



# Catholic Erskine

St. John Bosco & St. Bernadette

## OUR VISION

Towards 2026

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
The Gospel is proclaimed. ....	2
The Gospel works in you.....	4
The Gospel comes from you. ....	5
Some obstacles to be overcome.....	8
Senior Leadership .....	9
Conclusion .....	10

## INTRODUCTION

It is said that if you want to make God laugh, then show Him your plans. However, good leadership principles teach us that failure to plan, is planning for failure. This document is a vision for the parishes of St. John Bosco and St. Bernadette's in the town of Erskine for the next five years. At the outset, we must acknowledge that this is primarily God's work and that while we can make plans, we must be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and be docile before Him.

In the first letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, the church in Thessalonica is a young church. Paul has no plans to go there. He receives a vision which tells him to go to Macedonia and as he journeys, he passes through Thessalonica. He stays there three weeks and, in that time, establishes a church! We pick him up writing to that church a year later. That church is growing, it's exciting and vibrant and joyful even though it is experiencing hardship. That's what we want for us! To achieve this, we need to be faithful to the three key elements, Empowerment by the Holy Spirit, Good Leadership principles, and an Evangelical Missionary orientation.

Paul seems to identify three movements of the Gospel in the life of a church, and it seems that we could focus on them in our vision. These moments are:

- 1) the Gospel is proclaimed to you
- 2) The Gospel works in you.
- 3) The Gospel comes from you.

## THE GOSPEL IS PROCLAIMED.



The first step in growing faith in a parish community is to proclaim the Gospel to our people. We want all our parishioners to have opportunities to experience the love of God; the parishes to be the ground that enables people to get to know Jesus and fall in love with him, not just to know about him. We can enable people to make the Gospel, THEIR Gospel. How do we do that? Well, we think it comes through our integrity. We cannot just preach the Gospel to people. St. Paul seems to indicate that the Thessalonians became believers because they were convinced of the Gospel that Paul preached because of what they saw in Paul. In other words, the message and the messenger were one. We see a parish community that is so convinced by the Gospel that they make it the centre of their lives, that people want to imitate Jesus. One important way to achieve this will be a really good experience of Alpha. We want our



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St. John Bosco & St. Bernadette

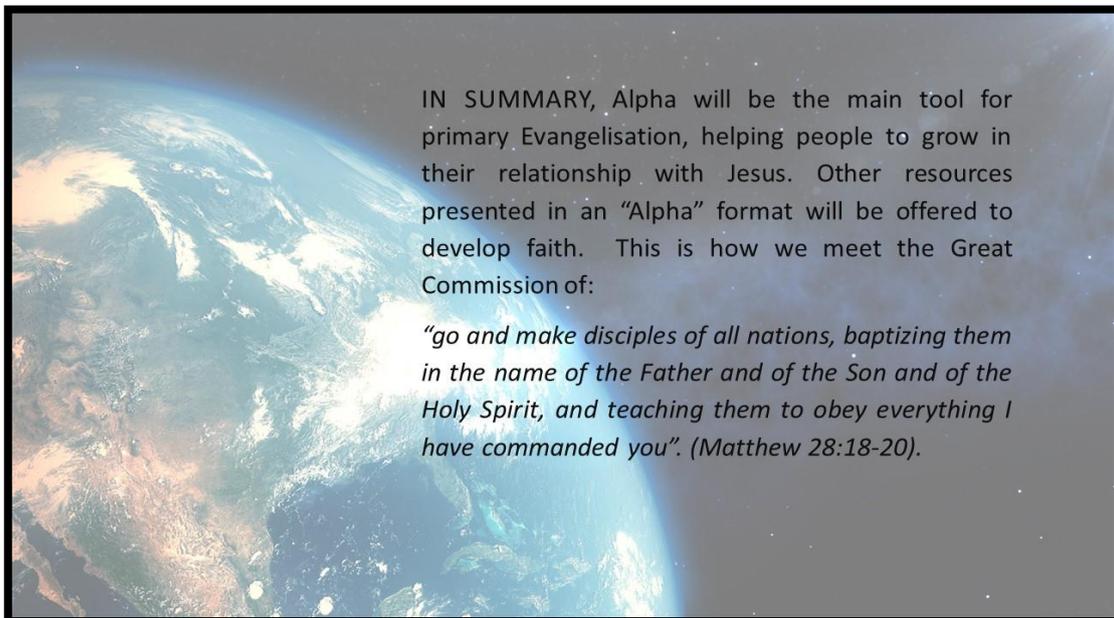
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Alpha experience to be so welcoming that people feel safe and want to be there. It will have as its hallmark a welcoming, invitational outlook. Therefore, having a comfortable, welcoming gathering space would be essential. However, the most important aspect of the whole experience will be that our guests would feel at home, in a joyful way by people whose lives have been transformed by their experience of Alpha. The testimony of their lives becomes the driving force which invites people to become part of what we are doing. This will become a reality by our commitment to enable our Alpha guests to perhaps grow in their experience by assisting in different ways on future courses. By 2026, our vision would be that everyone who is a regular part of our church will have experienced Alpha and/or some of the other faith enriching courses which we will offer.

By 2026 we aim to have 70% of our Alpha attendance made up of people who normally only attend church at Christmas and Easter, or not at all.

We foresee that we will have developed sacramental preparation processes that mirror the Alpha experience, so that we can use every opportunity of engagement with people to help them come to a relationship with Jesus. Again, these experiences would be delivered by people who feel a calling from God to do this work and are generous in their response. These people will be formed by their own experience of growing as disciples.

We will have developed an effective ministry to our children and young people, including Youth Alpha and an age-appropriate Kid's Church.



THE GOSPEL WORKS IN YOU.



The Gospel has a transforming effect when you turn away from what was not healthy and life-giving and embrace what is true. The Flow of the Gospel then redirects your life, it works in you. We hear in Paul's Letter, "You turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God" 1 Thess 1:9. This is what we call repentance, turning away from sinful lives and turning towards Christ Jesus. When you do that, well, things happen. You do not become perfect, but changes do occur. We have a vision that as a parish we would be willing to undergo this kind of transformation, to become a parish where we focus totally on those things that help us to make and deepen discipleship. We foresee that our parish would be transformed into a community that is alive in God's Holy Spirit, that we create the ground where people want to be there and serve out of a sense of commitment, rather than just being consumers. We see a church where people are encouraged, and want to be generous with their time, talents, and treasure. We think therefore, that the best way to nurture this is through small church groups.

By 2026, we would have developed our Life Groups as the medium through which we help to foster an atmosphere of mutual support in all aspects of people's lives. We would be able to provide material using on-line technology, for these groups to pray, explore faith and discuss aspects of their Christian faith. The Life Group would be the primary place to experience the caring church, a place where people can belong and be valued.

The generosity of spirit would also mean that by 2026, every member of our church would be engaged in some form of ministry. This would not be purely liturgical ministry. We envision that we would have created an environment where individuals would be encouraged to use their skill set to offer some form of service to the whole church and beyond the confines of our parish.

Central to enabling the Gospel to work in all of us is prayer. We would see that by 2026, we would offer a wide range of prayer forms and help people to learn how to pray and make prayer central to their lives. We envision that in everything we do, prayer would be central. So, every meeting, every gathering would have prayer at its centre. We would also have many opportunities to come together for prayer, with times of Eucharistic Adoration, with gatherings for Praise and Worship.

We would foresee meaningful celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Connected with this would be excellence in celebrating all the Sacraments of the Church. All our celebrations would excel in our hospitality, our music, and our homilies, we would not go in for half measures!

Of course, our Sunday celebration of the Eucharist would be at the very heart of our week and all that we do. We would envision that our celebration of Mass would be truly a time where as many people can gather at the one time in worship. We would therefore have to be incredibly careful not to put on Masses for convenience, but truly celebrations

where we are able to use all the gifts at our disposal to make them celebrated prayerfully, joyfully and in the most excellent way that we can.

All our celebrations would be Live-streamed. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, to maintain contact with those who for whatever reason are no longer able to attend church. Secondly, it would be a window into our parish so that those who may be curious may come and see. We would therefore have to invest in technology to do this effectively.



IN SUMMARY, the Gospel works actively in our lives through our participation in Life Groups, ministry, prayer, and the Sacraments, using all means at our disposal to engage with the audience we physically see and those we are not yet aware of.

## THE GOSPEL COMES FROM YOU.



Paul writes, "This has made you the great example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia since it was from you that the word of the Lord started to spread." 1 Thess 1:7. Having heard the Gospel and allowed it to change their lives, the church in Thessalonica started to engage in Paul's work of proclaiming the Gospel. Whenever we receive something that is wonderfully life-changing, we instinctively want to share it. The question we must face is this, do we love those who live in Erskine enough, to want to share this Good News with them?

- The general principle we should be operating from is that if we as the Church in Erskine did not exist, would the local people notice? We want to be in a position where they would very much notice.

By 2026 Catholic Erskine and all parishioners will be committed to the principles of *Laudato Si'*. *Laudato Si'* which means *Praise Be to You* is the second encyclical of Pope Francis and has the subtitle "on care for our common home". In it, the Pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take "swift and unified global action."

The principles of *Laudato Si'* are linked to our Gospel values. We must see this as the responsibility of us all to care for creation. We must take seriously everything we do daily

and consider the damage our actions have on the earth “our common home” as well as the results of our inaction on the poor around the world. Pope Francis asks us to hear the cry of the poor. Everyone must make changes in their daily lives. In Chapter 2, The Gospel of Creation, Pope Francis recounts the Christian beliefs that: God created everything with intrinsic goodness. Humans are called to be stewards over creation on behalf of the loving Creator. The right to private property is not “absolute” but “subordinate to the universal destination of goods”. Perhaps most fundamentally, the Pope emphasises that environmental harm is caused by sin, understood as broken relationships “with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself”. These relationships are broken in part because humans “presume to take the place of God and cause us to mistake God’s command for humans to “have dominion” over creation (Genesis 1:28) as exploitative license rather than a vocation to “cultivate and care for” God’s good gift of creation (Genesis 2:15;).

We must live these and all Gospel values to become true disciples. We can no longer see the cries for environmental changes to be the problem for Governments and world leaders only. It is the responsibility of us all. We must realise that refusal to make the required changes are a refusal to acknowledge that we are being sinful by our actions. We can all make a difference to our environment. Small changes by everyone will produce improvements. We see the devastation of Climate change on our world today and must act now and live out the Gospel values to save our planet for future generations and “Care for our Common Home”.

Laudato Si’s scope is broader than man’s effect on the environment, but also the many causes that threaten the relationships of man to each other. This theme undoubtedly links to Pope Francis latest encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, which explains that our call to love others as brothers and sisters, even when they are far from us is a call to 'open fraternity', a love without borders. exploring themes of friendship and unity in a time of growing fragmentation, with a focus on the human family. This theme is the backbone of our outreach program where our road to discipleship has us actively reaching out to all in our local community and beyond. To foster loving relationships with others, build bridges, break down barriers and provide support where needed.

By 2026, we would envisage that our church members are convinced that each of them shares in the responsibility of bringing the Gospel to others. The primary way of doing this would direct them to invite, invite, invite.... their neighbours, work colleagues, family, and friends. It will be a general principle that we will always be conscious of being invitational. This will mean that we will place high importance on hospitality. Everyone would be greeted as they entered our venues. That the hospitality members are trained and understand that their role is a critical one in bringing the Gospel to those who come to us. We should make it our aim that by 2026, we would know everyone who comes to us by name. That is why when we return to “Normal” we would make it a particular discipline to have a “Name Badge Sunday” every month.

On those occasions, such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals, where visitors come to our churches, we must make special efforts to reach out and welcome them so that they would wish to quickly return and join us. Everyone will be welcomed warmly to be sure that

they feel a sense of belonging as quickly as possible. Even the visitor who may just be passing through our town and may not be back warrants us to make the same effort so that every person goes away talking about us and wanting what they experienced for their own community. That way we can grow our faith beyond our parish boundaries. bringing together people from all walks of life and again being witnesses to our faith, showing hospitality and welcoming in all that we do.

We envision that by 2026, parishioners would take the initiative of holding Alpha courses in their own homes, or places of employment, cafés, pubs, or wherever they would be able to meet with those who are not members of a church, and that we would have developed the infrastructure to support this.

We believe also that we should have developed a parish mission for service to our wider community in Erskine. This includes responding to some of the practical issues that people experience in our community. This work has already begun with parishioners working with EBI Unites to distribute food to vulnerable people during this time of pandemic.

We will also work with local agencies to provide financial advice to those who find themselves in difficulty. The aim is to have a network of our parishioners enabled to help parishioners and non-parishioners (clients) in need of financial aid and welfare support. The parish will allocate a room within the church which volunteer trained parishioners will use to give support and help. Volunteers will help complete forms to claim benefits for clients, if required. If we cannot give the advice directly, we would signpost clients to a third party who would be qualified to give appropriate advice where required. Such areas where we will advise or signpost are welfare support, grants, those who find themselves homeless, food bank and mental health support. Our church website will include information highlighting benefits and a grants available tool.

EBI Unites food pantry would be attached to the parish building with a dedicated area to service the needs of those needing support. Not only delivering food but within the unit would be food for people to come and collect as they need. We will raise funds from the parish to support the above.

By being invitational and following our plans, we want to set a target that we increase our regular Sunday Mass attendance by a minimum of 20% each year, from now to 2026.

Finance. To develop an understanding among our church members that their financial giving is an expression of their discipleship. We want our accounting to be transparent and that we would give regular updates as to our financial situation. Much of what we want to do will need a financial commitment if we want to be able to fulfil our mission.

We can foresee that in 2026, the economic position of our country will be more precarious than it has been in recent time. We can anticipate a rise in unemployment and the resulting poverty and emotional and spiritual stress that would accompany this. We need to identify those in our parish who have skills who can assist in responding to these issues; people with financial skills, people who can assist in helping others with such tasks as creating C.V.'s. People with counselling skills who could offer support. We would like to develop a Drop-in Centre, where people could come for help with practical issues, for a chat



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or to have a cup of tea or even a meal. Perhaps we would need to make a commitment to lease a building in the town centre for this. Catholic Erskine would have forged strong links to other Churches and faith communities. We would work together with these communities to address some of the Social Justice issues facing our local community and the world because together we are stronger.

IN SUMMARY, we share that Gospel in a practical as well as a spiritual way by using every opportunity to be invitational. This means increasing awareness of the importance of financial giving and responding to the challenges of our wider community by offering the church not just as a spiritual hub but as a place of safety and practical help.

### SOME OBSTACLES TO BE OVERCOME.

We need to face up to the fact that having two parishes is a difficulty. Ideally that could be resolved by merging the two parishes into one. We need to develop ways of breaking down parochial attitudes and helping people to see that we are being called to a common mission.

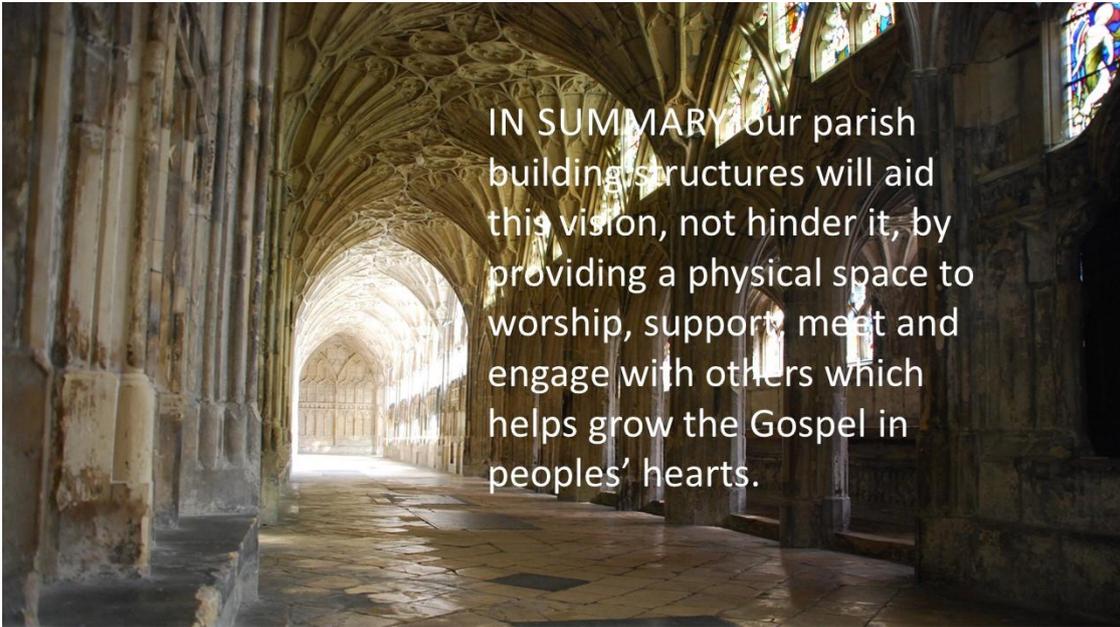
**Physical Structures.** To fulfil this vision for the future we must acknowledge that neither of the two Parish buildings has all the facilities we require. However, it is also clear that we currently do not use our two buildings to their maximum potential. We will undertake a serious study to see how we can better use what we have to enable our Mission.



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## SENIOR LEADERSHIP

We are also conscious that it would be important to constantly develop leaders within the parish to help us to grow our vision. The Senior Leadership Team (*SLT*) is critical in developing this vision and producing and implementing plans to make it a reality. We must nurture future leaders who can bring fresh energy to the SLT, if it is to remain a healthy and dynamic force in the parish. We look forward to a day in 2026 when we would be spoiled for choice!

It would also be desirable that by 2026 we would be in a financial position to be able to hire a dedicated professional staff to undertake some of the leadership roles.

An important aspect will be the Parish Pastoral Council which will be responsible for strategic planning. The ongoing development of the Parish Pastoral council is a key priority.

There would be great focus on the training and development of lay leaders. These leaders would be willing to share their talents beyond our parish family. They would be willing to attend church in other areas or even move into other areas to help in the development of other missionary churches.

Groups of young people would be taken to other countries such as Lourdes, Africa etc to help nurture the Gospel values of service to others.

Promotion of the vocation to Marriage would also become a priority. We want to support couples to have good Christ centred marriages and help them in creating holy Catholic families. We see that families are the place where faith grows best and therefore, we need to support those who are married and their families.

Formation of religious vocations. We would hope that we would have grown as a missionary church to such an extent that we would be inspiring people to vocations to the

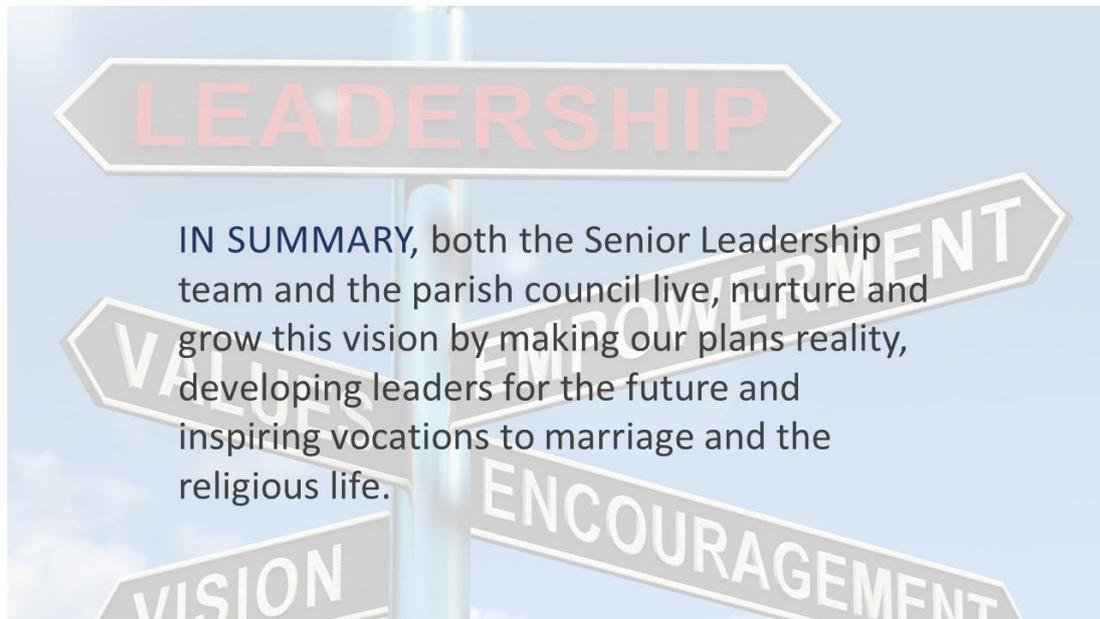


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priesthood, permanent diaconate, and religious life. As a local church we have a responsibility to the wider church. Fostering vocations would be a key element of the life of our Church.



### CONCLUSION

In presenting how the Gospel moves in stages, we do not mean to give the impression that everyone will be at the same stage of development at the same time. The movement through each of the stages may differ for each parishioner.

Our central goal is that by 2026, the Lord's command to "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*" *Matthew 28:19*, will be so ingrained in our parish DNA that it will direct everything we do.

We look forward to 2026 where our parish will be outward orientated and welcoming. A place where everyone, no matter where they are on the journey of faith, will know that they are respected, valued, and have a place here. That everyone, who considers themselves a member of our parish family, will recognise and respond to the fact that they are called to generous, joyful, service as missionary Disciples. That everything that we do, might be truly for the glory of God and not our own.

*Come Holy Spirit Come! Amen!*