

PASTORAL ASSOCIATE'S REPORT 2007-2008

The past year for me has been a year of cementing and surmounting – cementing the many good programs and activities that are already in place in the parish, and surmounting some of the challenges I find here. The results of the parish survey show that many parishioners are well satisfied with most of the things that are happening in the parish. As well, there were quite a few very helpful suggestions in the areas of ‘things we don’t do well - yet.’ I am constantly mindful of our need to move forward, to plan for the future, to find ways of involving the youth, to present adult education in areas that will be helpful and attractive to you. I know there needs to be a closer liaison between the parish and the school community. I see how much more could be done with liturgy and planning, with the music, with more frequent times for prayer/meditation. I want so much for this parish to offer something to everyone to enable them to grow in the love of God.

This is where the challenges come in.

I have been here so long now, that when people see me coming, they hide for cover, scared of what I might ask them to do next. We have an amazing number of people already involved in all our activities: e.g. each time I send out the SFX ministry rosters; there are over 100 copies to be made – truly indicative of an active and supportive community. Each time we plan doing something new or different, we have to ask the question – who can help? And we go back to the list of the same faithful people who are already deeply committed. My greatest challenge seems to be in involving everyone. If each person took on one task it would all be simple. But that doesn’t seem to be the way it works, and honestly, I no longer know how to do this. It continues to afford me concern, challenge and cause for thought.

I will list below the groups/people that contribute so wonderfully to the life of the parish, but I cannot close this report without particular mention of my RCIA experience during the year. Our meetings started with 8 enquirers and a number of parishioners who agreed to give support in different ways – as team members, sponsors, prayer supporters. Brother Paul and I were fairly much newcomers to the process, and we learnt as we went along.

It was really hard work, but personally I learnt and grew an incredible amount, as well as gaining greater confidence in my own abilities to share the important message of the gospel with others. When I look back now at our new Catholics, I am struck by the way the group itself gelled – these people really love each other – they listen, they respect one another’s views, they encourage and support one another – they are even arranging to keep meeting on an ongoing basis, as they find the thought of ‘deserting’ one another too painful. They bring such freshness and joy, openness and wonder, happiness and light to our community. This involvement has been the greatest blessing of my year.

I want to offer my most sincere thanks to all parishioners involved in the groups listed below. They are the ‘salt’ of Box Hill, and without them, we could do nothing. I list them in no particular order of importance or involvement, but as I type this, I am truly mindful of the individuals and all they give us. Some of these groups have made reports of their own, but I will mention them again. Thank you. I wish each of you every blessing.

Parish Pastoral Council – both current and retiring members have made concerted efforts this year to respond to the needs and hopes of the whole community. They have cooperated closely with the friars in various ways, and supported many of the activities in the parish.

School community – I wonder what a parish would be like without the hope and promise that a school brings to it. Staff and parental involvement is amazing. Our children receive a wonderful education, many opportunities to find God in their lives, and hope for a bright future. This is the busiest place in the parish most days, and the life and energy of the whole community is one of the strong signs of God’s love in action in Box Hill.

Baptism program - is presented to all families bringing their first child to the parish for baptism. Those who conduct the program do so with joy and energy, and offer a warm welcome to new families.

Autumn Friendship Group - What a wonderful group of wonderful women (mostly), who support one another through all the highs and lows of life, and have a great time along the way. They are truly inspiring. This year, a number of their members have gone to their eternal reward, and they really need

an injection of younger members. Would you consider joining them – I can assure you that it will be a great adventure for you.

Children's Liturgy – This group is mostly composed of school parents who are anxious for their children (for all our children) to gain a better understanding of the Mass, of scripture, of their place in the church. Sunday after Sunday they prepare special celebrations of the word, so that the children hear the day's message from a more simple perspective. Simple activities reinforce what the word is telling the children. A great deal of time and planning goes into this ministry, but the results are so worthwhile.

Counters/collectors - Most of us would think very little about the money side of the parish. You would be surprised to know just how many people are involved in these important tasks for the running of the parish. We rely on the honesty, integrity and expertise of many people to take up the collections, count them, recount them, bank, record, analyze and acknowledge payments.

East Timor Support Group - During the early part of this reporting period, this group was particularly busy raising money for projects for our partnered parish in East Timor. They were well supported by parishioners, and the school community has held special fund raising events to offer support to the school at Weberek. They are expecting to begin more fund raising in the near future.

Food at the Barn - This group, in conjunction with the churches of Box Hill, continues to offer a very important service to people in need in the community. Approx every 10 weeks, they cook a hot meal for about 50 people at the Box Hill Baptist Hall. As well as 'doing the job', I understand they have a great time together during the preparation.

Hospitality - This is a huge area, and one in which we intend to make more effort in the coming year. It involves many things – welcoming at Masses, preparing tea/coffee for morning teas after Mass and on special occasions, assisting with funerals if required. I see that welcoming is a hallmark of a vital parish, and hope that many more people will make themselves available to be part of this important ministry.

'Godstart' - This is a program which endeavours to forge a link between a child's Baptism and the time when he/she starts school. Each year, on their birthday, one of our visitors calls into their home with a birthday card, prayer booklet, or a set of 'How to teach children about God' brochures to keep families informed of all that is going on within the parish. It is proving to be an important connection for young families who at this stage don't manage to attend Mass regularly – a great outreach program.

Marriage preparation - It's sad that currently we are down to only 2 couples who are available to present the FOCCUS program to engaged couples. From that point of view we are fortunate that we have had so few weddings here this year. It is an invaluable part of a couple's preparation for marriage – spending time discussing the hopes and dreams, concerns and possibilities of married life with people who had the experience of marriage. It has been part of this parish's tradition to offer this service locally, and I hope that more couples would consider this ministry to our young people – the future of our church.

Ministry to the sick - How important it is for the sick and elderly to feel included in community life here. We are blessed in having generous, warm, caring people to visit the homes and nursing homes in our area, taking communion, reassuring people of God's love, letting them know what's happening here, helping them feel at least somewhat involved in the parish. This is a vital ministry, one which I see as spreading the Good News in a gentle and compassionate way.

Playgroup - This group has had an exciting change during 2008, with its move to the classrooms at St Clare's. They are very fortunate to be able to leave all their equipment out rather than have to pack up and put away each week, and it has eased the load on the parents enormously. The classrooms are beginning to take on their own new character, with walls and windows being decorated, and the outside playground being upgraded. A visit to Playgroup is a joyful though rowdy experience. Numbers are growing quickly, and there is a wonderful sense of fun and companionship that is almost tangible. **RCIA** has already been mentioned above. Most sincere thanks to all who have helped this to run so smoothly. And - an urgent plea to other parishioners to consider involvement in the coming year. This is the way we fulfil our mission to go out to the world and spread the gospel. We need many more people to be involved.

Sacramental program - We are blessed with 5 catechists who prepare the children not attending Catholic schools for the Sacraments. The program is now (ideally) over 3 years, with children attending in Grade 2 for Bible stories and simple prayers, Grade 3 for First Reconciliation and Grade 4 for First Communion during the 2nd and 3rd terms each year. There are also separate classes in preparation for Confirmation. St Clare's classrooms have proved ideal for teaching, and we have about 15 children in the Grade 2 – 4 program, and 15 in the Confirmation classes. This is a demanding role, magnificently filled by our dedicated and untiring catechists.

Sacristy - At both churches we have amazing people who set up for Masses daily, arrange flowers, wash, clean and repair linen and vestments, serve on the altar and make themselves available for whatever the priest requires on the day. At St Clare's a faithful group continues to clean the church too – they are remarkably diligent, thorough and faithful. They all have the friars' deep gratitude.

Lenten study - This year we were delighted to have so many people meet together to discuss the coming Sunday's readings during their Lent preparation. There were groups at both parishes, at Bedford Heights, and in private homes. I am certain that this involvement assisted all those who took part to celebrate Easter with new understanding and perception.

Ministry - So many people assist with the liturgy by their involvement with ministry of the Word, of Communion and of Music. We have had training sessions during the year, and the Advent Gift sheets encouraged quite a few new people to volunteer. There are excellent readers at both churches, and Ministers of Communion are faithful, thoughtful and reverent in their service. Our organists and singers are very faithful too, and provide great support to the liturgy, rising to the occasion when anything extra is required. Music ministry will be something that the parish will look at carefully this year. We would love to hear from musicians, singers, anyone with the ability to implement positive change in this area.

Liz Clark, Pastoral Associate