

# Annual Report 2002

*"All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ"*

## *Parish Priest's Report*

In wondering where to begin this annual report, I determined to do two slightly unusual things.

First, I decided to re-issue last year's report. Sometimes we fool ourselves that having said a thing once it has been heard. I know I've often worked on this principle in preaching. Having made a particular point last time, I must do something original this time. Not so. For one thing, the composition of parish communities changes all the time. There is no guarantee that half of us heard what was said last time, because half of us were not here then. And the other half, who were here, picked up this bit and that, but not necessarily the whole vision. Because nothing is static, we have to keep memory alive, and our need for reminding ourselves of unchanging truths is endless. It is also a simple but often overlooked fact, that we hear things when we are ready to hear them and not before. I said some things last year that I need to hear again, and if I need to hear them more than once, chances are so do you! Copies of the 2001 report are lying around in the hope that they continue to provide a useful map, showing the route we have taken and pointing the way ahead.

Secondly, I decided to place at the centre of this year's report a document I recently produced for the Dreaming Group. When we met last year, we really had no expectation of building anything but ourselves. We are here to grow a church, a Christian community. We are doing this, slowly but surely. Little by little we are gathering more people, and little by little we are deepening our faith. Trusting in the generosity of God, we are quietly confident. We meet on an excellent site, right in the heart of the city which is rapidly becoming the centre of life in the northern corridor of Perth. This time last year, we had consigned to the filing cabinet early pipe dreams about building an imposing structure, or indeed a church of any kind. We had made the temporary worship space work for us, and we were content to wait and see. All we knew for sure was that any future plans would need to be more modest than the original vision, but there was no pressure and we were in no hurry. This stance was honest and realistic, and remains valid a year later. We should not be worried about creating more space until we are bursting at the seams. The great church of the ecumenical religious community at Taizé in Burgundy is a contemporary parable. The right thing to do is knock down a wall when you can't fit everyone in, pitching a tent alongside to accommodate the overflow.

So, what started us dreaming? It was a bright idea, an innocent suggestion, devoid of any concern for empire-building. Out of left field came the idea of a straw bale building in an organic setting – something simple, elegant, environmentally friendly. It was proposed not just as a way of cutting building costs, but as a possible means of connecting with broad community concerns for a more sustainable way of life, the desire to explore more genuinely

human patterns of society in the global jungle. And it *is* a jungle out there. Calling the world of the twenty first century a global village is too cute by half. Ruthlessness may seem to be triumphant, but it is not the last word. It is not the word made flesh at Bethlehem. Christian proclamation has much in common with the resurgent spiritual awareness of many who see through the lies of the market economy. As little as ten years ago, foundational Christian concepts like spirituality, reconciliation and redemption were still suspect in a supposedly rational scientific world, but the watertight compartments into which life was divided are leaking badly now. Science and religion are no longer enemies. They simply ask different questions. Science asks *How?* and *What?* Religion asks *Why?* Hitherto well-policed frontiers are being crossed in a new quest for wholeness, the wholeness we have traditionally called holiness. In this exciting exploration we have language and experience which suddenly makes sense again – not just to those outside the church, but to ourselves as well who are in need of deeper conversion of heart. Connectedness, balance, respect, mutuality, inter-dependence – these are all key concepts in catholic tradition, although they have often fallen into disuse or even been trampled underfoot. We know something after all about living humanly, for we follow the only true human being, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. We have much to learn and much to share in the world now emerging, if only we will be patient enough and gentle enough. September Eleventh 2001 faced us with the fragility of all our proud constructions, and threw us back into one another's arms. There is no place in the modern world for competing spiritualities. Religion is either peace-maker or peace-breaker, and the choice is our own. Responsibility lies squarely with us. Asking what God is up to in the events of human history, even in the most shocking, should be second-nature to us, like joining hands with sisters and brothers of faith to work with God rather than against God.

This is the context in which our dreaming takes place, the dream of building here a holy place or "thin" place, a place of transcendence which marries the temporal and the timeless. Not that the presence of God can ever be commanded or manipulated, but it can most certainly be *invited*. Apart from this presence, this carefully constructed city of Joondalup can never be a truly human city. We will create a place of welcome, hospitality and sharing, a place for exploration and encounter, where all can be at home and be themselves.

Some of you may know Auguste Rodin's sculpture, *The Cathedral*. Arising in a block of rock, Rodin saw something as soft as stone is hard, as animal as stone is mineral, as sensitive and creative as rock is inert. He saw a pair of hands. In fact, what many people miss is that they are both right hands. In other words, they are the hands of two different and distinct human beings moving towards each other. But not for hearty handshakes, not for back slapping; still less to grapple, grab, filch, smite or slay. "They are the hands of persons approaching each other, gently, caringly, lovingly, albeit with a certain proper shyness, as if both persons are sensitive to the fact that when it comes to drawing nearer to another human being one must be marvellously tender, infinitely patient and have endless respect for the other person's integrity."

Last year, we had a motto, a lens to help us see ourselves and prosecute our mission better: "Strengthening the centre, stretching the edge". This is still an excellent mission statement, but this year we have added to it famous words from the Rule of St Benedict: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ."

I have called my Dreaming Group paper "Pitching the Tent". We are talking about a tent for sheltering people, a house for the church, but not only for the church. If we are to build anything worthwhile it will be a house of prayer for all people, for it is first of all a humble house for the humble Christ. I offer these reflections to you as a way of helping us all dream, encouraging us to see visions of what might be.

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*The calling of the Christian community is to be there with the Gospel as that sphere of association where the mystery is luminous. In art this means the ikon, the cross, the living face, the grace-cup and the broken bread. It does not mean the rivers of calligraphy, speaking a verbal education of mankind. Nor is it the lotus-flower of mysterious union. The Christian takes other religion to a babe in a manger and a man on a cross, to a holy table where bread and wine invite to fellowship in redemption. Our ambition is to have these always present to be the text of that search for expression which lies nearest to the heart of all human living, so that to feel, to suffer and to understand become one and the same thing. Other faiths, to be sure, have their symbolism, and for these our reverence and our study. But, in the Holy Spirit, the Babe, the Cross and the Eucharist are ours, not in vulgar competition, yet articulate and present, and always as an accusation of our own disloyalty.*

These words of Bishop Kenneth Cragg take us to the heart of what we are about in designing and building a house for the church, a tent of meeting for the People of God. This building tells the gospel story of God's love for the world, demonstrating that there is purpose and meaning and mystery at the heart of life which is essential for every human being. In a word, the physical reality of the church building is sacramental, or incarnational, an argument embodied and made manifest. We are creating a sacred space which points to the sanctity of all time and every place.

We Christians believe that there is ultimately no religious frontier between sacred and secular, no division between liturgy and life. The building out to reflect this conviction by making no sharp distinction between the ordinary world and the religious sphere. As Christian life is a journey, the church building nevertheless incorporates three distinct arenas of worship and ministry.

## Gathering Place

The gathering place, or narthex, is the 'common room' of the community of faith. This is the place of welcome and hospitality. The chief purpose of this gathering place is to provide a 'hearth' around which the community can gather, relax and feel at home. It needs to be large enough for people to arrive and leave without disturbing those already inside the worship area. There are excellent kitchen and toilet facilities adjacent to this area. Offices and meeting rooms also lead off the narthex. Perhaps the gathering place could open out on to a courtyard or paved area, as Perth's sub-tropical climate lends itself so naturally to outdoor entertaining.

## Place of Initiation

The place of Christian initiation forms stage two of entry into the worship space, naturally linking the gathering place with the eucharistic assembly. The place of initiation, focused on the water of the Font, is not restricted only to the celebration of baptism. It is used also for renewal of baptismal vows, confirmation, admission to the catechumenate, and occasionally for penitential rites. The Font is a fixed feature which people need to pass on entering and leaving. It is, however, the water, not the container, that is symbolic. This 'living' water, which needs to be *seen* and *touched* and *heard*, is extravagantly generous. It needs to provide for baptism by pouring water and baptism by immersion, though not necessarily for baptism by submersion. This area is spacious enough for the congregation to gather naturally around the Font. The Font could be so designed that the coffin may be placed over it at a funeral.

### Place of the Word

The place of the Word is the main liturgical arena where the living Lord in the word of God encounters the baptized community as it prepares for the breaking of bread and for engagement with the world. The central feature here is the Lectern, or table of the word. From the Lectern the scriptures are read aloud and proclaimed in the sermon. The Lectern could face 'east' with chairs arranged on either side facing inwards so that the people look to the Lectern, to the reader and preacher, and to each other. The primary presence of Christ is the gathered church, the Christian community itself. Made in the divine image, the human Body of Christ needs to experience itself in all its diversity. An 'eastern' facing Lectern gets away once and for all from a line-up of important people doing important things on a 'stage' up front, entertaining an 'audience' seated before them. The Lectern is designed not just for reading and proclamation, but also to display the open book of the gospels at all times. There are candles here to mark the presence of Christ, the Word of God and Light of the world. Perhaps there is also an icon of Christ the Teacher. The Lectern stands on the same floor level as the seating to emphasise the equal accessibility of the whole priestly community to the sacred text.

### Place of Presiding

The chair of the bishop or priest, although distinguishable as the place for presiding or orchestrating the liturgical drama, is best located alongside the seats of the rest of the assembly. In this way we make clear that the presider *emerges from within the assembly* as one of the *laos* authorised to act in a representative fashion by Christ and the church. This essential ministry of leadership and co-ordination, being a shared offering, necessitates seating for other ministers close by the priest. If the curved rows of chairs on either side of the Lectern are broken into four distinct blocks, priest and other ministers can sit in the cross-section between the gathered people. Opposite them, also among the people, musicians are suitably located.

### Place of the Table

The altar, plainly a table of four equal sides, stands in a spacious area of its own to which the people move after meditating on the scriptures. Apart from some benches along the walls for the elderly and infirm, there is no seating in this area because the people stand to join the priest in offering the eucharistic prayer and to share the bread and cup. Four equal sides

declare that everyone has a place at table, and all have equal access. There are no places of honour, no back or front, and the table is not a counter across which the assembly is served a meal by the priestly caste. The altar-table stands on the floor, not on a platform, in the middle of the space. The design of the altar endows it with sufficient strength, beauty and significance to stand in its own right, unadorned by cloths or frontals, candles, cross or flowers. Provided that the design is of sufficient strength and dignity, the altar stands completely bare when not in use, the 'empty stage' of the liturgical arena awaiting the arrival of the people of God, the players in the liturgical drama. The only necessary adornment is the white tablecloth when the altar is laid before the gifts for the sacred meal are presented. Candles may stand to one side, possibly with the processional cross, or these can be carried from the Lectern to the Altar as part of the liturgical pilgrimage.

### Place for Personal Prayer

Ideally, there is an intimate place for individual and small group prayer apart from the place of corporate liturgical prayer. This is very simply furnished, perhaps with icons and lamps and the provision of votive candles, but with no altar-table. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved here for communion of the sick and as a focus for private prayer. The floor is carpeted - unlike the rest of the building - so that people can sit or kneel comfortably. Apart from benches lining the walls, there is no seating.

### Windows & Light

The place of corporate liturgical worship has no picture windows to provide views of the bush setting, and yet is not inward looking. Its focus on Font, Lectern and Altar leads us deeper and deeper into the mystery where all reality is knit together in one fabric. Glimpses of garden and bushland - and sufficient natural light, without being too bright - can be provided by clear glass floor-to-ceiling lancet windows, angled perhaps so as to preclude direct views. Another alternative would be small port-hole like openings in the thick walls giving tiny glimpses of the garden, with a clerestory above flooding the building with daylight.

David Graeme Wood

## *Churchwardens Report*

It is pleasing to report that the last year at Grace Church has been one of relative stability and growth. We have not had to contend with any major changes within our Joondalup Christian community. Our gradual growth over the past year is due in no small way to all of us. A big thank you to Father David for challenging our perceptions of how we worship and for deepening our appreciation of the Liturgy. A reflection of this appreciation can be seen in the increasing numbers of people who attended services during Christmas, Passion Week and Easter, and the many baptisms. During the year, Tuesday worship was re-introduced and a small but dedicated band gather weekly at 12.45pm for Eucharist, quiet prayer and then lunch.

Thanks are due to our Priest Associate Diane Heath who stepped into the breach and did a great job when David was away. Diane has also found time in her busy schedule to be our church organist when required. Thanks also to members of Parish Council for the time and effort they have put into their monthly deliberations over financial, fundraising and other matters in the past 12 months. We would urge you all to consider nominating for the Parish Council, if not this year then maybe next. Although they are somewhat thin on the ground, the Pastoral Assistants have done a very good job particularly when you consider that there are now only four PAs as Marjorie Rodgers, one of our stalwarts, has been ill for quite some time. Congratulations to our readers and intercessors, including some new faces. Everyone has done a terrific job and all have made a substantial contribution over the last year.

At Grace Church, we pride ourselves on being a friendly congregation welcoming visitors and new people alike and that is why our welcomers and hospitality people are so important. So thank you to everyone who has been a welcomer and those who have been on the hospitality roster after the church service. We have gained quite a reputation for the quality of our morning teas! Thanks also to the Synod representatives who have represented Grace Church at the Diocesan Synod for the past three years. We are indebted to our team of cleaners for doing the rather unglamorous but very necessary work of cleaning the church on a Saturday morning. On the music front this year, we have fortunately had the musical talents of organists Chris and Diane. Having live music has made a huge difference.

This year we have been involved in several fundraising and social activities. We had a couple of fundraising dinners, the first with the Dean of St George's Cathedral, John Shepherd, as guest speaker and the second, quite recently, with Rabbi Josh Aaronson. Both events went very well. Special thanks to those who provided food and helped with the dishes afterwards. Other fundraising activities have included the cake stall and Devonshire Teas held at the church during the Joondalup Festival. This not only raised money but helped raise our profile in the community. Thank you to all who participated. This event for us has been bigger and better each year and from each we learn valuable lessons for the next. There was also a lolly drive and a very successful 'trash and treasure' that raised money and got rid of many unwanted items. We also had an 'austerity' night where we got together at church and ate fish and chips. Other activities have included busy bees.

A reflection of our growth has been the advent of a new social group, the Women's Group which meets for an informal dinner and chat once a month. We again have a Children's Ministry held upstairs in Bishop Brian's offices. Thank you to the Bishop for the space and to those who have volunteered to make this possible.

Also during the year, members of our congregation have supported various charitable causes including rattling tins outside the Joondalup banks for the Parkerville appeal and contributing food for more than 20 Christmas hampers for Anglicare. This is on top of the weekly contributions the congregation makes to the Anglicare basket.