

# ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

*“Making the Word of God Fully Known”*

A Report on the Impact of the Pilot  
Program for Parish Renewal  
2012 - 2013

## Executive Summary

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## 1. Aims of the Report

In 2011 the Archbishop of Melbourne, through the Bishop Perry Institute for Ministry and Mission, commissioned this report to provide a rigorous and evidenced based evaluation for the Pilot Program for Parish Renewal that commenced in the Diocese that year. This research was aimed to:

- Establish a ‘baseline’ of missional effectiveness for participating parishes as close as possible to the time and status of the parishes’ entry into the Program.
- Evaluate the Pilot Program’s efficiency and effectiveness in encouraging and facilitating improvement in missional effectiveness.
- Report on practical outcomes of the Pilot Program, both intentional and unintentional, that could inform the improvement, expansion and diversification of the program into the future.

The research was guided by key questions, including the following:

- What is meant by missional effectiveness? How could it be measured?
- What impact has the pilot program made in the life of the parish? What difference has it made to the leaders involved, particularly to those being coached?
- What impact does the pilot program have on different types of parishes? Does it work better for particular church traditions or socio-economic contexts?

## 2. Research design

The definition of missional effectiveness utilised for the study was determined as:

A parish is missionally effective as it seeks to engage the wider world with the good news of Jesus Christ in ways that lead to congregational growth and health.

In the light of this, a longitudinal study was undertaken using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative measures. These were comparative data from Diocesan Yearbooks and National Church Life Surveys, as well as interviews with clergy and focus groups of mission action team members. Six parishes were studied from the 2012-2013 cohort of parishes with an average attendance of 130-210. These were parishes seeking to transition from a ‘pastoral’ to a ‘program’ sized church. The design of the research is illustrated in Figure 1:

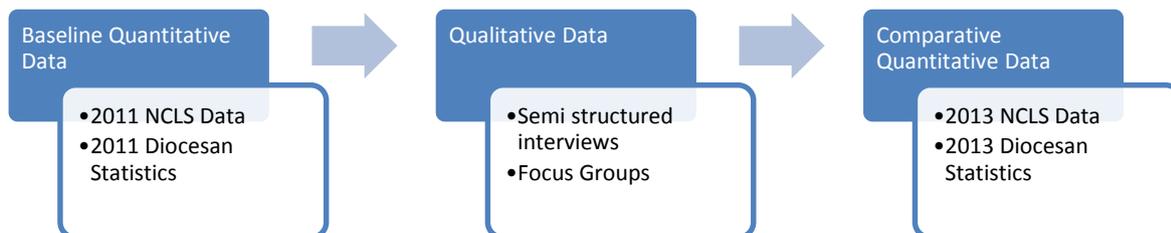


Figure 1: Overview of Methodology.

## **3. Key Findings**

The following five areas were examined to ascertain the impact of the pilot program.

### **3.1 Impact of the program on the life of the parish**

All of the parishes studied for the report underwent significant transitions over the two year period of the program including:

- The introduction of new programs seeking to connect with the wider community.
- The development of a new strategies to welcome newcomers.
- The restructuring of leadership around pathways to discipleship.
- Greater integration and ministry with those from other cultural backgrounds.
- Greater impetus given to rethinking the use of buildings for the purposes of mission.

### **3.2 Impact of the Program on Average Sunday Attendance**

The pilot program had overall a positive impact on average Sunday attendance. Those parishes previously on a growth trajectory continued to grow numerically and those that were declining or static in attendance began to grow. The main areas of growth were with children and families, including those from within the Sudanese community.

### **3.3 Impact of the Program on Church Health**

A comparison of the National Church Life Survey for the parishes before and after the program indicates four significant changes in church health and vitality. These were:

- Inspiring and empowered leadership
- Practical and diverse service
- Willing and effective faith sharing
- Intentional and welcoming inclusion

### **3.4 Impact of the program on clergy**

All the clergy interviewed spoke highly of the pilot program and saw it as enhancing their ministry. They felt encouraged by being “upskilled” and spoke of the following benefits:

- Enhanced accountability through monthly coaching session.
- More creative ideas through the training offered.
- A reconceptualization of their role from being pastor to all to enabler of others.
- The development of new skills.
- A marked growth in confidence.
- A sense of being personally supported in their task.

### **3.5 Impact of the program on lay leaders**

The overall response of lay leaders to their involvement in the program was a positive one. Many felt empowered by the training as well as by the willingness of clergy to involve them in mission. Themes that emerged in interviews included:

- A greater clarity of purpose as to the mission of the church.
- The empowerment and enabling of their ministry.
- A growth in personal commitment to the parish.
- New insights and understanding

## 4. Conclusions

The research indicates that the pilot program has been very effective in encouraging and facilitating improvement in missional engagement. This was shown by:

- The commencement of new initiatives to connect with the wider community.
- Clergy developing a new focus and intentionality.
- Lay leaders developing new skills and gifts for ministry.
- Positive changes made to the 'missional' DNA of the parishes with a greater proportion of attendees being willing to share faith and welcome newcomers.
- Growth in the average Sunday attendance of each parish.

The context-based nature of this program was a major factor in its effectiveness. Rather than import an expert to do the work of mission, the program sought to ground the missional imperative within each context. This meant that coaching and training was able to be applied directly to the specific issues and problems of each parish.

## 5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward for consideration.

- 1: The Diocese continues to invest in the parish renewal program.**
- 2: The Diocese continues to invest in leadership development of clergy by formalising a professional development program which includes annual accountability.**
- 3: Training programs for lay leaders in parishes be developed and expanded.**
- 4: The expansion of the coaching program be carefully monitored and evaluated for quality control by the creation of an advisory group.**
- 5: Guidelines for Mission Action Teams be developed.**
- 6: Further research be undertaken of the parishes involved in this project to investigate the continued impact of the pilot program.**
- 7: Research be undertaken into the impact of the pilot program on the growth of smaller parishes.**
- 8: Extra coaching and training support be offered to clergy and lay leaders with multi ethnic congregations, with a study undertaken of the specific issues and pressures facing the leaders in these contexts.**
- 9: Long-term coaching and training support be offered to clergy and lay leaders in congregations which have faced recent major internal conflicts.**