



*The Building Stronger Parishes research project explores how Catholic parishes, in various contexts, use their strengths and available resources to respond to a variety of challenges. The aim of this research is to identify and analyse some of these initiatives in parishes throughout Australia, which can then be implemented in other parishes facing similar challenges. Particular emphasis is given to stories of vitality and hope that bring life to their communities and have an underlying foundation in an ecclesiology of communion.*

## **WHO WILL BE INVOLVED?**

Catholic parishes from around Australia will be chosen that have been identified as having developed particular programs or activities of importance to the study. Suitable parishes will be identified through discussions with the Project Reference Group, key diocesan staff, especially those involved in pastoral services, and people active in parish life. Attempts will be made to choose participating parishes from different contexts to enable researchers to gain perspectives from a range of parishes in Australia. Researchers will also collect additional information about successful small endeavours in other parishes by phone, by mail and from parish websites.

## **HOW WILL IT WORK?**

Data collection will be done at parish visits through a number of interviews with the parish priest, parish leaders and parishioners in general, focus groups, and observation of liturgical celebrations and other events in the life of the parishes being studied. Other forms of data collection from documents such as Sunday bulletins, parish council minutes, parish website resources, etc. will also be used.

The research project has obtained ethics approval from the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee. A pilot study was conducted in St. Francis Xavier's Catholic parish in Montmorency, Melbourne in November last year. Research on the remaining parishes has begun this year and the duration of the project including data analysis and dissemination of the findings, is expected to run until December 2013.

## **WHAT WILL WE LEARN?**

The goal of the project is to provide effective support and resources for Australian parishes, with an emphasis on facilitating the development of practical pastoral strategies. The research findings will include research reports, articles, discussion papers and other print and web-based publications. A website that is currently being developed and will be launched shortly will be the primary source of information on the project throughout its duration. The intended audience will be bishops, diocesan pastoral planners, parish priests and other parish leaders and all those interested in creating vital parishes throughout Australia.

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