Mercy Parish - Journeying together

Reflecting on who we are – Mission Focus Questions 2026

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Introduction: Every parish has its own story — made up of people, families, cultures, experience and friendships that shape our faith community. One element we all share at Mercy Parish is a connection to the Catholic Church and a link to this parish.

This invitation is about taking a small next step together — to pause, to listen, and to talk with one another about what really matters in our Catholic life. It's not compulsory, people can opt out, and there's no set outcome or right answer. It's not about agreeing on everything, but about growing closer as we discover what we already hold in common and what we can learn from one another.

Over five years, I've spent time researching the relationship between parishes and schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. I'm aware of so many wonderful people living out their faith with generosity and creativity. I've also noticed that we often use the same words — like faith, community, disciple, worship, and encounter — yet mean quite different things by them. That can leave us wondering: Who are we, really, as a Catholic community?

One way to explore those connections and disconnections is simply to talk about them — with kindness, curiosity, and the Holy Spirit guiding our steps. This is a gentle plan, for all groups within the parish, including schools and at Sunday Eucharist, to take some small steps and let's see where that takes us. 😊

\- Colin MacLeod (Mercy Parish Pastoral Council)

The Invitation: Frs Michael and Joseph, along with the Mercy Parish Pastoral Council, propose the following approach to support our parish community to reflect together on our shared Catholic mission and vision. It is understood that the task is at the same time complex and possible: Over 2026/27 we plan to reflect on key elements of what we may *already claim* but which can hold very different meanings for individuals and groups. We'll do this by reflecting, alone and together, on a monthly question during 2026, and briefly but significantly take lots of opportunities to do so: at the start of all meetings: parish council, finance committee, cultural gatherings, liturgy team, prayer groups, school board, senior leadership meetings, etc.; at assemblies and in class; as part of prayer gatherings, or private prayer, on screen at the start and end of Mass, etc. Everywhere!

The goal is simply to spend time with the questions, to listen and reflect together, with God. The plan is NOT to come up with summaries or final answers, but to gently learn and challenge one another about what we understand our Catholic community to be, and where we believe we are, or should be, heading. Feedback on this process late in 2026 will inform the next steps in 2027 for working out what we claim as our shared mission and vision. (We can't plan this until we see where this first phase takes us.)

Selected questions for 2026 (which are grounded in the current mission and values statements for our diocese, parish and schools) are:

1. February **– Who do I understand Jesus to be?**
2. March **– What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ?**
3. April **– In what ways do I encounter God in this community?**
4. May **– What Catholic values are visible in this community? (What values are not visible?)**
5. June **– What does it mean to grow in faith?**
6. July **– Why do we worship together?**
7. August **– What does it mean to be Catholic?**
8. September **– Who is welcomed here? (Who is missing?)**
9. October - **Who inspires me in this community?**
10. November **– Where are we heading as a Catholic community?**

Our Missions and Visions. The following are included as contexts – missions and visions – to which our wide parish is already connected. (Others exist too, of course, for other Catholic groups.) These powerful words help centre and guide our communities. Many concepts recur and overlap. At the same time, their purpose and power can be weakened by people having many different understandings of just what the words mean or don't mean. Our journey of reflecting on who we are, *as a whole parish community*, can help strengthen and develop what we *understand* and what we *do* together.

Summaries of current mission/vision statements are as follows:

Mercy Parish – Parish reflections statement (June 2022 – a starting point)

What is the Spirit asking of us as a parish?

1. **Prayer and worship** – *the foundation – Relationship with God, each other and creation is at the heart of our parish*: We aspire to be authentic, prayerful disciples of Jesus, desiring to grow in God's love, worshipping God, serving our community and caring for creation.
2. **Participation** – *we value and encourage the participation of everyone*: celebrating diverse cultures and gifts; creating opportunities for people to join in; valuing our parish priests and lay leadership; aspiring to be a synodal Church through listening, dialogue, and discernment through the Holy Spirit.
3. **Communion/Community** – *we know and care for each other, reaching out to weave wider and more inclusive bonds of belonging*. Striving to be:
    - *Welcoming, inclusive, non-judgmental* – treating people with dignity, respect, mercy, compassion and aroha, developing deep friendships where people feel they belong.
    - *Reaching out to one another*, including our schools, and those who are vulnerable.
    - *A safe community* – Acknowledging, with deep sorrow, all affected by sexual abuse that has happened in the Catholic Church, committed to our parish being a safe place for all.
4. **Mission** - The Spirit is leading us to engage with our wider community, to reach out to those in need, supporting environmental and social justice initiatives, ecumenical and interfaith initiatives – sharing our resources and skills.
5. **Growth and formation** – *combining knowledge and experience, contemplation and action.*

Summaries of current mission/vision statements are as follows:

Dunedin Diocese Strategic Planning

Our Mission: To live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
Our Vision: Guided by the Holy Spirit, we seek to journey together, celebrating God's love, deepening our relationship with God, each other and all of Creation and learning how to be missionary disciples of Jesus Christ bringing mercy, love, healing, peace and justice to our world.

The Calls to Action:

- **Leadership and Participation of All**
    - We are each called to be a missionary disciple of Jesus Christ, committed to building loving relationships with God, all people and all of God's creation.
    - Our leaders embody Gospel-based servant leadership, are from diverse backgrounds, skilled, values-driven, aim to empower other people and encourage the participation of all.
    - By virtue of our baptism, we are each called to participate and share our talents in our community for the good of all.
- **Inclusive Community and Belonging**: Our faith communities proclaim the Gospel through their commitment to being welcoming, non-judgemental and upholding human dignity and by being safe communities where people feel they are known and belong and where diversity is seen as valuable and authentic.
- **Liturgy**: Liturgy is the way our community expresses its love of God.Liturgy helps nurture our faith in God - Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit. We are called to develop rich opportunities for all to encounter God in meaningful ways.
- **Outreach and Mission**: We are invited to respond to God's compassionate love, as experienced in our own lives, by being missionary disciples – living out and sharing with others the message of Jesus and the Gospel values of love, mercy, peace, justice and hope. Our lived response to God's love includes being active advocates for all of God's creation with a special concern for the poor and the earth.
- **Being a Synodal Church**: Synodality provides an opportunity to listen to each other carefully about a range of issues, respectfully understand the perspectives of other people and with the guidance of the Spirit prayerfully discern how to move forward with courage and trust. We commit to being a synodal diocese using the process for discernment and to actively engage our community.

Overarching Aims for all Catholic Schools

All Catholic schools in Aotearoa NZ commit to supporting four dimensions as outlined in the NZ Catholic Education document Catholic Special Character Evaluation for Development[1]:

- **Te Tūtaki ki A Te Karaiti - Encounter with Christ:** *Spiritual formation; Evangelisation; Faith-based Leadership.*
- **Te Whakatupu Mā Te Mātauranga:** *Growth in Knowledge: Leadership; Religious Education, Catholic Curriculum.*
- **Te Whakaatu Karaitiana - Christian Witness:** *Catholic School Community; Partnership and Collaboration; Pastoral Care; Service and Outreach.*
- **Te Kaitiakitanga me te Whakapakari I te Tuakiri Katorika-Safeguarding and Strengthening Catholic Special Character:** ***Stewardship; Legal Obligations.***

St Brigid's School

- **Lighting the way for all to shine**
- Mercy Values:
    - **Care-Atawhaitia,**
    - **Respect-Te Tapu o te Tangata,**
    - **Responsibility-Whakaharere**
- 2024/2025 Strategic Plan:
    - Our goal is to nurture our community's faith.
    - Gospel and Mercy Values are at the heart of our school, shaping our values and practices.
    - Our focus extends to fostering respect for others, cultivating strong relationships, and guiding our community to live by the teachings of Jesus.

St Bernadettes School

- **We Believe – We Care – We Learn**
- Mercy Values (extended):
    - **Manaakitanga-Hospitality**: Welcome, Include, Accept
    - **Panekiretanga-Excellence**: Try, Encourage, Achieve
    - **Rato Awhina-Service**: Help, Share, Give
    - **Te Tapu o te Tāngata-Respect**: Understand, Value, Appreciate
    - **Aroha-Compassion**: Love, Forgive, Care
    - **Tika-Social Justice**: Support, Change, Improve
- 2024/2025 Strategic Plan:
    - Jesus calls us to make the world a better place.
    - Ākonga (learners) will grow in their knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.
    - We care for ourselves, others and our whenua – understanding the significance culture plays in our lives.

N.B – Trinity is in a different position to the local two parish primary schools – being effectively part of every parish in the city – but they are part of our community and are invited to participate in this journey as appropriate.

Trinity Catholic College

- **Hei ākonga mā te Karaiti**
- *Trinity Catholic College exists to promote excellence in learning and teaching in a climate of faith and pastoral care for the Catholic community of Dunedin.*
- **Respect** - At Trinity, RESPECT is the recognition, allowance and encouragement of our own, and others', uniqueness, gifts and talents. In the Gospel stories, we hear often of Jesus' respect for others.
- **Service** - At Trinity, SERVICE leads on from RESPECT and is the action of helping make our community more caring, hospitable, peace-making and joyful. In the Gospel stories, we often hear of Jesus' service to others.
- **Justice** - At Trinity, JUSTICE is a product of SERVICE and is the action of and desire for fairness, reconciliation and peace. In the Gospel stories, we often hear of Jesus' call for justice.
- **Truth** - At Trinity, TRUTH emerges from JUSTICE and is the basis of RESPECT. It is the practice of being courageous, honest, trusting and reflective. In the Gospels, we hear Jesus speaking often about truth

[1] https://www.nzceo.org.nz/resource-items/catholic-special-character-evaluation-for-development-document/