

Catholic Parishes of Te Wairua Tapu and Te Awakairangi – Amalgamation Proposal

ANALYSIS OF SUBMISSIONS

Number of submissions

There were 49 submissions in total. 9 submissions were from Te Awakairangi Parish and 40 from Te Wairua Tapu Parish.

41 were from individual parishioners, couples or family/small groups.

8 were from parish groups/committees:

- Te Awakairangi Senior Leadership Team and Finance Committee
- Te Wairua Tapu Parish Pastoral Council
- Te Wairua Tapu Parish Finance Committee
- Our Lady of the Rosary Stewardship Team
- Sacred Heart Petone Stewardship Team
- Our Lady of the Rosary School Board
- The Eastbourne Community Workshop report (representing ~55 attendees plus additional written feedback)
- A "Summary of feedback from the OLR community" survey

The number of people involved in submitting is higher than 49, due to the family and group submissions.

The merger

11 individual and family submissions, representing approximately at least 15 individuals, supported the merger. The merger was also supported by the:

- Te Wairua Tapu Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Committee,
- Te Awakairangi Senior Leadership Team and Finance Committee
- Eastbourne community workshop (approx. 55 attendees)
- Sacred Heart Petone Stewardship Team

Reasons for supporting the merger

1. *Practical/administrative sense given priest shortages* - a pragmatic response to declining clergy numbers.
2. *Consolidation of administration, finances, and resources* - "makes good sense" given the realistic constraints both parishes face.
3. *A providential opportunity to finally build one shared identity* – the first merger (2014-2025) never fully delivered two unified parishes and the new merger would be a "providential opportunity" to properly achieve that shared identity, mission focus, and

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stronger, more mission-oriented parish combining the strengths and charisms of both existing communities.

4. *Strengthened mission effectiveness and stewardship* - several submitters explicitly endorsed the Archbishop's own stated rationale — that combining the parishes would strengthen "mission effectiveness, stewardship of resources, and the vitality of parish life".
5. *Necessity and inevitability* - some framed the merger less as a positive choice than an unavoidable structural necessity. There was a desire to resolve prolonged uncertainty, wanting a firm decision after years of "to-ing and fro-ing," viewing continued indecision as more damaging to parish life than a clear resolution, whichever direction it took.
6. *Precedent from the earlier parish mergers* - parishioners broadly accept the need for this merger partly because they'd already been through a comparable process — the 2015 mergers which formed the two parishes.

A notable pattern in support for the merger: Much of the explicit "merger" support came with a clear separation from support for the church closures - people who accepted or endorsed combining the two parishes structurally were simultaneously firm that this should not require closing San Antonio or Our Lady of the Rosary churches. Among a few submitters there was pragmatic resignation about the merger and the church closures, prioritizing the sustainability of the wider Catholic community over preserving every individual building.

9 submissions from approximately 12 people opposed the merger.

Reasons for opposing the merger

1. *Loss of community, identity, and belonging* - submitters said the merger threatened to dissolve close-knit congregations built over decades, replacing a "friendly," known community with a larger, more impersonal one.
2. *Lack of communication and consultation* - this was a consistent concern: parishioners felt the rationale for the merger was vague, undocumented, and had not been properly explained or consulted on, and "imposed from on high".
3. *Financial motives and lack of objective data* - some submitters suspected the merger was driven purely by cost-cutting. There were fears that money raised specifically for a local church (eg OLR) would be "swallowed up" by the merged entity and redirected to other locations rather than benefiting the community that raised it.
4. *Risk of one parish dominating the other* – concerns were expressed that a larger or better-resourced parish would dominate decision-making, diluting the smaller parish's identity, worship style, and influence.

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5. *Pace and process of change* - even among those not opposed outright, many argued the timeline felt rushed, asking for a multi-year, phased transition rather than an abrupt administrative change, with structured opportunities for input.
6. *Precedent and past experience* - a few submitters referenced past mergers/closures (eg St Francis of Assisi/St Benedict's, Wainuiomata losing standalone status) that they felt were handled poorly.

San Antonio church closure

8 submissions from approximately 12-13 people explicitly opposed the closure of San Antonio church. Two submissions from parish groups opposed the closure:

- The Eastbourne Community Workshop (55 attendees)
- Our Lady of the Rosary Stewardship Group

No submitters supported the closure of San Antonio church, although two expressed reluctant acceptance.

Reasons for opposing the closure:

1. *Geographic isolation and transport difficulties* - Eastbourne is described repeatedly as the most isolated of the churches, roughly 11 km from the nearest Lower Hutt/Petone churches, with poor Sunday public transport.
2. *Elderly and disabled parishioners unable to attend Mass* - the San Antonio congregation is described as predominantly elderly, many of whom no longer drive or hold a licence. One family also raised the specific difficulty closure would create for a family member with autism.
3. *Loss of Eastbourne's ecumenical relationships* - San Antonio shares strong ties with Eastbourne's Anglican (St Albans) and Presbyterian (St Ronan's) churches. Submitters felt this ecumenical spirit would be lost.
4. *Eastbourne's distinct community identity* - several submitters argued Eastbourne is a genuinely separate community from Lower Hutt and that closing San Antonio would leave Eastbourne Catholics "totally isolated" from the rest of the merged parish.
5. *Heritage and historical value* - San Antonio has served the community since 1909, reflecting the area's Italian Catholic settlement history, with descendants of those founding families still attending. It was described as one of Eastbourne's oldest surviving churches, with notable stained-glass windows and donated icons.
6. *Community and civic role* - the church sits beside the Sports Ground and RSA, is used for community meetings and outreach beyond worship.

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7. *Financial viability and building condition* - multiple submitters stated the San Antonio community/parish is financially self-sufficient, and the building has a strong seismic rating (cited as 80-85% NBS) arguing there is no structural or financial necessity driving the closure, and that the underlying motive appeared to be the value of the land.
8. *Family and generational ties* - some submissions described multi-generational connections eg family travelling from overseas specifically to have children baptised at San Antonio, arguing these ties matter for a sense of belonging and identity that would be lost if the building were sold.

Our Lady of the Rosary church closure

18 submissions from individual or family/small group submissions representing 20+ named people opposed the closure of Our Lady of the Rosary church. 5 submissions from parish groups opposed the closure:

- Our Lady of the Rosary Stewardship Team
- Our Lady of the Rosary community survey
- Our Lady of the Rosary School Board
- Te Wairua Tapu Parish Pastoral Council
- Sacred Heart Petone Stewardship Team

No submitters supported the closure of Our Lady of the Rosary church.

Reasons for opposing the closure of Our Lady of the Rosary church:

1. *Largest, thriving congregation in the parish* - multiple submitters emphasized that Our Lady of the Rosary has the highest Mass attendance in the parish, cited as around 300 people, with extra chairs regularly needed in the foyer for overflow.
2. *Not a financial burden, the church community is self-sustaining* - several letters stated Our Lady of the Rosary is "not a drag on the parish finances," citing utilities/rates/insurance of roughly \$20,000 against a collection of about \$75,000 for the year.
3. *The church is structurally sound* - a roof renewal is needed rather than earthquake strengthening.
4. *Serves a distinct, less affluent, multicultural community* – Our Lady of the Rosary's congregation was described as including many immigrants from Asia and the Pacific living in Moera and Epuni, less affluent areas, plus growing numbers of Catholic migrant families.
5. *Deep, long-standing community identity and relationships* - many described Our Lady of the Rosary as an unusually close, welcoming, multi-generational "parish family," with

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strong intergenerational participation, an enthusiastic music group, and decades of relationships that would be lost or badly disrupted by dispersal to other Mass centres, with some submitters warning people would simply "leave the Church altogether" rather than transfer.

6. *Impact on elderly and those without transport* - Our Lady of the Rosary's community includes many elderly and retired parishioners who currently walk to Mass and have no other transport.
7. *Link to Our Lady of the Rosary School* - several submissions stressed that closing the church would sever the school's access to a local church for school Masses, sacraments (Reconciliation, Confirmation, Communion), and everyday faith formation.
8. *Nearly 100 years of history and a milestone approaching* - Our Lady of the Rosary is nearly 100 years old, with its centenary due in 2029, an opportunity to bring the community together.
9. *Loss of a spiritual/musical community anchor* - several individual letters specifically praised Our Lady of the Rosary's music group and the spiritual richness of its liturgies as something they feared could not be replicated elsewhere.

Internal unity within the two parishes currently

Beyond hopes/fears about the proposed merger, several submitters commented on how unified each parish already feels internally, and both come across as still works-in-progress, made up of distinct sub-communities rather than fully blended wholes.

Within Te Awakairangi:

- A submission from the parish's own Senior Leadership Team/Finance Committee acknowledges the parish "encompasses significant cultural diversity, with multiple language groups and Mass communities, each with distinct expressions of faith and belonging", diverse, but not framed as a single unified identity yet.
- One parishioner was blunt that Te Awakairangi, already the Archdiocese's largest parish, hasn't achieved internal cohesion: "there is still a lot of work to be done to build an integrated Parish at Te Awakairangi," and warns that "people do get lost in large crowds" making "community, connections and unity" harder at scale.
- Another submission (offering practical suggestions) notes that small liturgy and music teams already serve different Mass communities within Te Awakairangi depending on how many Masses there are, and that "sometimes 'hitches' or 'breakdowns occur", a sign the parish's various congregations still operate somewhat separately rather than as one coordinated body.

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- A different submitter raised a perception problem: building works and resources concentrated at Ss Peter & Paul's while other churches close creates a "big brother Ss P&P" dynamic that "is not helpful in building an inclusive unified community", suggesting internal inequity between the parish's constituent churches.

Within Te Wairua Tapu:

- Te Wairua Tapu was itself formed by merging four parishes in 2015, and several submissions described that merger as still not fully "settled." One Waiwhetu parishioner recalled that before the 2015 merger their church building "was in very good condition" but "since we were combined into Te Wairua Tapu we have been unable to get even basic maintenance done," feeling their church was "run down" while resources went elsewhere in the parish.
- The Our Lady of the Rosary community survey summary lists "Inequality and Dominance" as a live fear – "one parish potentially dominating another, leading to a loss of the unique identity of the smaller group" - described as an existing concern, not just a hypothetical concern about the new merger.
- At the same time, a Waiwhetu submission describes strong cohesion at the local level: "a strong close knit OLR whanau presence within the community," with good interpersonal relationships and mutual support , but this reads as unity within their own sub-community (OLR) rather than across Te Wairua Tapu as a whole, and submitters worry that identity would dissolve further in a bigger parish.
- The Eastbourne/San Antonio workshop notes similarly show San Antonio operating as a fairly distinct, geographically isolated community within Te Wairua Tapu, with its own history of feeling under-consulted relative to the rest of the parish (referencing the unresolved 2019 Parish Futures Report and a promised "second review" that never happened).

Overall pattern: both parishes are described less as single unified bodies and more as federations of distinct church communities (language groups, individual church congregations, geographically separate hubs) that have not fully integrated, with several submitters using this as a caution: if internal unity within each existing parish is still incomplete, a bigger merger risks compounding rather than resolving it.