

Annual Report 2008-2009 November 15th 2009

By Reverend Hans Christiansen

Introduction

In the absence of the incumbent Rev'd Catherine Eaton, I deliver this annual report.

It has been a very dynamic year both locally and globally. We have witnessed and found ourselves immersed in a deep financial crisis that took its toll on both our personal finances as well as the diocesan finances. We have had a massive bushfire this year in Victoria that took its human toll and affected us all. Locally here in our own parish we have recently been saddened by Rev'd Catherine Eaton's illness but we are gladdened by her prospect of good recovery.

In the midst of both global and local tumultuous events, I think our parish with its message of God's love in Christ firmly embedded in our ethos, worship and deeds, has been able to be incredibly innovative and dynamic as well as speaking into the tragic events of this year and offer some hope.

We are a people of hope and love. As the apostle Paul reminded his community: all you do, do it with love and as Jesus summed up his teaching the night before he died when he washed his disciples feet he said, "love another as I have loved you".

God's love and our love is our treasure and our pearl of great price and it is with God's love we are sent to the world to be messengers of reconciliation and hope.

This year has above all shown to me how strong our community is in its commitment to love and support each other and work together in order to bring God's message and love to the world.

As I have reflected on the year past I was struck by the many services of love we have done throughout the year.

Some Highlights of the Year

This year we have seen so many of the things that we have talked about for a number of years beginning to happen.

The vision of the tree and its qualities has, together with the rest of the Mission Action Plan, been approved and adopted by the parish at the meeting we held in August. We now have a clear vision and mandate to go forward with. Our mission statement is *Following Christ. Nurturing Community* and our four strategic values of Nurturing Community, Spirituality, Shared Leadership and Sustaining our Future gives us clear guidelines as to where are heading the next five years. It is great that we can distribute the plan today and then re-commit ourselves to working towards implementing the visions enshrined in it. I thank all of vestry for their hard work and many thanks to Bill Brown for making the reports ready for distribution today.

Back in April we launched the St John's Restoration Appeal and since then several fundraising events for St John's restoration have taken place. Thank you to Val Johnson and the committee for running the appeal in such a professional manner.

This year we got a new Roof at St Andrew's.

After years of dreaming, we completed the Labyrinth at St Andrew's. I particularly want to thank Robin and Bronwyn P. for guiding us and helping us draw it. I thank Judith M. who did so much work laying the bricks. Thank you to the many people who donated bricks and thank you also to Michael F., James H. and Ruth C. who also helped laying bricks.

This year we have begun three new monthly services, more of that later.

We have opened up our kitchen at St Andrew's for a weekly Community Kitchen on Tuesdays. Thanks to Kirsteen MacKenzie for keeping oversight of this.

In response to the bushfires in February we held a very well attended memorial service for healing on Rye beach. Many from our playgroup and from the local community attended the service.

Together with other people from the wider community we inaugurated and organised the celebration of Rye Interfaith Festival with over 3000 participants including over 350 attendees at the Ecumenical Eucharist.

We resurrected Café Church in January at St Andrew's with 180 people attending Dr Craig Hasted's excellent talk and workshop. Thank you to all the many people helping with that.

As asked for in last year's Annual General Meeting, we have, in partnership with the Mornington Peninsula Interfaith Network, resurrected Conversations in the Pub under the new name of Spirituality Café. We held three very well attended talks in this area and three further up the Peninsula. Thank you to the committee for their work.

Together with the Human Rights Group, people from the parish helped arrange the Consultation with Fr Frank Brennan in Mornington.

We arranged and facilitated three new ecumenical services in the smaller days of Holy Week.

The men's group was resurrected.

We had Open Church Day in September.

We have had two people confirmed when Bishop Paul visited and one person received into the Anglican Communion. Congratulations to Rowena Kew, Hannah MacKenzie and Pauline Powell.

We have strengthened our connection with Elmore parish with a visit to Elmore and a visit from Elmore.

Despite cancelling the annual fair we have had significant fundraising activities this year raising up to \$10,000 in one week alone. I here particularly think of the Parish Dinner, Jim Uhe's art sales, and the garage sale at the Brown's. Thank you to all who work so hard with these things. I especially thank Shirley Goldsworthy and her team, Jim Uhe and Rosemary and Bill. Also thank you to the Guilds and Nexus groups for your fundraising efforts. I take

this opportunity to also mention the very significant financial help we receive from JackandAndys Op-Shop. Thank you to Bev Baker and the Board and all the volunteers working in the shop. The op-shop not only supports us financially it also provides a vital parish window to the wider community.

Staff

We are so lucky to have such a dynamic and large staff team.

This year we farewelled Helen Lake after many years of service as a secretary in the office. We thank Helen for her many years of work and for staying back some time to help Jacqui learn all the many details.

It has been great to welcome Jacqui to our staff. Jacqui started as parish secretary back in February. I think all would agree that we are very fortunate to have Jacqui with her many skills, her smile, laughter, enthusiasm, and empathy. Jacqui has been on a big learning curve and she is doing a marvellous job.

Thanks also to our Lay minister Kirsteen MacKenzie. Kirsteen does a fabulous job as the pastoral care co-ordinator, editor of the Waterhole, her work with the children, her oversight of the community kitchen, and all her many other jobs she blesses our community with.

Thanks also to Sue Boggan, our counsellor, who behind the scenes does great work with many people both within and outside the parish.

Thanks to Rev'd Christine Barren. Since Catherine's illness, Christine has been a marvellous help to me. Christine continues to do all her great work with preaching, liturgical deaconing, the music and the choir, children, and playgroup. I particularly commend and thank her for the work with the new baptism service and her work with the new band.

Thank you also to Fr John Spring who recently joined the staff as locum. Fr John has been a great and welcome help for me. We also warmly welcome Sandra to our community and we look forward to see Fr John's ministry unfold.

And finally thanks to Rev'd Catherine Eaton, my mentor and vicar. In December last year Catherine was made an incumbent of the parish, a day many had looked forward to for a while. It was difficult for us all to learn of Catherine's illness back in August. However, we are glad that Catherine is recovering well and we are looking forward to her return next year.

Since Catherine's absence I have been on a steep learning curve. I am sorry if I at times have been too busy since taking over from Catherine. I am trying my best. Thank you to all of you for your understanding and support.

It is with mixed emotions that I leave in January to take up my new position as Chaplain at Balcombe Grammar School. I am looking forward to take up what I feel God is now calling me to, but I am also sad to leave this parish. The past four years have been wonderful for me. You have all taught me so much and I thank you all for opening your hearts and souls to me. I will miss you very much.

My final service in the parish will be the 3rd of January 2010.

Vestry

It has been another big year for vestry and all the members have done great work. Vestry is responsible for the smooth running of our parish and that is, as you can imagine, no small task. This year the most significant achievement for vestry, as already mentioned, has been the completion of two years of consultation and hard work with the Mission Action Plan that was adopted by the parish in August earlier this year. Vestry has also tackled many other important things this year such as getting the new roof at St Andrew's and supporting the St John's Restoration Appeal Committee.

I personally thank each of the vestry members for this year Val J., Kirsteen MacK., Prue F., Ray L., John M., Marj C., Rob K., Maggie P., Elizabeth B., Rosemary B. and Bill B.

Especially I want to thank our wardens who do a lot of work in the parish: Val, Kirsteen, Prue, and Ray who had to withdraw during the year. And I also personally thank our Treasurer Bill B. for keeping good track of the finances. Bill receives good advice from the Finance committee and I thank that committee as well for all their work.

Liturgy

Our liturgical life is at the heart of who we are and what we do. It is, as Saint Benedict said, the Opus Dei, the work of God done by the people. It is in the liturgy we gather weekly to be fed and nourished by the Word and Sacraments. It is from our prayer together that we are sent out every week to live and work for justice, healing, creativity, love and compassion. It is therefore of the utmost importance that our liturgy every week is of a high standard. We have a great team of people who behind the scenes tend to all the many tasks so that our worship is of a high standard. I think of and thank all our sacristans, our servers, the people who wash all the linens, our flower teams, our welcomers, our intercessors, our musicians, the choir, and all the people in our community who continue to ensure that our worship and prayer continues to run smoothly. Thank you to all of you for doing such a fabulous job.

This year we have begun three new services: The Sundays@5 is a small but dedicated group who continues to explore new ways to engage with younger people. At present it looks like the group is settling for monthly Labyrinth services at St Andrew's.

We have begun a monthly, more informal service at St Andrew's at 10.30am. The service is led by various lay people and the staff. This service has much potential and hopefully it will also become the Sunday where most of the younger people of the parish meet for worship, thus building stronger connection with each other.

We have also begun a monthly baptism service at St John's on the third Sunday at 10.30am. Christine Barren is responsible for this service and the baptism preparation and Kirsteen Mackenzie helps her. I believe we are off to a flying start with 80 people attending the first service. Our hope is that some parishioners also will attend the service and that some of the younger people who feel connected to St John's will begin coming.

Our Christmas and Easter services continue to be very popular with numbers slightly up at St John's this year.

Our monthly Taize service continues to offer a meditative sanctuary for those who feel the need. It has been particularly heartening this year to welcome a number of people from other denominations to the service. Judith M. and her team lead the service. I thank Judith and her team for their time, effort and faithfulness to provide this monthly meditative worship.

This year in September we celebrated for a second time the Season of Creation, a season that again was appreciated by many.

Weddings Baptisms and Funerals

The demand for the pastoral services of weddings, baptisms and funerals in our parish continues to be large. This year we have celebrated 42 weddings, 45 baptisms and 19 funerals most of which have been for people who are not part of the parish.

Thanks to all the many people involved in making especially the weddings and baptisms possible. Thanks to Margaret P. and Judith M. who did great work as weddings secretaries and thanks to Jacqui who took over their work earlier this year. I thank the team arranging flowers, the verger team, the sacristans, and of course a big thank you to Shirley and John Goldsworthy who continue to deliver excellent marriage seminars to the couples. I particularly congratulate and commend Shirley Goldsworthy on the completion of her marriage guidance book. We will launch her book in this parish with Bishop John Wilson on the 13th December and the parish is delighted to have Shirley's book available for all our future wedding couples.

Farewells

We have sadly farewelled a number of dear friends this year who are greatly missed. We think of Ken Brumby, Des Cory, Frank Hibbs, Joan Page, Joyce Ross, Rens and Corry Dootjes. And we have said goodbye to some good friends who have moved to be closer to the city and family. Particularly I think of John and Helen Howells who have given so much to our parish life and Maggie Mackie, Pamela Strongman and Valerie Brumby.

Community

Our community is very strong and we have so many groups and things going on in the parish. We give thanks to God for the Friday Club, Music and Storytelling, Emergency Food Relief, Art Group, Op-Shop, Men's group, Youth Group, Band, Community Kitchen, Nexus and Guilds, Spirituality Group, Meditation and Labyrinth Groups, Garden group, Poetry and Art Group, Spirituality talks, Breast Cancer Groups, Prayer Chains, Mission Group, Beacon and Websites group, Human Rights and Interfaith networks – all the groups in their own way offer inspiration, nourishment and connection points with people in the wider community. I can't name here the many leaders and volunteers, but I thank you all for the hard work you are doing. Without you many of our windows to the community would be closed and we would have less opportunity to show God's love in action.

Wider Church and Interfaith

As Anglicans we are part of a big global community of 70 million plus members. This year the bishops went to the Lambeth Conference in England, which, despite the sad Breakaway Conference GAFCON in Jerusalem, showed how much we have to celebrate in the Anglican Communion. We are very diverse but we are also unified. Recently we witnessed the development in the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Anglican Church. We are yet to see what the Catholic proposal actually will mean but it seems that it will not affect the Anglican Church of Australia very much but it is yet to unfold.

We have good leadership here in Melbourne with our Archbishop Phillip and Regional Bishop Paul. Despite a very big deficit due to the financial crisis, the Diocese seems fairly

unified which was evident in the two Synod sittings we have had this year. Thanks to Patricia R. and Marj C. for their work as synod representatives.

I am very proud that our parish continues to give so generously to Anglican aid and mission work overseas and in this country. Thank to John M. and the rest of the mission group.

Our Parish Connections with Elmore parish has been further strengthened this year with a parish visit to Elmore earlier this year and a visit from the Elmore parish recently.

This year we have also engaged more than ever before with the interfaith community on the Peninsula and beyond. The connection with the Mornington Peninsula Interfaith Network that was formed after the Interfaith Festival has been a fruitful one. Many of us look forward to participating in the Parliament of the World's Religions in December this year.

Endings and New Beginnings

We are indeed a vibrant and very active parish. We have many dreams and visions, as is evident from our Mission Action Plan. People from outside the parish keep commenting to us how impressed they are by all the many things we are doing. But it is no secret that we are struggling to find volunteers for all our work. Our community is ageing and while we have a good group of dedicated younger people we need to keep searching for ways to speak to and help younger people in the wider community come to faith and grow in faith.

This year, as mentioned, we have begun many things and tried different ways of connecting to build up people of faith. Some of our attempts will bear fruit and others will not. We need to keep being creative, willing to let go of what does not work and put energy into what seems to work.

I personally think we need more worship that speaks to younger people. I am therefore very pleased that we have begun the three new services. However, we might need more. I also think it is essential that we focus on establishing small groups of young and older laypeople who get together learning about faith and sharing faith. We need more young people taking on leadership roles of the parish. This is crucial for the parish if we are going to continue as a vibrant and engaging community of the heart.

When all is said about work and doing things it is important to remember that all work in the end is for love. As the apostle Paul once said to the Corinthian community: *Let all that you do be done in love* (1 Cor 16:13-14). Our love for God, each other and the world, is our pearl of great price. As long as we seek to live in love we cannot fail, we can only grow in wisdom and love and with Lady Julian (of Norwich) we can then, regardless of the tumultuous events in the world, keep saying, "*All things shall be well and all manner of things shall be well*".

Indeed all shall be well with this parish. We have much to celebrate and much to continue working towards. We are a community of the heart following Christ, Nurturing Community. Let us keep up the good work of loving and listening to God and then seek to radiate that love to others.

In closing I like to take this opportunity to thank each and everyone in the whole parish for all you do to make this place a beautiful place of God. As you are being rooted and built up in Christ, may you all find blessing, wholeness and joy.

And finally I close with the ancient greeting of Saint Paul that we all love so much:

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor 13:13).

Reverend Hans Christiansen