

3.13 CREATING SUSTAINABLE MINISTRY

In response to God’s call to mission we seek to use the gifts God has entrusted to us for the benefit of the church’s work and to the glory of Christ throughout our Diocese. We are “members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him, the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord”. (Ephesians 2.19)

Our Anglican understanding of Church is expressed in article 19 of the 39 Articles is defined as “a congregation of the faithful in which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments duly ministered”. This definition affords greater flexibility in ministry forms than is currently practiced in our Diocese.

We share a collective obligation of stewardship that requires us to work together to ensure that our ministry is as healthy and vibrant as possible. This obligation arises not only from our shared collective mission but also from scripture and from our vision of extending the kingdom and building communities of hope.

We acknowledge that every Christian is called to engage in ministry and to become a member of the household of God. Primary to the mission of a local congregation is the mandate to build up the body of Christ so that Christians are equipped for mission work in their area and beyond.

As an episcopal church, we acknowledge that our Bishop has ultimate responsibility for the mission and ministry of the church in the Diocese. However, our Bishop does not work alone. As a synodical church, wherein authority is shared amongst the clergy, the laity and the bishops, we work collaboratively to support the mission of our Diocese, each using the gifts given by God to extend the kingdom.

Parishes are recognised by the Diocesan Council with the concurrence of the Bishop. Within the parish there are a variety congregations using a variety of buildings. While parishes have significant capacity to give a local expression to the Christian faith as received by the Anglican Church of Australia, the parish always exists in the context of the mission of the Diocese. It delivers ministry to the local community as an expression of the whole Diocese. In that respect, our parishes and our Diocese always exist and work together in mutuality of interest.

Parishes and congregations are not permanent structures. They have a life cycle. They are planted; they grow; sometimes they die; sometimes they transform. There is a mutual stewardship responsibility, shared between the local ministry and the rest of our Diocese, which obliges us to work together through all stages of the life cycle. It goes beyond congregational self-designation and self-determination. This responsibility includes a discernment of what to do when a ministry has insufficient resources and when it can call upon the resources of the wider church.

The Diocesan Council has formal responsibilities relating to the oversight of parishes and the management of church trust property. For example, it may receive submissions relating to the recognition of a parish, the closure of a church building or the sale of property.

In order, that those involved in making or considering submissions have clarity about the criteria that will be used, the Diocesan Council has resolved to use the following indicators.

A **Sustainable Parish Ministry** is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or overall parish ministry that has the majority of the following observable characteristics:

- It can commit to the Mission of the Church as expressed in the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion
- It embraces the Healthy Ministry Practices identified by the Bishop
- It has a strong sense of community with Gender, Age, Ethnic & Economic diversity and a strong sense of connection with the wider community in which it is placed.
- It has clergy and active lay leadership with the skills to manage the programs and property of the parish ministry to meet its own sense of mission.
- It has the energy and resources to meet the challenges of the community it serves.
- The freewill offering of its members is a major source of its core financial support.
- It has the resources and appropriate leadership necessary to carry out its calling.
- It can provide for the future well-being of congregational or parish life.
- It generates financial resources from its members and those it serves, and does not deplete its capital reserves or capital assets.

A **Strategic Ministry** is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or overall parish ministry when taking into account the mission call to the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Newcastle which has an iconic character or is located in an area which is identified to be of importance from a 25 year, 50 year or perpetual horizon. The long history of a church building does not necessarily make the ministry a strategic ministry.

The Diocese has

- Strategic Ministries which are sustainable
- Sustainable ministries which may or not be seen as strategic
- Strategic Ministries which are not currently sustainable
- Unsustainable Ministries

The commitment of the Bishop and the Diocesan Council is to

- a. nurture sustainable ministries;***
- b. apply resources to the further development of sustainable strategic ministries;***
- c. apply resources to ensure unsustainable strategic ministries become sustainable***
- d. engage in a process of transition for unsustainable ministries to sustainability, recognition as a Festival Church or Church that is not a parish, or closure.***

An **Unsustainable ministry** is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or overall parish ministry which is unable

- a. to give full expression to mission and ministry as described in the Healthy Ministry Practices and/or the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion;
- b. to meet a full-time remuneration package for an incumbent (stipend, housing, superannuation and other benefits);
- c. to meet its Parish Contribution or other amounts to the Diocese such as insurance costs;
- d. to comply with Diocesan Work Health and Safety and Child Safety expectations
- e. to elect Synod Representatives or Churchwardens
- f. to meet its obligations under the Designated Fund Ordinance 2015.

An unsustainable ministry exhibits some of these characteristics –

- It is depleting its capital assets to pay for its current expenses;
- It is unable to maintain its property and have sufficient capital reserves for its longer term property needs.
- It cannot cover current operating expenses without cutting back on important ministry.
- It is unduly reliant on sources of funding outside the freewill offering of its members.

The Bishop and the Diocesan Council recognise that there are some congregations meeting in iconic buildings or strategic areas which are not currently sustainable as a parish but which have character which should continue to be nurtured. These congregations and church buildings will become part of the Parish of Churches under the Care of the Bishop.