

A proposal for services at South Head in 2025

Dear South Head,

In our services this month, we have been considering our vision to be light for the city and refreshment for the soul. We've also noted our need to ensure that everyone can hear and respond to the call of Jesus regardless of age or stage. We want to make much of Jesus and see many people become his friend.

After discussion with some leaders, I'd like to propose we start a new contemporary service in 2025. Many of you may be aware that St Peter's long had such a service – indeed, the St Peter's hall was built for such a purpose – and others have existed at different times at St Michael's. Such a service will significantly increase our capacity to reach and retain young adults, teenagers and families. We want to retain the beautiful richness of what we have, but we do need to add to it for the sake of our future and for the salvation of others.

The proposal springs from a discussion between members of the Parish Council and the ministry team at a strategy meeting in September. This is a proposal for which I am inviting feedback. It also comes with an additional, although secondary, suggestion for the morning services at St Michael's. I genuinely value any verbal or written feedback from anyone on these issues. I'd like to invite a few weeks of feedback after which I can take the input to the Parish Council and ministry team.

Please pray. We need the Lord's hand, in the power of his Spirit, to lead us in and through this moment of discernment.

Grace and Peace,

Matt

The core concern: reaching and retaining youth, young adults and families

In September, at our strategy meeting, we told stories and celebrated that we are a rich, vibrant community of faith that meets across the two sites. We value community and connection with one another. A recent survey of parishioners also revealed that we love our services. They nourish us and form us into the people God longs for us to be. We should be greatly encouraged by this! The Lord is wonderfully at work in our services, helping us love each other and the Lord more and more.

We also noted in the strategy meeting that we longed for more children, youth, and young people to attend church – a comment I have heard from others since I started at South Head. Many are already praying and asking the Lord to aid us in this respect. The reality we spoke about at our meeting was that our current service set-up does not easily allow these demographics to remain with us.

Good work is happening under God at Little Sheep Church on a Sunday. Contrary to perceptions, most of the families there were not formally members of St Michael's. Most are new to our community and not looking for a formal church. We are on mission at Little Sheep Church, reaching new families with the good news of Jesus. We need to continue to resource and grow little sheep with volunteers, time and energy so it thrives as a community. But Little Sheep Church is a church for a season when kids are especially young. The question is, where will these families go next? Our current services are not an easy place for many of these families to move.

Proposal: in 2025, we begin a new contemporary 4pm service at St Michael's

Instead of changing our current South Head services, I think we should add a new service:

- at a new time (in the afternoon), for example, 4 pm
- that is different in flavour from those we already have
- that will be easier for families, youth, and young adults to 'stick.'

Several families have commented on the difficulties of mornings with sport, nippers, and other competing factors which makes an afternoon service make sense.

In addition, it is well known that when new people join churches, they are much more willing to join something new. We are increasing our capacity to receive people by making a new space.

What might this service look like?

- It may involve songs that are more contemporary in style (songs from CityAlight and Emu Music, for example).
- It would have a lighter formal liturgical footprint.
- We would strive to have some children and youth praying and reading the bible.
- We might have a parallel kids program, like the Kids' Church we've started at St Michael's 10am, along with a youth bible study.
- It would need to feel "all-age".
- It may be less formal and a bit more open to chaos.

This is a sketch; a team of people thinking and praying through the particulars is required to plan more closely what this service would be like.

A Further Suggestion: it might make sense for 8am and 10am at St Michael's to come together as one 9am service.

At the moment, our 8am and 10am services are essentially the same. The only difference is the beautiful orchestra and choir accompanying the 10am service. I suspect it may make sense for us to run one service rather than two. It may be that the 8am and 10am do not wish to come together, a desire I intend to respect if that is the feedback received.

The danger in combining is diminishing the richness of the two communities as they exist. We need to preserve the bonds of kindness which hold us together. However, I wanted to raise the question and see what both communities thought. I suspect we would have a lot of fun and could love each other even better if there was one service only. 9am is also a much better time than 10am for younger people. They often visit our 8am or 9am service rather than our 10am slot.

What about St Peter's?

Initially, when thinking and praying about beginning a contemporary service, I thought it would make the most sense to start one in the afternoon in the hall at St Peter's. The space was designed for such a service and until a few years ago, a service was run in it. However, I did not want all the parish's children to end up at one site. I've experienced this problem in a previous parish, Newtown and Erskineville. It becomes a long-term issue when families end up at one church over another in a multi-site church.

However, I do think in 5 years (by 2030) we should aspire to have a contemporary service in the afternoon at St Peter's as well. We could have a rich liturgical communion service in the morning and a modern service in the afternoon at both sites. I think if we aspire to this, we will be best able to love and serve everyone connected to our parishes.

What are the alternatives?

- i) Make no change.

We could change nothing and invest in what we have, to seek to be more hospitable and especially continue to develop the offering of our kids and youth program. I think this would do something, but I fear that future trends will follow those we're already experiencing. We are struggling to retain younger people at church and will continue struggling without some re-organisation.

- ii) Alter the current 10am at St Michael's

The alternative is to alter the 10am at St Michael's, so it is more contemporary. I think the feedback we've received on how loved this service is, makes this the wrong option. I sincerely believe in the way we do Holy Communion and don't think we ought to change it.

In addition, it is challenging to sustain running two children's ministries simultaneously for a smaller church. It is better to run them at non-competitive time slots. It means that someone working in children's ministry can be at both services and volunteers can serve at different times. It is a much wiser for our resourcing in the long term.

- iii) Begin the 4pm at St Peter's

As I've already suggested, we should, in time, also start an afternoon service at St Peter's hall. However, I think beginning at St Michael's first is prudent, followed by St Peter's. We could do this the other way around and start at St Peter's. The advantage of St Michael's is its proximity and relationship with Kambala. The simplest way for us to grow a group of youth and young adults is through our existing connection with Kambala.

- iv) Let the 8am at St Michael's and 9am at St Peter's come together in their chosen way.

Another alternative is for the 8am and 9am services to come together. I would suspect it best for this to occur at St Peter's, which has better access and parking. Both these services are small (between 20-25), and it could be a blessing for them to come together and form a new community. However, they are very different communities, and there are a number of historical reasons why some members of South Head have moved from one church to another. It may be too difficult to make such a change. However, if members of these congregations wished to come together in this way, I would be happy for that to happen.

How can I help?

- i) *Give some verbal or written feedback.* I am very open to any feedback on the proposal and the suggestion. I think we need to discern our path together. Please book me in for a coffee, send me an email, write a letter or give me a call.
- ii) *Pray.* I am openly seeking the help of the Holy Spirit and the Lord's will for us at South Head. Please join me in this. The church belongs to Christ. May his will be done.
- iii) *Express interest in the new congregation.* If you would like to be a part of the core team who thinks and prays through the start of the new contemporary service, I'd love to hear from you.