

Vision/Action Plans

September 2020



In the challenging context of the global coronavirus pandemic our prayerful and collaborative vision/action planning has led to the following important directions, strategies, and goals for the year ahead.¹



In *The Book of Acts* we see how the early church, and the apostles of Christ, had to be agile, meeting in a variety of ways and places, and changing course when the circumstances changed. Agility and innovation, faith and vision were necessary attributes in such times. Like them, we need to **be open to the Spirit of God** and navigate the rapidly changing world around us. We will stay true to God's call, aligned with our diocesan partners in mission, and open to God's wisdom. To be sure, though, we will undergo many changes in these unprecedented times, to adapt and innovate while keeping true to our foundations and ethos with the help of God.

Our new plans respond broadly to **three biblical commissions**:

- Make the Gospel known by word and deed (e.g. Matt. 28:20), and
- Care for God's people (e.g. John 15:12)
- Love mercy and do justice (e.g. Micah 6:8)

KEY PRINCIPLES IN THIS VISION/ACTION PLANNING PERIOD

The following **key principles** are explained in full on our website. In summary:

- a) Our vision/action plans have **short-term reviews built in**.
- b) Church will be both **in-person/and on-line** in the future.
- c) Our **on-line access points** will include **interest-oriented groups, activities and ministries**.
- d) A refreshed **commitment to Reconciliation** will form part of our plans.
- e) The **"gifts", abilities and networks** of our parishioners will influence our plans.
- f) We will **use of our church property creatively** while in-person use is limited.
- g) We will **be proactive in communicating** on-line with parishioners.
- h) We **favour live on-line gatherings** over on-demand recorded services and events.
- i) We will **systematically make regular contact** with parishioners during the pandemic.
- j) We will offer a **wide range of small, significant communities to join**.
- k) **COVID-safe plans** will be put in place when in-person gatherings, however limited, resume.

SHIFT FROM A SUNDAY-CENTRIC ON-LINE FOCUS TO MULTIPLE ENTRY POINTS

Our on-line presence as a church has been dominated by access to church on Sundays and augmented by contacts and information. This misrepresents the wide range of entry points and access points to Christian community on offer at St Michael's. This vision/action plan sets out to

¹ This vision/action plan will focus on 2020 – 2021 and will involve short-term reviews and a full revision in 12 month's time

improve visibility and access on-line to a wider range of ministries. This will help us to improve our pastoral care *and* our outreach during the global pandemic.

In the pre-COVID world, St Michael's Church benefitted greatly from its property's **physical visibility and** architecture and the freedoms that allowed our parishioners to interact with and invite their friends to church services, events and activities. Our church site is prominent and attractive. The **glass foyer** is both symbolic and practical, offering a welcoming entry where anyone in the general public can look in and see and assess the church's people, and information about the church's life on Sundays and other days before choosing to enter.



In the current pandemic environment physical access to church life is highly restricted. This vision/action plan proposes significant changes to entry and access to our Christian community via **on-line and virtual means**. Like the **glass door** into the **physical church property**, these plans propose to make many new on-line "doorways" that are transparent through which people can "enter" and engage with the life of our church.

Some **key changes** are as follows:

- A. **Website changes:** Our very practical and effective website will soon feature seven (7) "glass doors" into the life of the church community.² Parishioners and new enquirers alike will be able to navigate their way from the home page of the website quickly and easily into arenas of interest and affinities. Each "glass door" will allow entry into a variety of activities, groups and resources related to the title above it. The working titles above these **seven "glass doors"** include: The **seven hubs** proposed are:
- i. **Advocacy and Action**
 - Groups and activities for justice, mercy and peace - such as reconciliation action, prevention of violence against women, climate action, refugee support (ASRC), women's support in Africa (BMF), Overseas Aid & Relief (TEAR), Common Grace, and more
 - ii. **Creatives**
 - Groups and classes for those whose gifts and professional work includes art, music, drama, craft, movies, sculpture, writing, and more
 - iii. **Learning**
 - Parenting courses
 - Book reviews and book swap
 - Links to recommended webinars and conferences
 - Christian education groups and resources e.g. Alpha, Ridley Certificate course, *Zondervan MasterLectures*, johndickson.org, and more
 - Sermon and study resources in our library, via links, YouTube channel
 - iv. **Wellness and Spirituality**
 - Resources (written and video) for wellbeing, spiritual growth
 - Groups and activities for:
 - prayer,
 - mindfulness,
 - contemplation,
 - mental health, and more

² A "perfect" number in biblical terms 😊 combined with a Covid buzz word!

- Community choir (via Zoom)
- v. **Worship**
 - Direct links to live worship services via YouTube and Facebook on Sundays
 - Links to YouTube channel resources for worship in the home, on-demand
- vi. **Community**
 - Pastoral small groups and bible study groups
 - Prayer support group
 - Contact details for church staff and leaders
 - Playgroup
 - Christmas events
 - Concerts
 - Book groups
 - Walking group (when restrictions ease)
 - What's App groups
 - Community choir
 - Fitness group
- vii. **Gospel missions Partners**
 - Church Missionary Society (CMS) link
 - Ridley College preparing people for Gospel ministry
 - Common Grace network
 - Sports chaplaincy

B. Social Media Changes: We will maximize the effectiveness of access to all the above information and activities via our social media channels and platforms, including:

- Google search
- Google My Business
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Facebook
- WhatsApp

- i. **Subscribers and Followers** – parishioners will be encouraged to express their “membership” on-line by becoming subscribers and followers on the abovementioned platforms. This helps the church’s administrators and pastors to keep track (without invading privacy) of who is regularly part of our community and to identify those who are new or enquiring. The following video explains how to do so: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXGO1QAgZbM>
- ii. **Curating our social media accounts** – staff time will be directed to make changes that improve the effectiveness of our on-line presence and communication:
 - A new “welcome to St Michael’s” video clip on our YouTube channel
 - Playlists of worship and small group video resources on YouTube
 - Watch parties via Facebook
 - What’s App groups for connection via interests

AGILE STAFF & STRUCTURES

Parish Council has committed to maintain current levels of staffing for the 2020-2021 budget, with short-term reviews built in to assess the financial status at quarterly markers. In the immediate future, staff time and skills will be deployed with greater flexibility, with short-term reviews of tasks and goals to provide the agility needed to meet the ever-changing environment of this pandemic.

Paid staff:

- Steve Webster, Vicar (full time)
- Kim Messieh, Assistant Minister ASLM (part time)
- Catherine Ward, Children's Ministry Assistant (part time)
- Emma Sugars, Office Assistant (part time)

Honorary Staff:

- Roslyn Loader, Missions Secretary ALM
- Hilary Toppin, Welcoming
- Greg Davies, Assisting Priest
- Chris Appleby, Assisting Priest

NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN MINISTRY

- I. Our Reconciliation Action Committee (RAC) has now helped us complete a 3 year commitment plan after it was launched by the Archbishop of Melbourne in November 2017. RAC has now recommended, and parish council has adopted a **formal partnership with Common Grace** (www.commongrace.org) which includes a financial contribution and involvement in a variety of engagements promoting reconciliation and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples.
- II. Our Climate Action Group (CAG) which formed this year has aligned our church community informally with the activities of **Australian Religious Response to Climate Change** (ARRCC <https://www.arrcc.org.au/>). In addition, it has recommended a number of ways to improve the climate action credentials of our church by making changes consistent with climate change awareness. This includes a new project to install solar panels on our two properties and other climate-friendly behaviour changes.

PROPERTY AND RESOURCES

- I. Some works of **restoration and repair** on the church and vicarage sites will be undertaken during this period of COVID-restriction while the opportunity presents and as finances allow (with the assistance grants).
- II. A **solar panel installation** project is underway (with budget-neutral outcomes) to align with goals presented to parish council by our Climate Action Group.

Conclusion

As we learned in the recent sermon series from the Book of Esther, we can consider how God may have prepared us for **times just like these**. Though history's ultimate outcomes are in God's sovereign "hands", we can be aware and faithful in our response to changes and challenges and ready to change and move where God leads.

[Mordecai said to Esther] "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

Far from being grounds for any kind of over-inflated sense of importance, The Book of Esther leads us to recognise God's sovereignty, greatness and providence. Even when circumstances may look otherwise, we know that God is at work with love, grace and mercy. God's Spirit will surely generate in us the faith, hope and love we need no matter what challenges we face.

With these truths in mind, the words of John the Elder continue as an inspiration for our times:

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. (1 John 4:9-10 NLT)