

## *Parish Report - Fr Wayne Bendotti.*

---

Good evening everyone.

- *Normally* this annual Parish Report would include a detailed run-down of the various Parish happenings and events during the past year.
- *Normally* I would summarise these events under headings such as: “*Prayer, Liturgy and Worship*” ... “*Parish Social and Community Life*” ... “*Outreach and Service Activities*” ... “*School Ministry*” ... “*Sacrament Preparation and Celebration*” ... and so forth.
- *Normally* there would be a long list of highlights ... and perhaps some of the challenges.

But as we all very well know ... this past year has been anything *but* normal!

Along with every other community, the pandemic was the cause of massive disruption for our Parish Community too!

- Two months with no Masses or gatherings at all.
- The complete cancellation of all Holy Week and Easter services – the annual celebration of the heart of our Christian life.
- An additional month with only very small socially distant groups for weekend Mass.

The cessation of all Church services during the early months of the pandemic meant the loss of Mass collections – which are our sole source of Parish income. Thankfully, this meant that the Parish qualified for the JobKeeper allowance, which covered Fr Wayne’s stipend for 6 months and helped the parish remain financially viable.

They say that “*necessity is the mother of all invention*” ... and this certainly proved to be the case for the Church in general, and Parish life in particular. One big positive to come from the pandemic disruption was the advent of *online live-streamed Masses*. These helped maintain a sense of connection and provided spiritual nourishment – albeit without the possibility of receiving Holy Communion – for many people during the time when we could not physically gather as Church. While many benefits flowed from this, the fact that many of our regular Mass-goers are elderly and “*non-tech-savvy*” meant that these benefits were not available to all.

When gathering for Weekend Mass was eventually able to re-commence, many things which previously served as points of engagement with our children were sadly unable to recommence. These included things such as Altar Serving; the simple act of handing a hymn book to parishioners on arrival at Mass; the Sunday celebration of Children’s Liturgy of the Word; being able to take up the Collection and present the Bread and Wine for the Eucharist; and especially our monthly Parish Morning Teas with Fr Wayne’s famous juice boxes!

While we were able to prepare for and celebrate first Reconciliation, first Holy Communion and Confirmation (... *albeit with revised timelines!*), the pandemic meant that we had to suspend things like our regular “Family Masses and Morning Teas”; School Class Masses and Prayer Services; and Altar Server training and our end-of-year Altar Server thank-you function.

Many of these activities had previously been important points of connection and of fostering a sense of ownership and belonging among our younger people and families. Their suspension – and the resulting diminished sense of participation and belonging – may partly explain the noticeably fewer number of younger people and families among those who have returned to weekend Mass.

All of this has served to shine a light on what I guess has clearly been “*the elephant in the room*” for many years – namely the gradual diminishment of participation in parish life and the increasing average age of the smaller numbers who do participate.

To state the obvious: Church is *people*. Parishes are *people*. Without the participation of many people – especially those willing to take on active roles and responsibilities – there is simply no Parish.

The pandemic has only magnified what has been our reality for many years – namely that we struggle to find people willing to be involved in the various basic requirements for an active and functioning Parish:

- The Parish Pastoral Council;
- The Parish Finance, Maintenance and Planning Committee;
- The planning, preparation and celebration of Parish Liturgy and Worship;
- Parish Outreach and Service activities;
- Parish Social Life; and so on.

Many of these important roles and functions currently do not exist at all, with the result that everything just lands on the Parish Priest’s desk and simply piles up there.

If this obvious trend of recent years – now exacerbated by the pandemic – continues, then it is difficult to see how we will be able to continue as a functioning parish very far into the future.

Like every community organisation, our continued existence depends on there being people willing to take on the various essential roles and responsibilities. Most of our “*weekend regulars*” have done this for many years in the past and are now elderly.

I say this not to shock people ... or point the finger ... or make anyone feel bad. I say this simply to state our present reality honestly and for what it is ... and to invite us all to prayerfully reflect on how we might find new and creative ways to move forward.

As I mentioned previously, *Parishes are people*. *Our Parish is us*. There is no magic wand we can wave, nor any back-up cavalry waiting to ride in with a rescue plan if and when things fall apart.

Our world and our society are changing rapidly and at a seemingly accelerating rate. By contrast, the Church seems to grow and change very slowly. While this is by no means a bad thing, it does mean that the Church very often appears to be more and more “out of touch” with modern society.

What we need to do as a local Parish Community to help counter this trend and where we begin? ... I honestly don’t know.

In conclusion, while uncertainty and change *will* undoubtedly continue into the future, what I **DO** know is that what *has not* changed and *will not* change is the one, central and most crucial fact: God is still God ... God is still in control ... and God knows what God is doing!

Our future *will* look very different to our past ... just as society’s “new normal” will be different from our “old normal”. Exactly what it will look like, I have no idea ... but I trust and believe that God does!

I therefore sincerely hope and pray that we can all work together as a united community – Parish and School together – as we move into that future ... and as we continue to discern how together we can best be the *Church* – God’s living, praying, serving, celebrating, outreaching and caring presence ... here in our local community.

May God’s love, peace and blessing be with us all.

**Fr Wayne.**