

ST MICHAEL'S UNITING CHURCH



CHURCH COUNCIL UPDATE JULY 2022

Revitalising St Michael's Community and Building

In 2020 the Church Council developed a statement of our [Strategic Mission Plan](#) which it shared with the congregation. St Michael's vision is "to be a nurturing and dynamic Christian spiritual community contributing to the world where each person and all creation can flourish and enjoy abundant life within the city of Melbourne and beyond." Since then, the Council has sought to build on this statement and produce a more specific account of our future aspirations. The purpose of this update is to inform members of the congregation of what has been achieved so far and encourage conversation on the directions we envisage.

In December 2021, the Council held a Strategic Planning Session in order to develop a small number of clear achievable goals.

The goals being considered will be assessed against the following filters:

- Matches St Michael's Mission and Vision
- Alignment with Strategic Directions
- Reality check that they are relevant/appropriate/helpful for the target group
- *Capacity* – can we actually do this idea well? Do we have the human, physical and financial resources necessary to achieve it?
- *Credibility* – do people believe us when we say that this is who we are and what we can do?
- *Connection* – do we have relationships with the target group(s) or is it possible to establish them?

The Council recognises that future programs and activities must be responsive to the interests and concerns of the people who have been part of the congregation for some time, newcomers and others with whom we seek to engage.

Revitalisation of the church building

In the future, significant work will be required in the church building interior to meet occupancy requirements. This is an ideal time to consider options to redevelop and revitalise St Michael's Church to allow for the implementation of the Strategic direction of being outwardly focused and providing an inclusive, hospitable, safe, accessible and welcoming church space for the people of Melbourne. The revitalisation project will be progressed alongside the nearly completed Conservation Management Plan.

Social and demographic context

To better understand our context and the implications it has for setting strategic goals, we have accessed demographic information available through the Census, the NCLS Australian Communities Survey, and the City of Melbourne.

For example, we learned that:

- The median age of City of Melbourne residents is 28
- 56% of Melbourne residents were born overseas and 53% have a bachelor's degree or higher
- 26% of Australians identify as non-practising "spiritual and religious" while only 13% see themselves as "spiritual but not religious." (NCLS)*
- The church's negative attitudes towards LGBTIQ people is one of the key reasons that people who are "spiritual and religious" choose not to join a church.
- 55% of Australians believe in God (personal or Spirit/life force). People aged 18-34 are more likely to say they believe in God than people aged 50-64.

Our presence in the city

St Michael's has potential for a stronger presence in Melbourne with Rev Dr Mayman providing insightful, inspiring and progressive teachings, services that include wonderful music and poetry. In addition to Sunday gatherings in the church, services continue to attract a significant following online. Newcomers have indicated that the online services and street signage were factors in their decision to attend a service at St Michael's.

The restructuring of the Mingary Counselling Service in 2021, establishing stronger links to the Cairnmillar Institute, provides another point of engagement with the city. The service is now known as "Mingary Cairnmillar Counselling & Wellbeing" recognising the educational and group opportunities which are also offered through St Michael's.

Who are the people with whom we seek to engage?

The Council identified several groups with which St Michael's might seek to engage further than we do at present. Recognising that there is a degree of overlap, they are:

1. Younger people (20-40) who see themselves as spiritual and open to participating in a religious community, including:
 - Younger people seeking a place a community that connects spirituality with social justice action and advocacy.
 - Younger people who have had negative experiences in churches because of:
 - hostility toward diverse expressions of gender or sexuality
 - conservative theology that does not connect with lived experience

Engaging with younger people who already attend St Michael's, we will explore how we might best use social and other media to reach this group with the goal of inviting them to participate in and contribute to our common life.

We will use our street signage and internet presence to convey our identity and communicate our values and beliefs.

2. People who are seeking a community in which to:
 - reflect on and develop their theological and ethical beliefs
 - explore their spirituality

We need to discover more about the interests of such people and how we might engage with them. We also need to better publicise what is already happening at St Michael's.

3. People who are seeking peace of mind, searching for greater meaning in their lives or ways to cope with what confronts them.

Our connection with the Mingary-Cairnmillar Counselling & Wellbeing already enables us to provide some support for this group. We have been consulting with the Cairnmillar Institute on how we might do more in partnership and what form that might take. In addition, we intend to explore possible initiatives in areas other than the psychological – for example ethics, theology or spiritual practice.

4. People who, for whatever reason, are not able to attend St Michael's Church in person, including:
 - People who do not live in Melbourne
 - People whose ability to travel is restricted by disability or health conditions
 - People who are not free on Sunday morning because of work or family commitments.

We believe it is vital to continue the online worship services in a form which is sustainable. Recently mid-week recording has been replaced by broadcast of an edited version of the Sunday service. We need to support existing members who lack the technology or the confidence to use it. We also need to maintain the full availability of the 'Contact and Care' system for these people.

Next steps

The next stage of planning involves the development of specific goals and action plans for St Michael's engagement with the community based on the work that has been done in the months since the December 2021 planning session.

Having affirmed the Strategic Directions identified in 2020, we expect to share Strategic Goals and Action Plans for 2023-2024 with the congregation in the next three months.

Meanwhile, the Council would welcome any comments or suggestions that members of the congregation might have after reading this update. Please feel free to speak to members of Council or the minister or email your thoughts to office@stmichaels.org.au

* NCLS Research released a statement following publication of the 2021 Census data that showed an increase in Australians ticking the 'no religion' box.

['No religion' part of ongoing trend, but not whole story](#)

"When people choose a religious affiliation in the national Census, it is a statement of belonging or identity, a 'tribe' in which to belong. "We go wrong if we confuse this identity statement with how 'religious' or 'spiritual' people are," Dr Ruth Powell, Director of NCLS Research, said."