

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish Essendon Parish Strategic Plan 2026 - 2030



Guiding our parish community into the future!

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LOOKING AHEAD

1 Executive Summary

Background and Purpose

The Planning Process

Who was involved & what was discussed?

About the Resulting Plan

Background and Purpose

Background

In October 2023 we commenced the parish strategic planning process. We called this initiative 'Looking Ahead Together', and it involved the development of Our Lady and St Therese's Parish Strategic Plan 2026 -2030. The objective of the plan is to inform and guide the future development of our parish, over the next 3-5 years.

Why are we doing this?

To ensure our parish continues to grow and thrive, it is becoming increasingly important that we develop a clear vision for the future. This plan will reflect, and support, the spiritual, community and material needs of our parish, while meeting the specific requirements and wishes of the various groups within Our Lady of the Nativity and St Therese's communities, including our school communities.

The Planning Process

How did we do it and who was involved?

A broad range of parishioners and groups, from across our Our Lady of the Nativity and St Therese's communities, were invited to participate in small focus group meetings, to share their ideas and feedback. This was to ensure that our Strategic Plan considered the different needs that exist across our entire parish community, and identified priorities and actions going forward.

Unplanned Interruption to the planning process!

Unfortunately, we had had to suspend the program in April 2024 for 10 months, due to unforeseen circumstances impacting those involved. The process recommenced in February 2025 with a fresh round of focus group meetings, adding to the feedback that had been captured in earlier meetings in 2023 and 2024.

Who was involved & what was discussed?

We conducted a number of 'focus group' meetings, across both Our Lady's and St Therese's church communities, speaking to some 50+ parishioners. This included some of the key support groups in the parish, like the St Vincent De Paul conference, men's coffee group, parish friendship group and parish leadership team. A number of individual parishioners also participated in these focus group meetings.

In the 'focus group' meetings we asked people 3 questions:

- i. What works well in the parish today?
- ii. Are there things you think we could do better?
- iii. Looking at the next 2-3 years, are there any specific 'opportunities' that you can see to improve the parish?

As a result, we captured a range of responses which we distilled down to 270+ items for consideration. We analysed this information and identified 9 'key themes' that form the basis of our strategic plan. We also captured a range of 'desired outcomes', and suggested activities, to address these perceived requirements.

About the Resulting Plan

In presenting this Strategic Plan 2026-2030, we acknowledge that it represents the views of a limited proportion of the parish, however we also recognise that this represents the population that came forward to be involved. In a community-based organization this is probably as good as it gets!

We also recognise that the parish community of today is very different from that 10-20 years ago, and will likely never return to the profile enjoyed in those years. People are more mobile, have more choices, have a more 'open' view of religion and don't feel the 'obligation' that many older people have grown up with. All of this has been accentuated by the appearance of Covid, which has left a strong mark on society and norms generally.

As a result, some of the 'desired outcomes' we captured have been interpreted in terms of 'what makes sense today', rather than trying to return to a state that no longer makes sense or is achievable today. Having said that, we now have new opportunities to build our parish and spiritual community, and an ability to reach beyond traditional borders and boundaries.

About the Resulting Plan

We have kept the 9 key themes separate to provide a level of granularity and clarity, rather than collapse them into a smaller, more nebulous group of results. We hope this makes the plan a little easier to understand.

The 'proposed actions' that we have associated with each Theme should be seen as a direction and starting point, rather than an absolute or an end point. This means that while we will initiate activity in a particular area, the final direction /outcome will depend on how we go, and what we find in the journey. The important point is that we make a start!

We don't suggest that this plan is absolutely 'correct', but we do believe that it highlights the areas, in our parish, that we need to think about going forward, and when we need to act. In that respect we do consider it 'correct' and relevant!

The success or otherwise of this Strategic Plan, like any other, will depend on the response and support of our parish community. While it opens up many new avenues for involvement from all areas of the community, the challenge will be to find eager and energetic hands to take up the challenge.

2 The Nine Key Themes

Key Themes that emerged to form the basis of our Strategic Plan!

- 1) Greater communication and transparency on plans, projects and finances
- 2) Programs to encourage families back into the church
- 3) Review and extend our 'outreach programs' to meet the changing needs of the parish and surrounding community
- 4) Recognise and celebrate the cultural diversity in our parish
- 5) Recognise and address the 'accessibility' needs of the aged, disabled and impaired within our parish community

Key Themes that emerged to form the basis of our Strategic Plan!

- 6) Grow parish community through more social events and interaction
- 7) Promote greater connection with the parish schools
- 8) Develop services and activities that are more engaging to younger people
- 9) Provide spiritual development programs linked to key seasons or relevant topic areas

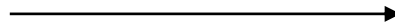
3 Themes and Proposed Actions

We used these 'desired outcomes' to develop 'action plans' for each Theme!

The following example shows how we used the various activities suggested in focus group meetings to identify 'concrete' actions / activities for inclusion in the plan:

Greater communication and transparency on plans, projects and finances

- Regular updates on Parish website
- Periodic parishioner briefings
- Items of interest in Parish bulletin
- Use social media for younger audiences



- Action Plan 1
- Action Plan 2
- Action Plan 3
-
-

As we work through each Theme and associated action plans, we need to consider and allocate priorities for each. This enables development of a timeline for the overall plan.

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

1 Greater communication and transparency on plans, projects and finances

Desired Outcomes

- Regular updates on Parish website
- Periodic parishioner briefings on new initiatives
- Items of interest in Parish bulletin
- Use social media for younger audiences
- Use technology to 'push' information to parishioners
- Periodic financial briefings to parishioners
- Produce periodic 'parish magazine / bulletin'
- Look for opportunities to publicly 'celebrate parish
- Produce a 'parish directory' of active groups and contacts
- Produce a periodic PLT update / briefing
- Publish a parish 'kids' bulletin with items of interest
- Establish simple process for parishioner engagement and ongoing feedback (Google form, QR code)



Proposed Action Plan

- Establish a 'Communications Team' in the parish
- Establish communication / change management guidelines for the parish
- Develop 'Annual Communication Program' and products
- Build online presence and associated products
- Develop 'parish directory' of active groups and contacts
- Upgrade 'parish website' to incorporate new updates and initiatives
- Establish online forum for parishioners to engage with Leadership Team and other active groups
- Publish annual calendar of parish events

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

2 Programs to encourage families back into the church

Desired Outcomes

- Form a 'Kid's Choir' to sing at masses periodically
- Seek opportunities for greater involvement of children at mass like Prayers of the Faithful, Children's Liturgy and KAM
- Re-Introduce altar servers to increase involvement of young people in ceremonies
- More family focused functions in the parish like parish picnic, outings, dinner dance
- Sport takes priority on weekend mornings so need more options for young people / families



Proposed Action Plan

- Expand role of 'liturgy team' to include kid's / family liturgy programs
- Explore and embrace the opportunities provided to families through the emerging 'Synodal Church'
- Establish weekend mass program where kids prepare and execute the liturgy with parishioners
- Establish program to support reintroduction of altar servers at selected weekend masses
- Identify options to include 'children's liturgy' as key component of selected weekend masses (possibly including kid's choir)
- Develop a 'celebrate family' program of activities targeting families over the year (may need dedicated group to organise)
- Build youth engagement through opportunities (instrumental / singing) to participate in selected masses

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

3 Review and extend our 'outreach programs' to meet the changing needs of the parish and surrounding community

Desired Outcomes

- Expand concept of parish as a community that can reach out to the broader community of Essendon
- Expand services to the elderly / disabled people - communion at home, online mass coverage, transport
- Form a ministry to the aged, isolated, disabled, cultural groups who don't speak english - could be a parish focus



Proposed Action Plan

- Establish a 'Parish Outreach Team' to lead the identification of support needs in the parish and local community
- Seek opportunities to partner with local groups / churches / agencies to support those in need in local community
- Promote relevant senior / aged support programs to assist parishioners / people in their daily living and health needs
- Expand the use of technology and other support programs to enable people to continue to participate in mass and other parish services / programs
- Expand our audiovisual facilities to enable all parishioners to fully participate in services within the church

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

4 Recognise and celebrate the cultural diversity in our parish

Desired Outcomes

- Celebrate our different cultures with special events and services (e.g. DWALHI)
- Invite 'ethnic' priests to offer mass at Parish on occasions to cater for diverse cultures



Proposed Action Plan

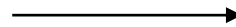
- Establish a Parish Multicultural Team to plan and organize an annual program of events to celebrate the various cultures represented in our community
- Invite priests of differing nationalities, from neighboring parishes / archdiocese, to participate in mass and other services on occasions
- Engage neighboring parishes to join in the planning and conduct of multicultural events / celebrations during the year
- Conduct information sessions for parishioners on different faiths / cultures to promote greater understanding and appreciation of beliefs
- Establish links and contacts with local / relevant faith organisations to promote understanding and interaction, including ecumenical events and shared celebrations
- Promote multicultural events where parish can enjoy 'international' food, dance and related culture differences

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

5 Recognise and address the 'accessibility' needs of the aged, disabled and impaired within our parish community

Desired Outcomes

- Improve 'disabled parking' access at parish churches, including drop off / pickup up facilities
- Increase parking places around churches
- Provide proper, dedicated disabled toilet facilities to service the churches in our parish
- Strategies to manage access to service for older and impaired people following further amalgamations



Proposed Action Plan

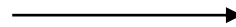
- Undertake a study to identify increased parking options / costs at both churches, including use of school yard at St Therese's and drive-through at OLN
- Provide appropriate, dedicated disabled toilet facilities at both churches as a priority
- Expand our audiovisual facilities to enable all parishioners to fully participate in services within the church
- Create flexible seating areas within our churches to accommodate seating with wheelchairs and other mobility aids as required
- Publish weekend hymns on website to enable download by parishioners with limited vision
- Expand role of the 'Welcoming Team' to include 'aged, disability and impaired' awareness program that periodically reviews needs of these parishioners

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

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Desired Outcomes

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- Increase parking places around churches
- Provide proper, dedicated disabled toilet facilities to service the churches in our parish
- Strategies to manage access to service for older and impaired people following further amalgamations



Proposed Action Plan (cont'd.)

- Implement a more 'professional' mass online presentation for those unable to attend the church
- Review options for providing transport to church for those who no longer drive, including Volunteer Pick-up Roster and Community Bus
- Review effectiveness of 'tactile ground surface indicators (TGSIs)' and lighting around churches to support people who are vision impaired

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

6 Grow parish community through more social events and interaction

Desired Outcomes

- Improve new parishioner welcome process to make more personal
- More community celebrations to bring us together as a community
- More family focused functions in the parish like parish picnic, outings, dinner dance
- Identify opportunities to engage the parish 'middle age' community and increase involvement in parish
- Parishioners more mobile these days, look for ways to attract and welcome people to our parish



Proposed Action Plan

- Establish a Parish Social Team to plan, co-ordinate and organize an annual program of events to engage parishioners of all ages across our community
- Engage Parish Friendship Group, Men's Coffee Group etc. to identify activities / programs that would appeal to members of the parish (e.g. book club, craft group, exercise groups, cards)
- Engage with the Parish School regarding upcoming social events and the opportunity for parishioners to participate in those events
- Promote events like lunches at local venues, group trips, or film days that provide opportunities for people to come together and interact
- Create a 'community page' on the parish bulletin promoting community participation with news, new parishioners, what's on, upcoming events and feedback

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

7 Promote greater connection with the parish schools

Desired Outcomes

- Consider a school grade mass and morning tea once a month
- Parishioners act as 'liaison' officers with school to promote engagement
- Create more opportunities for children and parents to participate in parish activities



Proposed Action Plan

- Engage with the Parish School regarding upcoming events and the opportunity for parishioners to participate in those events
- Identify opportunities for parishioners to participate / volunteer in school activities, especially the growth and development of the children
- Promote programs that recognise and reward student achievement in the school – recognise that achievement as a parish community
- Parish Bulletin include a link to the school newsletter and vice-versa to facilitate communication
- Actively promote relevant parish events in the school support groups and school newsletter – establish contacts with school support groups

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

8 Develop services and activities that are more engaging to younger people

Desired Outcomes

- Consider a youth ministry to increase involvement in parish (including youth choir, youth masses)
- Bring in younger priests from time to time to increase interest of young people
- Consider a junior 'Parish Leadership Team' to build involvement of young people
- Introduce youth programs like ALPHA and Antioch to attract young people
- Build a stronger connection with Secondary Schools, perhaps through their 'social justice' programs
- Use technology to engage young people in parish activities
- Develop program(s) to address topics young people are interested in (e.g. climate, LGBTQI+)



Proposed Action Plan

- Engage with local catholic Secondary Schools regarding upcoming events / programs and the opportunity for parishioners to participate in those events
- Initially expand role of 'liturgy team' to include a youth liturgy program to assess the opportunities and level of youth interest and participation
- Establish a 'Youth Ministry' to identify and organise programs / events that are of interest to youth in our parish
- Create online presence for Parish Youth initially on parish website, and then through social media channels, to provide information about events and activities
- Promote youth programs like ALPHA and Antioch in parish to provide a faith / community experience to young people

Translating 'desired outcomes' into 'action plans' for each Theme!

9 Provide spiritual development programs linked to key seasons or relevant topic areas

Desired Outcomes

- Train parishioners in 'paraliturgy' so they can assist in running ceremonies across the parish
- Introduce a 'speaker series' for key seasons of the church as basis of a spirituality program
- Introduce more 'themed' masses in future to attract people (e.g. cultural masses, Seasons of Creation)
- Put articles of interest in bulletin / online periodically for spiritual development
- Identify opportunities for lay people to play greater role in liturgical services in future
- Build a stronger 'ecumenical' focus going forward, with both christian and non-christian faiths
- Monitor implications of 'Synodality' for the parish and identify opportunities to leverage going forward



Proposed Action Plan

- Establish a 'Spiritual Growth Team' to identify, plan and organise programs / events to support parishioners in their spiritual growth
- Spiritual Growth Team to monitor the progress of 'synodality' in the church, and inform parishioners on its impact in our parish, and our practice of faith
- Provide parishioners with access to contemporary articles / resources on faith online using the website or other social media platforms
- Build links with local Christian and non-Christian faiths to promote a stronger, shared 'ecumenical focus' at key religious celebrations during the year
- Establish on-going training / formation programs for parishioners to enable them to assist in conduct of ceremonies across the parish
- Implement an 'annual retreat' day with mass and selected speakers discussing a range of topics

4 Strategic Plan 2026 – 2030

Proposed Actions, Priorities & Timeline

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish
Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Key Theme	Proposed Action Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
1 Greater communication and transparency on plans, projects and finances						
	1.1 Establish a 'Communications Team' in the parish					
	1.2 Establish communication / change management guidelines					
	1.3 Develop 'Annual Communication Program' and products					
	1.4 Publish elements of the 'Annual Communication Program'					
	1.5 Build online presence and associated products					
	1.6 Develop 'parish directory' of active groups and contacts					
	1.7 Upgrade parish website to incorporate news, parish updates and new initiatives					
	1.8 Establish online forum for parishioners to engage with Leadership Team and other active groups					
	1.9 Publish annual calendar of parish events					
2 Programs to encourage families back into the church						
	2.1 Expand role of 'liturgy team' to include kid's / family liturgy programs					
	2.2 Explore and embrace the opportunities provided to families through the emerging 'Synodal Church'					
	2.3 Establish weekend mass program where kids prepare and execute the liturgy with parishioners					

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish
Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Key Theme	Proposed Action Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
	2.4 Establish program to support reintroduction of altar servers at selected weekend masses					
	2.5 Identify options to include 'children's liturgy' as key component of selected weekend masses (possibly including kid's choir)					
	2.6 Develop a 'celebrate family' program of activities targeting families over the year (may need dedicated group to organise)					
	2.7 Build youth engagement through opportunities (instrumental / singing) to participate in selected masses					
3 Review and extend our 'outreach programs' to meet the changing needs of the parish and surrounding community						
	3.1 Establish a 'Parish Outreach Team' to lead the identification of support needs in the parish and local community					
	3.2 Seek opportunities to partner with local groups / churches / agencies to support those in need in local community					
	3.3 Promote relevant senior / aged support briefings / programs to assist parishioners / people in their daily living and health needs					
	3.4 Expand the use of technology and other support programs to enable people to continue to participate in mass and other parish services					
	3.5 Expand our audiovisual facilities to enable all parishioners to fully participate in services within the church					

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish
Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Key Theme	Proposed Action Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
4 Recognise and celebrate the cultural diversity in our parish						
	4.1 Establish a Parish Multicultural Team to plan and organize an annual program of events to celebrate the various cultures represented in our community					
	4.2 Invite priests of differing nationalities, from neighboring parishes / archdiocese, to participate in mass and other services on occasions					
	4.3 Engage neighboring parishes to join in the planning and conduct of multicultural events / celebrations during the year					
	4.4 Conduct information sessions for parishioners on different faiths / cultures to promote greater understanding and appreciation of beliefs					
	4.5 Establish links and contacts with local / relevant faith organisations to promote understanding and interaction, including ecumenical events and shared celebrations					
	4.6 Promote multicultural events where parish can enjoy 'international' food, dance and related culture differences					
5 Recognise and address the 'accessibility' needs of the aged, disabled and impaired within our parish community						
	5.1 Undertake a study to identify increased parking options / costs at both churches, including use of school yard at St Therese's and drive-through at OLN					

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish
Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Key Theme	Proposed Action Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
	5.2 Provide appropriate, dedicated disabled toilet facilities at both churches as a priority					
	5.3 Expand our audiovisual facilities to enable all parishioners to fully participate in services within the church					
	5.4 Create flexible seating areas within our churches to accommodate seating with wheelchairs and other mobility aids as required					
	5.5 Publish weekend hymns on website to enable download by parishioners with limited vision					
	5.6 Expand role of the 'Welcoming Team' to include 'aged, disability and impaired' awareness program that periodically reviews needs of these parishioners					
	5.7 Implement a more 'professional' mass online presentation for those unable to attend the church					
	5.8 Review options for providing transport to church for those who no longer drive, including Volunteer Pick-up Roster and Community Bus					
	5.9 Review effectiveness of 'tactile ground surface indicators (TGSI)' and lighting around churches to support people who are vision impaired					

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish
Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Key Theme	Proposed Action Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
6	Grow parish community through more social events and interaction					
	6.1 Establish a Parish Social Team to plan, co-ordinate and organize an annual program of events to engage parishioners of all ages across our community					
	6.2 Engage Parish Friendship Group, Men's Coffee Group etc. to identify activities / programs that would appeal to members of the parish (e.g. book club, craft group, exercise groups, cards)					
	6.3 Engage with the Parish School regarding upcoming social events and the opportunity for parishioners to participate in those events					
	6.4 Promote events like lunches at local venues, games nights, group trips, or film days that provide opportunities for people to come together and interact					
	6.5 Create a 'community page' on the parish bulletin promoting community participation with news, new parishioners, what's on, upcoming events and feedback					
7	Promote greater connection with the parish schools					
	7.1 Engage with the Parish Schools regarding upcoming events and the opportunity for parishioners to participate in those events					
	7.2 Identify opportunities for parishioners to participate / volunteer in school activities, especially the growth and development of the children					

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish
Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Key Theme	Proposed Action Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
	7.3 Promote programs that recognise and reward student achievement in the school – recognise that achievement as a parish community					
	7.4 Parish Bulletin include a link to the school newsletter and vice-versa to facilitate communication					
	7.5 Actively promote relevant parish events in the school support groups and school newsletter – establish contacts with school support groups					
8 Develop services and activities that are more engaging to younger people						
	8.1 Engage with local catholic Secondary Schools regarding upcoming events / programs and the opportunity for parishioners to participate in those events					
	8.2 Initially expand role of 'liturgy team' to include a youth liturgy program to assess the opportunities and level of youth interest and participation					
	8.3 Establish a 'Youth Ministry' to identify and organise programs / events that are of interest to youth in our parish					
	8.4 Create online presence for Parish Youth initially on parish website, and then through social media channels, to provide information about events and activities					
	8.5 Promote study groups during the year to look at selected topics relevant to youth formation and faith development					

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish
Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Key Theme	Proposed Action Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
	8.6 Implement a youth 'annual retreat' day with mass and selected speakers discussing a range of topics					
	8.7 Promote youth programs like ALPHA and Antioch in parish to provide a faith / community experience to young people					

Our Lady and St Therese's Parish
Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Key Theme	Proposed Action Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
9	Provide spiritual development programs linked to key seasons or relevant topic areas					
	9.1 Establish a 'Spiritual Growth Team' to identify, plan and organise programs / events to support parishioners in their spiritual growth					
	9.2 Spiritual Growth Team to monitor the progress of 'synodality' in the church, and inform / prepare parishioners on its impact in our parish, and our practice of faith					
	9.3 Provide parishioners with access to contemporary articles / resources on faith online using the website or other social media platforms					
	9.4 Build links with local Christian and non-Christian faiths to promote a stronger, shared 'ecumenical focus' at key religious celebrations during the year					
	9.5 Establish on-going training / formation programs for parishioners to enable them to assist in conduct of ceremonies across the parish					
	9.6 Promote study groups during the year to look at selected topics relevant to spiritual formation and faith development					
	9.7 Implement an 'annual retreat' day with mass and selected speakers discussing a range of topics					