
Parish Life in the Anglican Diocese of Perth, Western Australia – The Bellevue–Darlington Story

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The Perth diocese

The Diocese of Perth is one of three in the state of Western Australia and is the metropolitan see for the Anglican Church in Australia's province of Western Australia. The present Archbishop, Dr Peter Carnley AO, is also Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. The Diocese has 111 parishes divided, since the mid 1990s, into four regions each with an assistant bishop in charge. Three of the regions are in the metropolitan area of Perth, covering about 3000 square kilometres, in which over 90 per cent of the population of Western Australia lives. The fourth region, the Goldfields Country Region, covers 300000 square kilometres of wheat and sheep farming land and goldfields round Kalgoorlie where the regional bishop resides. As is true for much of Australia, the rural sector is in severe decline with reducing population and services. This decline has affected the church as well. At present in the region, six parishes of the eighteen have full time stipended clergy. For the past six years the region, first under Bishop Brian Farran and now Bishop Gerald Beaumont, has been implementing a new policy called 'Becoming Ministering Communities in Mission', which seeks to provide ordained and lay ministry within the region in a new way. This policy is now also being adopted in city regions where the church has also been facing decline.

Throughout the 1990s the Diocese participated in the Decade of Evangelism following the Lambeth meeting of Anglican Bishops from around the world in 1988. The expressed aim of the programme in Perth was to open 40 new parishes in the fast-growing urban area. In the event 19 new parishes were opened, which was an achievement in itself. However, the process brought to light the need to change the paradigm for being church in the late 20th century. The Diocese had been following the traditional Anglican model, referred to as the pastoral model, whereby a congregation was gathered round a minister. The aim initially in each new parish was for a priest to gather a congregation and together they would build a new church for worship and a rectory for the priest to live in. It was hoped that each new congregation would be viable financially within five years. Up to that point they would be sustained with a grant from the Diocese, which was sourced both from usual diocesan income and from a

special fund to which established parishes were encouraged to contribute. Established parishes were encouraged to enter into partnerships with new parishes.

One outcome of the process is that new parishes have been loaded with debt for buildings they find difficult to repay, they struggle to pay clergy stipends and diocesan assessment (a proportion of parish income which is remitted to the Diocese to finance parish grants, hospital and prison chaplaincies and theological training). Rising costs of clergy and declining congregations have also put some established parishes into difficulties. A number of these have had to reduce the hours and stipend of clergy from full time to part time. Without support parishioners and clergy enter a downward spiral. Much work has been done in the past three years to overcome problems like this. The work needing to be done is systemic and structural and extremely complex. The Anglican Church in this Diocese needs to be moved from maintenance mode to mission mode; the place of mission is no longer overseas but local and the nature of diocesan structures has to change to become supportive of mission in this new direction. Clergy selection, training and personal development through in service training has to change to meet the newly perceived needs for leadership, team ministry involving both clergy and lay. Indeed, the paradigm of church has to shift from people gathered round a minister to that of a ministering community gathered around a priest where clergy are not the only ministers but have particular liturgical and pastoral ministry and leadership skills that enable complementary lay ministry to be developed.

History of application of systems leadership theory in Perth

In 1995 Ian Macdonald (partner of Macdonald Associates Consultancy, UK – MACUK) and Don Wiggill (then a MACUK associate) ran a Working Together course for newly ordained priests in the post-ordination Training in Ministry (TIM) programme. We had been running a series of workshops on culture and the church and changing the culture of an organisation. This was the first use of the Working Together course in a church context. The course deals with team leadership and team membership, and with changing the culture of an organisation. The work of changing an organisation's culture includes the analysis of systems, behaviours and symbols in relation to a set of values continua by which they are judged. The course gives a practical introduction to systems leadership theory in a form developed by Ian Macdonald and others (Macdonald et al., 1989).

The introduction of the systems leadership concepts embodied in the course came at an opportune time in the Diocese when many changes such as starting new parishes and implementing regionalisation were starting to take place. Initially our discussions with bishops centred on training new clergy in two contexts. The first was the training of priests as rectors, and with David Dadswell (general manager, MACUK) as external presenter, we ran a course for the formation team and students that helped to clarify and resolve some dysfunctions. The second discussion focused on post-ordination training for those in the Goldfields Country Region of the Diocese. There, the decline in rural population had led to significant decline in the ability of parishes to maintain a traditional stipendiary clergy based ministry in country towns. Following leads from New Zealand and Nebraska in the USA, Bishop Brian Farran (1996, 1997, 1999) had established a new venture, Becoming Ministering Communities. This new venture involved training local people for lay leadership and for some to be ordained as local deacons and priests. They were to act together as ministry team leaders in local centres. The training programme is called 'Teach Each A Ministry' (TEAM). We saw

the effective leadership components of the Working Together course as being particularly beneficial to helping those trained under the TEAM programme work together. Furthermore the teaching about culture change in the course would reinforce what Bishop Farran was attempting to achieve.

A third area for the application of systems leadership concepts opened up when one of us on the department of parish development management board matched the profile given for effective church leaders by Peter Kaldor of the Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) with the capabilities of the Working Together course to provide the necessary training (Table CS10.1).

Table CS10.1 Profile of an Effective Leader

From The NCLS	From Working Together
Has outward focus	Creates a culture in the organisation
Has a vision for the future owned by the congregation	Has a vision for the future owned by the organisation – explains the context and purpose of what we are meant to do
Has the ability to achieve goals	Creates and improves a group of people who have a common purpose to achieve goals
Is bold (inspiring), not non-directive	Makes decisions, monitors progress, coaches and reviews the activity for feedback and improvement
Yet listens to attenders' ideas	Listens, encourages and recognises contributions, gives time to think
Puts a priority on growing attenders' gifts	Creates, maintains and improves a group of people so that they achieve their objectives and continue to do so over time
Leader embodies the vision	This element is related partly to cognitive power/ intellectual ability but also to the way the leader carries out the role, uses effective social valuing processes, and models the behaviour the vision requires – disciplining
Leader has direction for the future to which they are committed	Leader has direction for the future to which they are committed
The leader models an outward focus	The leader models behaviour appropriate to the culture they create – culture can include outward focus
The leader is growing in their own faith journey and modelling it for the congregation	Leader grows in faith, knowledge, skills and models it for team
The majority of those surveyed identified teacher, pastor, priest as the important focus for their ordained leader but these do not provide a correlation to an effective local church	Leadership can be taught; particular people will be outstanding leaders in special circumstances and poor in others, but all can be improved to do an adequate task
	Course also teaches how to be good team members, and a set of values against which behaviours are judged as positive or negative

Archbishop Peter Carnley approved a plan to offer six parishes the opportunity to send their rector and five lay leaders on Working Together courses. We ran these in March 1999 with the help of Ian Macdonald and David Dadswell. At the same time the senior staff of the Diocese also participated in a course.

The course comprises theoretical presentations, practical exercises that are extensively debriefed and syndicate tasks, which involve a case study and a systems review. The case study presents a familiar situation requiring a decision that participants have to work through using

the models presented on the course. In the systems review, participants analyse a current system with which they are familiar and start to make recommendations for improvements or radical changes. For the syndicate tasks we ensured that syndicates comprised parish teams and encouraged them to use the systems review as an opportunity to start some work that they could continue to plan and then implement in the parish. The team from the parish of Bellevue–Darlington used the opportunity to start planning for a major restructuring of the parish. The rest of the paper describes this story.

The account is based on interviews with the co-rectors and some of the committee members, papers they supplied to us, and the minutes of Perth Diocesan Council.

The Bellevue–Darlington story

The context of the restructuring this group planned was the vision for the region put forward by the new regional bishop, Brian Farran (1999). He had articulated a picture for the Northern Region of Perth Diocese consisting of a number of regional parishes growing to 300 or more worshippers on Sunday, and a number of satellite centres which would grow to 150 or so worshippers. In Bishop Farran’s projections, Bellevue–Darlington clearly fell into the satellite centre category. The parish comprised two centres, St Cuthbert’s in the forested hill suburb Darlington, and Good Shepherd in Bellevue on the plain below and linked to an industrial estate and low economic housing.

The two co-rectors and four members of parish council attended a Working Together course from March 12-15, 1999. The following day they described their experience to parish council who established the same group as a sub-committee to prepare a proposal to enable the parish to be more effective in mission and ministry under a regional model. By November 28, 1999 the two congregations had been joined together. Table 2 describes the timeline.

Table CS10.2 Timeline of Joining Together St Cuthbert’s and Good Shepherd Parishes

1999	
·	March 12–15 6 members of Parish Council (PC) attend Working Together
·	March 16 PC forms sub-committee of these six to prepare proposal to enable parish to be more effective in mission and ministry under regional model
·	Mar 30–present Sub-committee meets every two to three weeks
·	August 24 Proposal presented to PC, resolved to present this to the parish on 5 September
·	August 25–6 Notices delivered to every parishioner about presentation on 5 September
·	September 5 Proposal presented to parish at services: 8am at St Cuthbert’s, 10am at Good Shepherd. Forum held at Good Shepherd 11.30am for whole parish to make initial responses
·	September 6–16 Groups held at seven different times for people to respond to proposal having had time to react
·	September 22 PC reviews progress
·	September 26 Independently facilitated workshop held 1–4pm to draw together consultation process
·	October 5 Survey sent to every Good Shepherd worshipper
·	October 19 Proposal and consultation presented to PC who agree to proceed with proposal
·	November 21 Final Sunday Service at Good Shepherd

·	November 28 First 10am relocated service at St Cuthbert's
2000	
·	February 17 Formal Review

The sub-committee followed closely the effective leadership model presented at the Working Together course for planning their proposal. During the period of planning they also attended three workshops designed as follow-up sessions to Working Together at which additional material was presented, questions could be asked and the planning process could be continued in a context in which they could be coached. The three workshops expanded their understanding of systems, the use of the values continua and how to help others use the effective leadership process.

The planning group set up by the Parish Council on March 16 raised several questions immediately:

- Is the parish clear about its mission and ministry?
- Does each of our centres have the potential to be satellite centres?
- Can we just keep going the way we are and survive?
- Does our parish have the potential to be a one-centre satellite centre?
- If so, where should the centre be located?

These questions related to the purpose of the restructuring and the outcomes desired.

Each question was carefully worked through; a mission statement was constructed and the issues relating to potential and survival were listed. They decided therefore that it was imperative to develop the parish with a single centre rather than two. The formal proposal was worded as follows:

We believe the site with the best potential for being developed as a satellite centre is St Cuthbert's therefore we would propose:

To structure the parish of Bellevue–Darlington as a satellite parish in accordance with the proposed regional model by consolidating our worship and ministry at St Cuthbert's, Darlington. This would involve relocating the present 10am congregation from the Church of Good Shepherd, Bellevue, to become the 10.00am congregation at St Cuthbert's. To accommodate this, facilities at St Cuthbert's would be expanded by the construction of a meeting room/hall, office, kitchen, toilets and foyer. This work would, as far as possible, be financed by the sale of Good Shepherd church and land.

The group carefully compiled a comprehensive list of critical issues, potential obstacles to their achieving their purpose. A selection follows:

- What if the parish community is divided or even polarised on the issue of closure and amalgamation?
- What do we put in place to enable pastoral care of a displaced congregation? (people will feel betrayed, let down, will not talk)
- How do we deal with resistance?
- What if parishioners who worship at Good Shepherd will not come to St Cuthbert's?
- What if St Cuthbert's congregation is hostile to immigration of Good Shepherd worshippers?

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- What are the legal issues surrounding the disposal of Good Shepherd?
- What if there is some clause limiting church disposal?
- What if the Diocese lays claim to proceeds (or some part) from disposal?
- What is to be done with movable heritage items?
- How is ongoing ministry to be shaped?
- What is the impact going to be on clergy, personal, relational, in ministry as a result of this proposal?
- What is the impact going to be on the sub-committee members?
- How will the community view the closing of Good Shepherd?
- What if a buyer cannot be found?
- What if the regional parish concept fails to proceed?
- How do we overcome a previous sense of failure to make a single centre parish?

From the documents and discussions with various members of the planning group it was clear that they had clearly identified the major critical issues or potential obstacles to achieving their goal. Each critical issue was again worked through carefully. The group systematically identified critical success factors, key actions they would need to take, outcomes desired and actions with time frames for completion.

By the beginning of August the planning had got to the stage that they could do no more without starting to implement the plan. On August 24 the plan was revealed in its entirety to the parish council, who adopted it and resolved to share it with the parish with a view to implementing it. In the next two days, notices were delivered to every parishioner about a presentation on Sunday September 5 at services in each church concerning the future shape of the parish, followed by a combined forum at Good Shepherd church. Nothing further was revealed at this stage. Interestingly this ploy highlighted where opposition would come from, because one parishioner complained that the lack of detail prevented anyone from knowing *how* they could oppose it.

Members of the committee presented the proposal clearly and people were given a copy. At the forum many questions were asked and one committee member remarked to us that many questions were in fact answered by other members of the parish who had grasped what the issues were and how they could be tackled, a sign of incipient ownership of the plan. Following this plenary meeting seven small group meetings were also held to allow greater questioning especially by those who found it difficult to speak in the large group. A parishioner strongly opposed to the plan went to every meeting, was allowed to have a say but was not allowed to take the meeting over. Notes were taken at the forum and each group meeting and the committee worked on the issues raised.

The parish council reviewed progress and four days later an independent facilitator held a workshop dealing with the emotional responses to the plan and helped participants assess where they saw themselves in a set of stages of acceptance of change. By the end of the workshop participants had indicated a few were still in an anger and anxiety stage but the great majority were positive, weighing up all information, were making an informed choice and half of those present made a commitment to the proposal.

Further dialogues were held with individuals. The results of these dialogues and the workshop encouraged the committee to send a letter to all members of the Good Shepherd congregation. The letter summarised the key elements of the process of presentation and consultation and the key element of the proposal as the 'relocation of the 10am congregation at Good Shepherd to form a 10am congregation at St Cuthbert's'.

The letter went on to state the awareness that members of the congregation were still working through the implications of the proposal and that the process was both difficult and painful. It also stated the awareness that there were members of the congregation who preferred the move to happen sooner rather than later, others felt differently. It then asked for views of members to allow the decision-making process about appropriate timing for the move be made and gave a deadline for replies. The reply slip had two issues people had to express views on:

1. With due consideration being given to the concerns expressed during the consultation process, I am prepared to support the proposal. YES/NO
2. If Yes, I consider the appropriate time for the Good Shepherd congregation to relocate to St Cuthbert's would be (please tick one only):
 - Advent Sunday (November 28, 1999)
 - Christmas Day (December 25, 1999)
 - Easter Day (April 23, 2000)
 - Pentecost (June 11, 2000).

The dates were chosen for their symbolic significance in heralding new beginnings, to match the significance of the closing of a church and new birth in another location.

The overwhelming majority responded in the affirmative and chose Advent Sunday, November 28, 1999 for the new beginning.

The deliberate use of symbol did not end here. The final service at Good Shepherd was held on November 21 and the service was constructed to express thanks for the past, grief for the demise of a worship centre and its associations and memories. Elements were used from the funeral service. After the service the congregation walked up the hill in a pilgrimage to their new location at St Cuthbert's and on their arrival shared in a parish lunch. The following Sunday there was a single service at 10am at St Cuthbert's in which portions from the marriage service were used to symbolise a new life together of the two congregations.

In addition to the excellent management of the social process of uprooting one congregation and relocating it, the committee had also made representations to the regional bishop for the sale of the Good Shepherd buildings and land. This sale was vital because the proceeds would finance the development of buildings at St Cuthbert's.

While the process as described sounds relatively opposition free, this was not in fact so. We interviewed the co-rectors in early November 1999. One parishioner had been very vociferous and abusive in opposition to the proposal within the parish, had written to the regional bishop and to the Archbishop, had sent a petition round the congregation and had visited lapsed members of the congregation to drum up support. One key issue in the tactics to oppose the sale of Good Shepherd was to highlight the Memorial Trust aspect of a gift of the land and buildings. They hoped that the presence of a Memorial Trust would prevent the sale of the buildings and invalidate the merger of the congregations. This was a potential obstacle that the committee had foreseen and had worked on.

The regional bishop in principle approved the sale, but the matter had to be sent for ratification to the Diocesan council. All the documents from the parish and the opposing group were presented at Diocesan council. After debate the matter was resolved that, providing the Memorial Trust could be legally removed from the Good Shepherd buildings and transferred to new buildings at St Cuthbert's, the sale could proceed.

The transfer of the Memorial Trust from the Good Shepherd buildings could only happen once there was something to transfer it to, or at least that plans were sufficiently far advanced

and approved by Diocesan council and the town council for reasonable certainty that the trust would be transferred.

Herein lies further good work by the parish council, again using the systems leadership processes effectively. The main critical issue concerning future building at St Cuthbert's, in addition to the need for the finances from the sale of Good Shepherd, has to do with the nature of Darlington as a suburb and the culture of the inhabitants. Darlington is situated on the Darling Range just above Perth. The Darling Range is part of the Jarrah forest and the suburb has as far as possible retained its forest environment. Removal of trees is strongly discouraged. To build further at St Cuthbert's would necessitate clearing some trees and bush and, therefore, was likely immediately to arouse strong local opposition. Parish council set up a development committee comprising the original committee and local residents who were strong supporters of the mores of Darlington and who had influence on town planning in the local municipality. Building plans have been passed unanimously by the local town council, and a faculty has been granted by the Diocese to build. The Church of Good Shepherd in Bellevue has been deconsecrated in readiness for sale. The original team who went on the Working Together in March 1999 still acts as a leadership team within the parish managing the process. They are now planning what the next developments will be when the buildings are completed.

The stress that the leaders were put through was very high. Both co-rectors were severely affected. They were strongly tempted to give the proposal away. They both stated categorically that it was their faith in the process that carried them through. In following the process carefully, identifying and solving the critical issues, paying attention to story and myth in the congregation, paying attention to their own behaviour as leaders and modelling what they proposed, and using symbol effectively they knew they had done everything possible. The review on February 17, 2000 vindicated their trust in the process. Everyone who came to the review meeting supported wholeheartedly what had happened, and the proposals for development that were shared. The turnout for the meeting was high. Furthermore, the process helped the spiritual life of the parish, numbers attending the Lenten studies in 2000 doubled from previous years. This growth in spiritual life has been sustained.

The Bellevue–Darlington story is not over, and it is not the only story. Other parishes have used the systems leadership concepts on other projects. A group in one parish used the process to plan a programme of maintenance on parish buildings, which was ratified by parish council. In the same parish, another group planned a discotheque ministry to youth using systems leadership processes. In another parish a group worked through the issues that arose for celebrating baptism anniversaries in an all-generations' service. The systems leadership model has been used to review Diocesan council's decision-making processes and recommend changes. The Goldfields Country Region is using the concepts in establishing a new form of ministry to parishes in the form of roving ministry development officers. Part of this ongoing work has been to develop role descriptions for the ministry development officers (MDOs) and to relate the MDOs into the authorities and accountabilities structure of the region and the Diocese. This is a broad range of applications, which is far from exhaustive.

Applying systems leadership theory is not a simple panacea for the issues the church faces. What it provides is a set of tools and processes that may be used to understand where the church is now in terms of its organisation and culture. Systems leadership theory provides a way of managing the difficult social processes that are associated with major organisational change. The theory enables us to start to think systemically and to start to see the complex interdependence of the myriad components that make up the church. It enables to initiate

processes that themselves are more holistic, paying attention simultaneously to such diverse aspects as leaders' behaviour, symbols and systems to facilitate change to a new and integrated organisational culture better adapted to interacting with the world within which it is situated. Using systems leadership theory enables people to be more creative because they have greater opportunity and discretion to think laterally, rather than be constrained by established paradigms. Further, teamwork and the use of the values continua to judge the effects of changes before they are carried out encourages us to be more inclusive in planning and aware of good social process. Finally, we have found that using these processes removes the myth that the incumbent has sole responsibility for decision making. They remain leaders with appropriate accountability, but systemic change is a process shared and owned by the parish and the incumbent.

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