

Parish Amalgamation Q&A

Following years of planning St Brendan's and St Michael's are set to undergo some changes that are aimed to provide more stability with an aim to future growth. This plan aims to build on the strong history of both parishes and set them up well for the long-term. One important aspect of this is the proposed parish amalgamation. While both parishes have been linked for many years, they have never been formally amalgamated as one parish. Below are some important questions regarding the amalgamation, many arising from the recent parish consultation. I have also included some basic points on already planned parish facility developments.

Please let me know if you have any further thoughts, questions or concerns regarding the proposed amalgamation.

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What is an amalgamation?

An amalgamation is the canonical (church law) process of combining two or more separate parishes into one unified parish.

Will an amalgamated parish need a new name?

Yes. While churches will keep their names (St Brendan's and St Michael's) we will need a new parish name. Having listened to many parishioners, I'm simply suggesting the **'Catholic Parish of St Brendan and St Michael'**. It's not uncommon for a parish to have two patron saints and we should keep both saints in our name if possible. Please let me know if you have other thoughts.

Why amalgamate the parishes?

A parish is defined as a local community of the Catholic faithful, in a defined area, to carry out the mission of Church. Parishes are therefore established with the aim of celebrating and promoting the Catholic faith in the best way possible. When these parishes were established (1898 and 1916) it was suitable to have smaller separate parishes. The world and the Church have changed significantly since then, and it makes sense to have a larger combined parish where resources and efforts can be shared. A combined parish would still be a rather small parish compared to others in Sydney, but it would be suitable for our inner-west area. Annandale and Stanmore have been linked together informally for over twenty years now, and the growth of the community together has seemingly been beneficial to both.

What are the intended benefits of an amalgamation?

There are two main benefits.

1. *Pastoral*. Simply, a larger community facilitates greater collaboration and coordination. This is true for regular pastoral activities (e.g. visits to the

housebound) as well as larger initiatives or events (e.g. concerts, fundraisers, retreat weekends). This has already been occurring to some degree. An amalgamation further encourages closer friendships and cooperation between parishioners across Annandale and Stanmore. People are the most important “asset” to a parish, and collaboration between more people, each bring their unique talents, is beneficial.

2. *Financial stability.* This is linked with the major developments that will take place. Increased income from the development, particularly the planned SCECS Day Care at Annandale, will provide long-term financial stability. Better facilities will also allow for other revenue streams, which will financially benefit both parishes. Currently, neither parish has strong financial stability, and an amalgamation will provide this for both. A good financial position isn’t everything for a parish, but it helps free us to do the good work we are called to do.

What changes will an amalgamation bring?

Because the parishes have been linked for so long, they have been operating similarly to a unified parish in some ways. As such, there will be no immediate visible changes: Both churches and schools will remain. Mass and other sacraments will continue to be celebrated in both churches. In fact, if they amalgamated “quietly” it would probably be a while before anyone noticed anything had changed!

The main change will be the transition to one bank account. Currently, we have two separate accounts that cannot be shared across parishes. Similarly, material goods cannot be shared across parishes now.

Over time it is hoped that there will be growing cooperation and unity between both communities, building one another up into one community.

Will the schools amalgamate?

No. Both parish schools will remain as separate entities. We will simply become one parish, with two churches and two schools.

Will both parishes be considered equal in the amalgamation?

An amalgamation is two parishes becoming one parish, not one parish taking over another. The purpose being that both previous parishes can provide mutually beneficial support. In this way, both parishes are treated as equal partners coming together.

Regarding church buildings, the purpose of the amalgamation is to continue to support and use both churches. Both churches will benefit the combined parish, and so both will be properly provided for.

Can we guarantee that both churches will always remain open?

Part of the purpose of the amalgamation is to provide a more stable future and grow our community across Annandale and Stanmore, and therefore the plan is to maintain and use both churches indefinitely. It is too difficult to absolutely guarantee the survival of any church well into the future (amalgamated or not), but the amalgamation will provide more stability for both.

Will there be a reduction in Mass and confession times?

No. Mass and confession times do sometimes change, but an amalgamation will not directly affect this. Both churches will continue to be used for Sunday and weekday Masses.

What is the process going forward?

For a parish amalgamation to be successfully completed, a few steps are needed.

1. The Parish Priest writes a letter to the Archbishop requesting an amalgamation. This includes an overview of the current situation of the parishes, the benefits and drawbacks of an amalgamation, and importantly the thoughts of parishioners following any consultation.
2. The Archbishop decides in favour of the amalgamation.
3. The Council of Priests consider the amalgamation and approve it (the Council of Priests is a committee of senior clergy from the Archdiocese).
4. The Archbishop sends a written decree to the parishes to announce the amalgamation.

Following this, the necessary civil and church law changes are made to make it one entity.

It's important to note that there will be some "heritage" items at each church that will be required to remain in that particular church because of their strong link to its history.

What are the downsides to an amalgamation?

This will always be somewhat subjective so I will answer personally, and that is that I cannot see a downside as such. There is likely some sadness in change, as there always is and should be. There is great history in both parishes, and an amalgamated parish is seemingly the best way to continue the history and mission of both parishes.

The mission, or purpose, of any parish is simply to live Christ's mission as the Church in a particular area. Over a century ago it made sense to accomplish this mission with two smaller separate parishes. Today this mission will likely be best accomplished as a combined parish. Seen from this perspective of our mission and purpose, it seems that an amalgamation is the best way forward.

What was the response to the recent parish consultation?

Most parishioners (>97%) wrote they are in favour of the amalgamation. Your comments were particularly helpful. Most comments were simply favourable, and many expressed important queries and concerns (most of which I hope are addressed here). All of the feedback will be passed onto the Archbishop as part of the letter to be written to him. Please contact me if you have any other questions or concerns about the proposal.

What is the plan for improved parish facilities?

The physical heart of any parish life is the church buildings. However, it is important for any parish to have other facilities that enable more parish activity. The following are the changes, in brief, to parish facilities that are already planned.

1. 'The Convent' (36 Collins St) will be renovated into the new parish centre and new presbytery. The new parish centre will provide large spaces and rooms for parish and community use, as well as new parish office space. The new presbytery will provide a more suitable living environment for parish clergy. To be finished early 2025.
2. St Brendan's school to move into the current presbytery (34 Collins St). This will increase playground space and school facilities. To be finished mid-2025.
3. A new Sydney Catholic Early Childhood Services (SCECS) Day Care to replace the current hall (currently leased by MindChamps Early Childhood and Pre School). This will be leased by SCECS from the parish. To be opened 2027. The current tenants of the existing hall have a lease until mid-2025.
4. Sydney Catholic Schools (SCS) will construct a second storey space above the SCECS facility. This will include general learning areas and a large open space that can be used as a parish/school hall. As above: To be opened 2027. The current tenants of the existing hall have a lease until mid-2025.
5. New toilet facilities to be provided for both churches. These are needed, especially at Stanmore. The timeline for this will depend on finances.
6. Church refurbishments. Both churches need significant work, and the plan is to refurbish both in due time. We have two beautiful church buildings, but they do need some significant work. The timeline for this will depend on finances.

How will the works be funded?

SCECS will fund the new long-daycare centre. SCS will fund the second storey works. The parish will build the new presbytery from the proceeds of the sale of the current presbytery. In time, the income from SCECS' lease will flow to the parish to help support and grow the parish into the future.

Church refurbishments at both sites and the new toilet facilities at Stanmore will need to be budgeted for.