

# Parish Growth Pilot Project Diocese of Melbourne

The Revd Canon Dr Stephen Ames  
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(2017)

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## The aim

- To identify patterns of growth in Melbourne Anglican parishes, using data from the diocesan year books
- To discern underlying reasons for growth in leading parishes that might be modelled by other parishes seeking to grow

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## The approach

We took a quantitative approach

- To measure and classify parishes
- To select parishes with consistent patterns of growth for further investigation

Our qualitative approach

- Studied documents provided by growing parishes giving their story of what led to their growth
- Engaged with parish leaders
- Sought feedback from the parish on our findings

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## A pastoral indicator

- We used a tool developed in the Church of England to compare dioceses (Francis et al.)
  - Average Sunday communicants
  - Christmas communicants
  - Electoral roll membership
  - Baptisms
  - Confirmations
- Relating these to the median parish and averaging them to produce a pastoral index number

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## A financial indicator

For Melbourne we also derived a financial index number from these factors (using parish financial data converted to a common base of 2011 \$ values):

- Ordinary income
- Productivity ratio
- Two generosity ratios
- External commitment ratio

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## The parish performance indicator (PPI)

- We averaged the pastoral and financial index numbers to produce the PPI
- We calculated the PPI for all Melbourne parishes for four years at intervals of five years: 1996, 2001, 2006 & 2011
- For each year we also calculated the PPI for a notional median parish using the median values of each of the individual components of the pastoral and financial indexes

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## The median parish

- Average Sunday communicants fell from 79 in 1996 to 59 in 2011
- Electoral Roll numbers fell by 23% from 112 to 87
- The productivity ratio (offerings & donations / total ministry cost) fell 44% from \$2.09 to \$1.16
- But the generosity ratio amount per elector (offerings & donations / number on Electoral Roll) rose 27% from \$801 in 1996 to \$1019 in 2011 (using 2011 \$ values)

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## Identifying growing parishes

For each five year period we calculated for both the pastoral and financial indexes for each parish:

- The percentage change from its index number at the beginning of the period
- The percentage variation from the median parish for the end year of the period

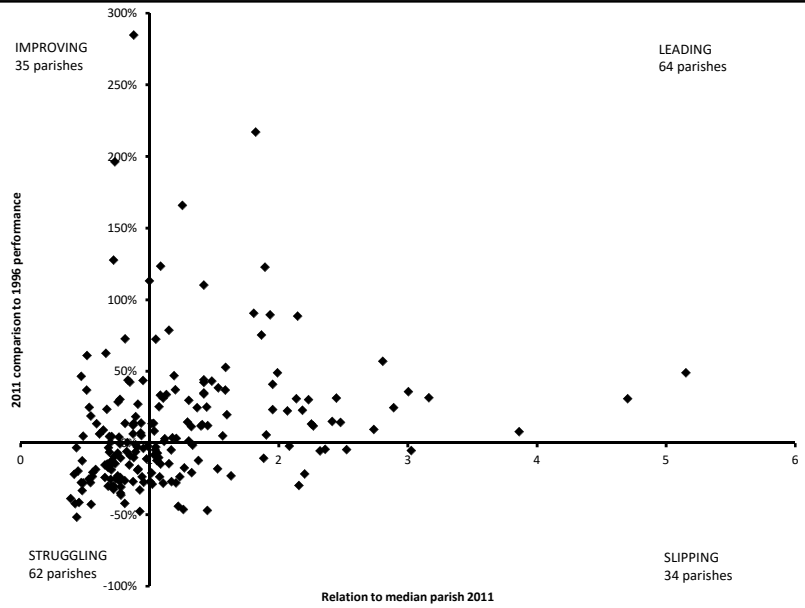
We then applied a double test to select parishes for further investigation:

- Improvement compared to itself for each five year period for **both** the **pastoral** and the **financial** index number  
[The parish did not need to be above the median but it did need to show consistent growth over 15 years]

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# The overall Melbourne parish distribution



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# PPI geographically

- Green    Leading
- Blue    Improving
- Amber   Slipping
- Red     Struggling



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# Geographical advantage

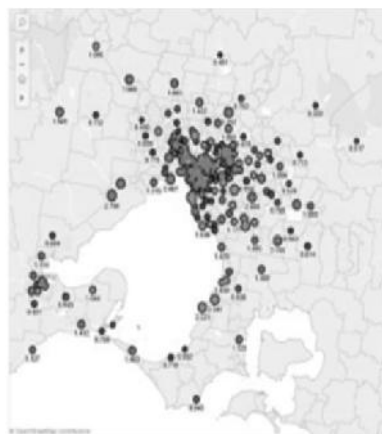
From Tony Vinson and Margot Rawsthorne, *Dropping off the Edge 2015: Persistent Communal Disadvantage in Australia*



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Some, but not convincing, correlation between parish performance and the relative advantage of postcodes



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The following points indicate something of what we noticed  
The four stories are much more lively and engaging than such a list

- The parishes are from across the diocese, geographically and in terms of Anglican traditions.
- Collaborative leadership, among clergy and lay people, was strongly evident in each parish.
- Strong, diverse lay ministry.
- Each parish has a strong connection to its local community.
- Each parish changed over the fifteen years but with each there was continuity so that what came later built on what went before.

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- Each parish is/has/was facing/ed conflict and hard decisions about parish life.
- Handling positively the transitions between clergy.
- The importance of music ministry.
- Each parish is a strong multi-cultural community.

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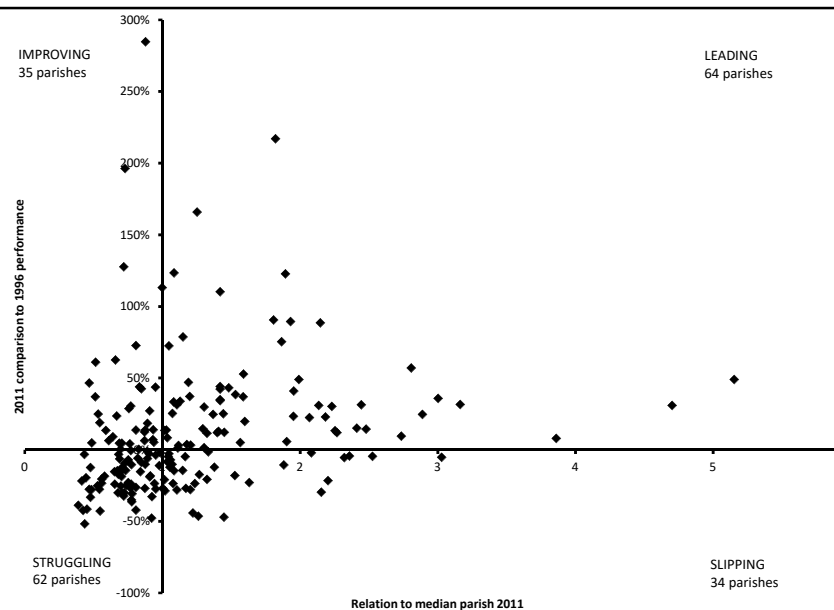
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- Each parish has a strong, though not identical, tradition of hospitality, including the sharing of meals.
- Faithful prayer on the part of the whole church and for specific matters for the life of the parish.
- No one major ingredient emerged as a clear and certain indicator of success, rather, each parish's story suggests that a synergy of strategies contributed to their record of continuous improvement as measured by the PPI.

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The  
scatterplot as  
a resource for  
reflection &  
planning



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## Pathways for further research

- Article in TMA with graph and invitation to clergy to receive where their parish is on the plot.
- Invite to a meeting all in the same quadrant for reflection on implications.

or

- Invite all to meet together to reflect on implications.
- Either way, document the main results and make available to senior staff.

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## Over to you ...

- Any questions?
- Observations?
- Do you think this kind of analysis is approachable and useful for clergy and lay leaders?
- ...

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