

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL – PARISH PRIEST REPORT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 26th July 2009

Since our last AGM in August last year there have been some interesting developments in the parish. And as this will be the last AGM Report before my retirement it marks in a way the end of an era, not only for the parish but more particularly for me. As I look back over 52 years of priesthood there have been considerable changes in the world and also in our Church. And many of these changes have impacted on this parish too. And things here are not quite the same as they were when I came 10½ years ago.

In this past year we have seen areas of change and development. Around the school there have been great changes and more in the pipeline, as Paul will report in detail. We see to the improvements in our hall with the repainting and renovation of the kitchen – and thanks to all involved in that project. Our building project with the three units is finally coming to completion – not without some dramas I might add, particularly with Telstra holding us up for about 12 weeks! But hopefully we should soon have a steady income stream. This will be important for the parish as our income continues to fall with declining numbers and the current financial stresses. They will be advertised for leasing this coming week.

We have reduced our Sunday Masses from two to one – with surprisingly little opposition, but this is a reality that will have to be faced by all parishes in the near future. On the other hand many have commented on the improved quality of the Sunday Mass in liturgy and singing particularly. Unfortunately that cannot be said of the Saturday Evening Mass – which no doubt will receive further consideration next year. However we are lucky to have a good choir, under Henry's leadership and the music provided by Marie and Toni. We do of course miss Bonnie's music, but she is now well involved in her new parish in Queensland. It would be good to find some new budding musicians and singers, especially to lead the singing at Saturday evening Mass.

Of course we still do not know what the future holds following my retirement. Efforts to get some clarification re future plans for this parish and others in the area have not been at all productive, and I know this does cause some anxiety. The air of uncertainty we discussed at last year's AGM still continues. As we move forward it will of course be important to continue developing strong lay leadership in the parish. This has been going reasonably well, but it is still a concern that too much is left to too few. While we have a good number of volunteers in various areas of parish life, we really need more people to accept positions of leadership and responsibility.

We have had a change in our Pastoral Associate, and I must say how well Sue Wakeham has fitted in to the job and has been so well received by parishioners. We are indeed fortunate to have found someone so capable in our own parish. She has done well in developing the Pastoral Care and in leading the Lenten discussions, among many other activities. I have really appreciated her support. Caroline and Carol keep on keeping on doing their work well, as does Anne Marie Platten as Parish REC.

In conjunction with our school REC Meg Burford, and our catechists and teachers, we have a good sacramental preparation process, but it would be good to have a more active parent involvement. The lack of young families attending Mass, esp. those preparing for the sacraments, is still an ongoing concern. There is certainly a good spirit of cooperation between school and parish, and special thanks to Paul Murphy and his staff, but it would be pleasing to see more school families involved in the life of the parish.

A few years ago we had quite a strong youth group in the parish, but most of the leaders have moved on, either taking up professional duties or getting married. Strong youth activities depend to a great extent on the quality of leadership within their own ranks – and this we do not have at the present time. In this of course we are not alone, but as it is often said this is one of the casualties in our Catholic Secondary Education system – the failure to link in with parish life and activities.

Again I wish to thank Ron Hoogland for maintaining our parish website, and also Terence & Grace Yeow for the efforts with the Tranmere Times.

Our church is undergoing great change. For example when the new Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia arrived the other day, one of our staff commented on its size – with the declining in number of priests and religious, how come it has grown from 680 pages in 2003 to 880 in 2009? In part it reflects the growing bureaucracy in the church, which in turn adds to the complexity of parish administration with all its ramifications. Running and maintaining a parish is not as simple as it used to be, so I thank all who have helped in this task, particular the Parish Pastoral Council, Finance Committee and parish staff, especially over the past ten years.

John F Swann PP
26 July 2009