



OFFICE OF
BISHOP WILLIAM WRIGHT

Memorandum

All Clergy, Parish Leaders, Lay Leadership Teams and all Diocesan Staff: Diocesan
TO: Offices, Catholic Schools Office, Schools, CatholicCare Social Services, St Nicholas Early
Education and Parishes

FROM: Bishop William Wright

DATE: Friday, 13 October 2017

ATTACHMENTS:

SUBJECT: St Laurence O'Toole Centre – Flexible Learning Centre

Dear Clergy and Staff

Many of you would have read the Newcastle Herald article (Saturday 7 October) about our plans for a Flexible Learning Centre at the St Laurence O'Toole Centre.

The article presents one side of the story – from those who are opposed to our plans.

There is another side to the story and this is detailed below in what we have today provided to the Newcastle Herald to address issues raised around:

- consultation over the future use of St Laurence O'Toole centre which is the former St Laurence O'Toole School
- the perception that outreach services have use of the centre in perpetuity
- the need for a flexible learning centre

CONSULTATION

First, comments that there was not proper consultation and that "attempts to contact the church have been met with silence and stonewalling" – are completely lacking in either fact or substance.

The Parish was consulted with the following about our plans to establish a flexible learning centre in the old St Laurence School site:

- the Italian Welfare Organization (IWO), Hunter Multicultural Communities (HMC) and the Association of Italian Pensioners of Newcastle (APIN)
- those who live in the closest proximity to the centre
- parishioners of St Benedict's, many of whom are also members of the Italian community

Our consultation with those representing the Italian community and/or the Italian outreach service providers has involved:

- An initial meeting with Andrea Rufo (representing IWO) and Cinzia Saccaro (who is the coordinator of HMC) on 20 March advising that the Parish had received a proposal and to ensure that the Parish would assist in relocating their operations to another venue. This is to avoid a repeat of the circumstances experienced when the Italian Centre in Beaumont Street was closed
- A public meeting with all parishioners, including members of the Italian community, on 18 March, held after the usual Saturday evening mass at which we outlined future plans, sought feedback and responded to queries and concerns. The Parish Priest asked for an indicative and non-binding show of hands to give some indication of the prevailing position of those in attendance
- We provided a written outline of the proposal in the form of a Pastoral Letter dated 31 March
- A public meeting with parishioners, including members of the Italian community, on 24 June to provide further information about the proposal. An offer of a show of hands was not taken up because of the aggressive and intimidatory behaviour of a small group of individuals who oppose the plan which forced a number of people - who support the proposal - to leave the meeting
- At this meeting, in response to queries and concerns about the future of outreach services provided at the centre, the meeting was advised that the Parish stands ready to assist with the relocation of these services – something we are still committed to doing
- A meeting on 21 August involving representatives of the HMC, IWO and APIN
- A meeting on 5 October involving representatives of the HMC, IWO and APIN
- The most recent written communication was to provide these organizations with three months' notice that their tenancy of the centre would need to end on 31 December
- In this written communication, we repeated our offer to help identify an alternative venue for the outreach services currently provided by these organizations at the centre – specifically, the Parish has informed those affected that it will work supportively with them to relocate to a suitable venue

Our consultation with those living in closest proximity to the centre has involved:

- The Parish letter-dropping some 100 homes closest to the centre on 11 September inviting them to a public meeting
- The Parish holding this meeting on 13 September at the centre
- The Parish providing details about how the centre will operate once it becomes a Flexible Learning Centre in 2018. At the meeting, responses were provided to a wide range of questions

Note: In the Parish letter, we invited those who were not able to attend the public meeting to phone or email the Catholic Schools Office if they have any queries or concerns.

Note also: These public meetings are not about getting parishioners to vote on the future of the centre. As mentioned above, any show of hands at such a meeting is indicative and non-binding, it is simply one way of obtaining feedback.

In conversations with a wide range of parishioners in a variety of settings, an overwhelming number of parishioners - who regularly attend mass in Broadmeadow - are in favour of the proposal.

DEEDS OF AGREEMENT

Second, the Deeds of Agreement do not promise the Italian Welfare Organization ongoing use of the St Laurence O'Toole Centre until they no longer need it.

- Deeds with the Italian community organizations do not grant a right of occupation of premises, but deal with the sharing and funding of the facilities located in the premises. There are Deeds addressing the financial arrangements applicable...**"if the provision of services at Broadmeadow premises ceases"**. The parties clearly anticipated that the provision of services at the Broadmeadow premises may cease, and were never granted in perpetuity.
- The relevant Deeds actually say: "It is recognised that provision of services at the Broadmeadow premises will continue **in a similar manner to the provision of services at the Hamilton Premises which at the date of this Deed is based on the need of the community to which the services are directed, currently for two days per week** based on needs of the Italian community and subject to change as the needs of the community change".
- The Herald article truncated this clause and omitted the above words highlighted in yellow. The omitted words are essential for understanding the use of the word "continue" in this clause. Some members of the Italian community have argued that the word "continue" was used to imply rights in perpetuity. The omitted words show that the word "continue" was used to clarify the services permitted at St Laurence Centre, being a continuation of the two-day per week services provided by the Italian community at Hamilton prior to utilising the hall at Broadmeadow.

Given the above, the argument - that a right of occupation was granted in perpetuity - is unsupported.

THE NEED FOR FLEXIBLE LEARNING CENTRES

Third, the establishment of the Flexible Learning Centre addresses a very real need within society for such learning and it is also an opportunity for us to help marginalised youth which is in keeping with the Church's mission

- There are 70,000 students enrolled in over 900 flexible learning centres in Australia – so there is a need for such centres
- Research published in 2016 shows that for every dollar spent, a flexible learning centre generates about \$25 in socio-economic returns – and for each student who such a centre can successfully engage, there is an average socio-economic benefit of \$359,000 over the life of a student

- The opening of a flexible learning centre at St Laurence will provide educational opportunities for those who have fallen through the cracks of traditional education centres. The students at our centre will be given the skills and the opportunity to make a positive contribution to our society
- The opening of a flexible learning centre at this site will also enable the Parish to return the former St Laurence O'Toole School to its original purpose i.e. provide education in a meaningful way

Beyond the opening of the centre at St Laurence, and in keeping with the Church's mission, we are aiming to open flexible learning centres in other locations such as Maitland, Raymond Terrace, Taree, Muswellbrook and West Lake Macquarie in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ [unclear]', is positioned below the text.