parishes through a synodal process in which the parishes seek the will of the Holy Spirit regarding the most appropriate structure for constant missionary outreach.

It is my hope that the first phase of parish level consultations could be concluded by the first week of September 2025 in order that I am in a position to provide the Council of Priests with more detailed information on this matter at their meeting on 11 September 2025. This will be a major topic for the Council's synodal reflection.

It may be that the views emerging from the parish consultation and the counsel of the Presbyteral Council is sufficient to enable me to determine an outcome following that juncture. It is also plausible that the parochial consultation and/or the Presbyteral Council identifies other matters that should be considered prior to a decision about the future territories of these parishes.

The Vicar General is able to offer you advice and support in this process as to the means of consultation and the mechanisms to maximise the effectiveness of the discernment involved.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn

