

Annual Report 2003

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

Parish Priest's Report

Given the continuing ecclesiastical storm in a tea cup initiated by John Shepherd's Easter article in *The West Australian*, it must be significant that there has not been a ripple of disquiet here at Grace Church Joondalup. Only one person has raised the matter directly with me. She was away at Easter, and the priest of the church where she worshipped was frothing at the mouth in bewilderment and anger. The Dean of Perth, evidently, was rapidly dismantling the faith once delivered to the saints, confusing the simple faithful, and needed to be ejected from his ministry at Saint George's Cathedral, or at least publicly disciplined by the Archbishop of Perth. Along the way, I have seen a number of quite nasty e-mails sent to the Archbishop, to the Dean himself, and to various bishops around the country. When we go into battle, it seems that Christian love is thrown to the winds and any weapon will do. This, of course, rather lets the cat out of the bag, so that the opposition in their white-hot anger reveal more about themselves than they realise. It is all a bit mad and sad, enough to make the angels weep. Personal attacks of this kind, nevertheless, do real damage, so I have assured the Dean of our love and prayer at a really hurtful time in his life. I am glad John and Joy have now embarked on their much deserved long service leave, and trust that their time away will be restful, refreshing and healing. May they return to us with fresh energy for the tasks that lie ahead. It should perhaps be pointed out that, in the end, the messages pouring into the diocesan and cathedral offices were about 50-50 in terms of support and disagreement. Sadly, it was mostly the negative messages that became public.

Why were no feathers ruffled here? Not, I suggest, because we are indifferent to the issues raised or complacent about the need to articulate our faith in the contemporary world. I like to think our faith is sufficiently secure to withstand such sudden storms, that we are relaxed about who we are and what we stand for, because we trust ourselves to the Lord of life and death. I like to think also that we are well prepared to face rigorous intellectual debate because we actually live in the real world and are not operating out of Sunday school faith. Many Christians, it seems, live in ghettos of the like-minded where no one ever questions or challenges them. Whenever they venture out, they are programmed to respond to such challenges as do arise with robotic apologetics, wheeling out their packaged certainties. In contrast to this, week by week we explore the faith together without fear or favour, and this faith is strong enough to live in a world of many faiths and none. Truth is tough enough to survive all the lies, and we are not silly enough to imagine that the Creator needs any protecting by us. In a word, we enjoy living in multi-cultural Australia, we actively welcome God's rich diversity, and feel at home exercising Christ's ministry and mission in the global village. Being unafraid in this way makes all the difference in the world. Yes, of course, we have our moments of fear and bewilderment. We wouldn't be human without them, and they come to us all. Sometimes, we are naturally anxious about our future, especially in a church where hard-liners are the only ones doing reasonably well at the

moment. On the whole, however, we believe that we are right not to build higher walls between church and world, not to mark more clearly the boundaries between those within the household of faith and those who remain outside. We want to keep deepening the centre while stretching the edge, so that we know where our treasure is but can still welcome the gifts of insight and knowledge and love that come to us from the most unlikely sources. Our motto this year is taken from the Rule of Saint Benedict: "All guests who presents themselves are to be welcomed as Christ." This stance is deliberately generous, sometimes more generous than we actually feel, for in our better moments we know ourselves lavishly blessed by One who comes to us disguised, a stranger seeking welcome and hospitality. The practice of the presence of God involves overcoming our natural fear of difference, so that we do not deny ourselves such wealth and health.

It seems to me that as we go forward in our adventure together, this distinctive and consciously adopted trait of our eucharistic community here at Grace Church Joondalup becomes more and more significant. The pressure is on to be and to do only what appears to be successful. Consequently, management techniques are all the rage, and, ironically, the church usually takes up those the business world is already discarding! We must resist this push, maintain our integrity and do better. Short term solutions will not save the day. Smart marketing and slick (and dishonest) sales skills make us feel better momentarily, but in the end they will fail. Fear is always the real enemy of faith, and anxiety inevitably produces bad theology.

The fault lines in the churches are not what they once were. Indeed, the fault lines between faiths are not where they used to be found. Today they run in different directions, so that our allies now are people we used to regard as enemies. Once, you could tell the story of Christianity in Australia in a sentence: Anglicans made the laws, Presbyterians made the money, Methodists did the work, and Catholics made the jokes. Now it is much harder to read history along denominational lines. The reformation is over. For the most part, old doctrinal battles are dead and gone. It would be silly to deny that these subcultures of denominationalism have life in them yet, even fresh life in some isolated pockets. Nor are we entering an era of passionless, homogenised Christianity, free of tensions, where all is bland and smooth as yoghurt. While some stir up old enmities, new lines of demarcation are appearing all the while. Chief among these is the line that separates fundamentalists and pluralists. This fault line runs through all denominations, identifying and grouping Christians of different churches. It also runs wider, identifying and grouping people of disparate faiths. While fundamentalists see their faith as something cut, dried and prepackaged, pluralists are more open to the promptings of experience. Pluralists expect to spend more time in the kitchen. Whether you are fundamentalist or pluralist, not whether you are Anglican or Orthodox or Muslim or Buddhist, decides where you stand on a range of questions - from women's ordination, authority, spirituality, and the inspiration of scripture, to homosexuality, civil dissent, international aid, refugees, Aboriginal rights, or even arts funding.

The fundamentalist-pluralist axis is the new dividing line between us. Are we basically comfortable with this reality or uneasy? Is history a spaceship or a cage? Do we feel imprisoned or are we being set free? Is the future frightening, or is the future God's future? As I see it, these are the basic questions currently facing us. How we answer them

determines pretty much everything else. I am encouraged by the fact that we have not been panicky about our faith in recent weeks, that we show no signs of running away from the hard questions or withdrawing into our security blankets. Together, hand in hand, we can face anything, and as we raise our eyes to look around without fear we see Jesus himself walking across the desert to meet us.

David Graeme Wood

Churchwardens' Report

The past year at Grace Church has been a busy one for our Christian community in Joondalup. Although a relatively small congregation, we have achieved much reflecting the participation of our community in the events of the year. We thank Father David for, as always, challenging our perceptions about 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 call for baptisms.

Tuesday worship has now been available to us for two years with a weekly service at 12.45pm for Eucharist and quiet prayer followed by lunch. Numbers have been slowly increasing but it would be good to see even more in attendance.

Our new Saturday afternoon meditation group has attracted a small number of regular participants. More are always welcome.

Thanks are also due to our associate priests Mother Jeni Goring, Mother Diane Heath and Mother Robin Tapper, who have all done a great job when David has been away. Mother Diane has also shown her versatility by taking a regular turn as organist.

A vote of thanks goes to our parish councillors for their efforts in the past year, managing our finances and the many other issues that arise. If you would like to participate please consider nominating for the Parish Council.

Our pastoral assistants have, as usual, done an excellent job. This year the numbers have been boosted by the appointment of Jan Hill and Allan Griffiths to the pastoral ministry team. Our PAs have also looked the part, wearing the alb during the service thanks to seamstress Pam Arthur.

Our readers and intercessors have made an important contribution to our services throughout the year and are to be congratulated on doing a difficult job very well.

At Grace Church we pride ourselves on our friendliness, and the welcome and hospitality we offer to worshipers before and after our service is a reflection of that friendliness. Credit is due to the members of our congregation who do our welcoming each week and to those who provide our wonderful hospitality to visitors and friends throughout the year.

Thanks are also due to the two Synod representatives, Gail Poynter and Michael Price, who have represented Grace Church for the last three years.

We are grateful to our team of cleaners for doing a great job of cleaning the church every Saturday morning.

On the music front we are in the fortunate position of having several capable musicians who have played the organ for us this year during services. Our thanks go to Chris Griffiths, Diane Heath and Mary Straiton.

Also this year we have kept ourselves busy with various activities in and around the church, including tidying up the bush block next door and painting the inside of the church, both of which we accomplished very well thanks to our band of volunteers.

This year we have done several fundraising activities to boost parish funds. This included a stall at the Joondalup Festival, which sold books, plants and crafts as well as the usual cakes and refreshments. Hopefully next year, we will be better located to take full advantage of the large number of festival visitors.

Again we sold Cadburys chocolate and this year, for the first time, baskets of Easter eggs assembled by Pam Arthur. We also sold books of wonderful poetry written by Mary Michael.

Thanks to Margaret Price for getting the women's group started. It has become a popular meeting point for dinner once a month. Numbers have grown steadily over the last 12 months and, as well as a social outlet, it has helped new members of our congregation get to know the regulars.

Our children's ministry held upstairs is going well and thanks must go to Mary Straiton for organising the ministry and all the other people involved. Unfortunately we lack children. Yet again we thank Bishop Brian Farran for his generosity in allowing us to use his office to conduct our children's worship.

To bring us into the electronic world of computing our parish web site is being developed thanks to the efforts of Chris Legg and Mary Straiton.

At Christmas our congregation contributed food for more than 20 Christmas hampers for Anglicare. This is on top of the weekly contributions the congregation makes to our Anglicare basket.

We are still dreaming about the future and about building a church on the bush block next door using the 'straw bale' method. Last year there were further meetings of our 'Dreaming Group,' drawing on local expertise. These meetings will continue this year as the 'dreaming' process continues and develops.

During the year, we lost several valued members of our congregation. Stalwart Marjorie Rodgers went out with a bang rather than a whimper. We wish Marj well in her new home

down in the wilds of Denmark. We also said goodbye to Maggie Molloy and her son Stuart. We wish them well in darkest Orelia.

We would like to close by thanking you for your contribution over the year and most of all for your friendship and support.

JACQUIE JOSEPH-BOWEN

MICHAEL PRICE