

MINISTERING COMMUNITIES IN THE DIOCESE OF WILLOCHRA

Our aim is that each congregation will be a self-sustaining unit of the Church where the Word is proclaimed, the Sacraments celebrated, the gifts of people are acknowledged, nurtured and used, and the love and care experienced by the Christian community extend outwards to the community beyond.

1. The Ministering Communities in Mission model of ministry is now being adopted in Australia in rural dioceses and in other parts of the world, particularly in remote parts of Canada and USA and parts of New Zealand. Kalgoorlie, Northwest Perth and Tasmania with Willochra are leaders in this style of ministry in Australia. Other rural dioceses are exploring and tentatively beginning to adopt this model.
2. The Model is a total ministry model, linked with Rolland Allen's missionary method (Missionary Methods – St Paul's or Ours) which has been rediscovered in recent years. This is founded on his experience as a missionary in China over a century ago. Briefly it involves understanding Church as the Body of Christ (Romans 12, and 1 Cor.12) recognizing the gifts and experience of the people, acknowledging that Baptism is commissioning for ministry and mission, "handing over" the gospels and the creeds to local people and letting them be the Church in that place without requiring years of education, under the oversight of the Bishop whose role as guardian and teacher of the faith is crucial.
3. In Willochra we now have four Ministry Districts whose congregations are at various levels of maturity in the model. In the initial establishment of Ministry Districts in 1997 there was financial pressure to change, but now there is a realization that this is "the emerging Church" for us:
 - ~ Wakefield: Clare, Riverton, Auburn, Belvidere, Mintaro, Snowtown, Tothill Creek, Watervale, Balaklava, Goyder, Hamley Bridge, Yacka, Bungaree, Penwortham (Brinkworth, Blyth, Saddleworth, Port Wakefield closed). At the moment there are two District Priests, one non-stipendiary deacon and one local priest.
 - ~ Southern Flinders: Jamestown, Georgetown, Gladstone, Laura, Melrose, Wirrabara, Wilmington, Orroroo, Peterborough, Terowie, Spalding. There is one District Priest and four local priests.
 - ~ Ministry District of Eyre: Colton, Elliston, Sheringa, Minnipa, Wudinna, Cummins, Tumbay Bay. There is one District Priest and one non-stipendiary Assistant Priest
 - ~ Lower Yorke Peninsula: Yorketown, Corny Point, Edithburgh, Warooka, Minlaton, Stansbury, Port Vincent, Mt Rat, Curramulka. There is one District Priest.
4. Pastoral Assistants are discerned and acknowledged by the local community and licensed for their various roles: to lead services, some are licensed to administer the reserved sacrament in a service of Extended Communion, to administer the chalice, to preach, pastoral care, children's ministry, evangelism.
5. Local clergy have been called not only personally but called by their communities to ordination. This call is confirmed by the wider Church when they attend the Provincial Selection Conference. They are licensed to minister in their own congregation and are not peripatetic pastors. Since these people are non-stipendiary, still learning, and often have other jobs, they do not lead all services in their congregation.
6. District Priests need to take on the role of "Equipping Pastors", being there to "equip the saints". As such they sit outside each community to some extent as the people themselves through Vestries and Church Councils and Worship Teams, etc make their own decisions about ministry, management, mission. This is an evolving role and each District Priest may interpret what is required somewhat differently. Of course, some congregations are more self-sustaining than others and some resist change from their dependence on the Priest. There is a Ministry District Council for sharing and co-ordination, mostly based around the shared cost of the District Priest and any assets held

in common. Otherwise the congregations manage their own affairs. The Ministry District Council is not some kind of "super Parish Council". There are regulations governing them but they have minimum prescription. Some people find this difficult.

7. The District Priests, and the Ministry Development Officer, share the Bishop's *episcopate*. The vision is kept clear before the people in the Bishop's sermons, letters, and in *The Willochran*.
8. Provision of learning opportunities and acceptance of life-long learning are vital. There is a 10 days a year 2-year Post Ordination Program for the recently ordained whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary or local. There are two Ministry Weekends a year for lay people. Study using Trinity College Certificate in Theology and Ministry is encouraged and there nine groups operating in the Diocese. The clergy come to two Clergy Conferences and one Retreat each year, and are encouraged to participate in a Continuing Education Program which most do. The principles of total ministry are valid in parishes as well as ministry districts.
9. Issues relating to this change in model:
 - ~ unwillingness to change from a dependency model
 - ~ perpetuation of old alliances and behaviour by congregations under the parish model
 - ~ the desire of ministers to be needed: District Priests finding it difficult to relinquish old patterns of behaviour; Local priests and Pastoral Assistants wanting to take on roles in other congregations
 - ~ acceptance by the wider Church of the validity of ordination of deacons and priests for local ministry
 - ~ inequality between congregations in finances, assets, and gifts and talents
 - ~ a focus on the gathered community and its worship as the major expression of church and less emphasis on mission
10. Positive outcomes:
 - ~ a healthy understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ and that no matter what the size a congregation, it can be the Church and every member can have a ministry
 - ~ greater involvement by lay people in the ministry of the Church
 - ~ deepening discipleship and Christian maturity as people learn formally and informally
 - ~ growing congregations in some places
 - ~ a willingness to look out is beginning to emerge
 - ~ a greater understanding of the identity of the Church and thus a capability to give leadership in ecumenical activity
 - ~ a happy Diocese