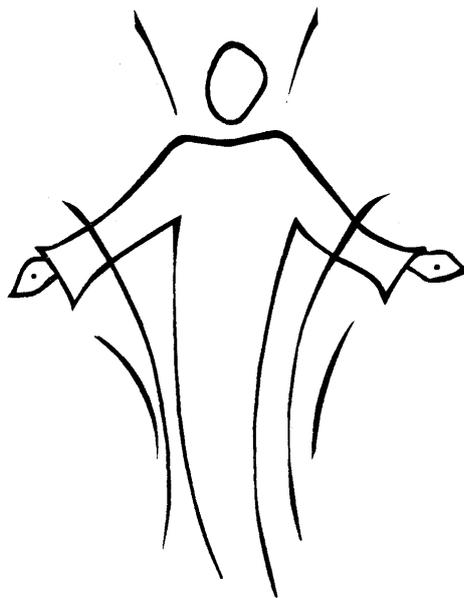


*St Thomas More's
Parish Community*

**Parish Pastoral Council
Report**



2018

Introduction

I am pleased to present to you and endorse the 2018 Annual Report for St Thomas More's Parish.

The report serves as a reminder of the vibrant life of our parish community, as it reminds us of the many things happening in the parish and also of the people who in various ways contribute to those happenings. As well as highlighting the connections within the community, it is a witness to our connections with the wider Church and the wider community generally.

This is the fourth Annual Report which I have now presented to the parish. Each year has been different from the one before it and I am still learning so much about how best to fulfill this role which you have entrusted to me. I continue to benefit greatly from your ongoing trust and support in undertaking the both challenging and fulfilling ministry of Parish Leader, ably aided by the support, wisdom and faith of the Parish Pastoral Council.

In gathering together each month the Council members not only provide leadership and direction to the Parish, but support me in this role as well as nurturing each other spiritually through journeying in faith and sharing the joys, insights and challenges of living out our Catholic faith in our busy and complex world.

I again thank each member of the Council for their tremendous energy and commitment. I acknowledge the special contribution of Suellen Sedl, Peter McDonald and Michael Keating who have recently finished their tenure on the Council. I welcome Terry Carter, Cathy Bathurst and Sue Kruger who have generously and willingly joined as the new members of the Council for the year ahead. I also again thank Peter McDonald who agreed to stay on the Council for an extra year, so that we could manage better our annual turnover of Council members. There is great energy in the Council for the year ahead.

This year also we saw a change of Priest Director. I especially acknowledge the contribution of Fr Peter Dorfield in that role, particularly the calm wisdom that he brought to our deliberations as a Parish Pastoral Council. I warmly welcome Fr Michael O'Brien to the role and thank him for the positive energy and the strong faith which he brings to us.

Thanks to each of you for participating in, and contributing to, the life of the community. Each of us is precious in the sight of our God and each of us has our unique calling to work for the coming of God's reign in our world. Thanks for the ways in which each of you responds to this calling.

As we go to print with this year's report, we are nearing the end of the Year of Youth and the Pope and Bishops are meeting in Rome in a synod to reflect on how we reach out to and include youth more effectively in the life of the Church. In his opening homily, Pope Francis said, "Hope challenges us, moves us and shatters that conformism which says, 'it's always been done like this.'"

May each of you continue to be blessed in the loving kindness of our God and may hope move us to an exciting future.

Michael Bermingham
Parish Leader
9 October 2018

Leadership

With the change of committee members in 2017 we farewelled Michael and Gabrielle Murray, Katie Wright and Mark Betts. Peter McDonald (Hospitality) agreed to continue for an additional year. We welcomed Kathryn Boulus (Education), Susie Pfeiffer (Communication) and John Kennedy (Spirituality) who joined Michael Keating (Outreach), Pat McNamee (Faith Education), Warwick Dingle (Administration) and Suellen Sedl (Worship).

Parish planning days were held in October and February where a small cross section of the parish community came together. These days were facilitated by Sr Margaret Endicott and it was an opportunity to listen and collaboratively work together for the wider parish community to review and renew our vision and direction for the next five years.

We have with some sadness farewelled this year Arthur and Joan Bateman who moved closer to family in their golden years and thank them for their contribution to our parish community over many years and acknowledge the many years of experience Arthur shared within the music ministry.

Thank you to Fr Peter Dorfield for his service to our community as Priest Administrator. Peter stepped down to focus on some health concerns.

We also said good bye to the Sisters of St Joseph after 57 years of service to our parish community. Sr Leonie and Sr Marion will be missed as will the Sisters presence within the community.

Fr Michael O'Brien was welcomed to our parish as the Priest Administrator and we look forward to him leading us in growing our faith.

A Diocesan Inservice on Safeguarding our Children and Vulnerable adults in our community was well attended by Parish members. Maree Keating has kept the council informed of Safeguarding updates and Peter Simpson Toowoomba Catholic Schools Manager: Professional Standards provided further insight for the committee. Safeguarding remains a standing item at our meetings. The Safeguarding committee continue to review and progress the work in line with Diocesan requirements and office administration hours have increased to assist with meeting the obligations.

Our Parish Leader, Michael Bermingham has in the main led formation at our monthly meetings to enrich our understanding of our Catholic faith.

The Parish Pastoral Council continues to review and update policies to ensure currency and relevance.

With the recent release of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan we are ensuring our parish vision and direction align with this.

A review committee has been formed to lead the process of the performance appraisal for our Parish Leader who completes his 3-year contract in March 2019. Input from parishioners in the form of a questionnaire will assist with this process.

I have found the past year challenging and rewarding and feel privileged to have been a part of the parish pastoral council and thank all members for their contributions to their respective ministries.

Thank you St Thomas More's.

Julie Hintz

Communication

The last year I was part of St Thomas More's Parish Council and my chosen ministry was Communication. My intention to choose this ministry was that I would act as a communicator between the Parish Council and parishioners. I have taken over from Warwick Dingle and received a lot of support.

Usually an electronic copy of the Parish Bulletin is emailed to parishioners who have given permission to use their email address through Michael Bermingham and the parish office. Page 3 of the bulletin is written/prepared by Michael Bermingham and informs and/or serves as a point of faith education or reflection for Parishioners. The Parish Bulletin is also published on the parish website and the parish Facebook page.

The main role as communication minister is to organise the Parish Council: provide agendas which are facilitated prior to the Parish Council meeting, take minutes and provide them electronically to all Parish Council members. Electronic copies are filed and can be easily passed on to the next council.

A generous parishioner sends cards of congratulation to those who have had children baptised each month in the parish and cards of condolence to the families of those whose funerals have been conducted at St Thomas More's. These details are sent to the communications minister, noted in the agenda and minutes and mentioned at each Parish Pastoral Council meeting.

Another parishioner has taken on the role to provide regular articles to be published in the Horizons magazine.

Prior to certain events, members of the Pastoral Parish Council have spoken at the end of mass to provide information to members of the Parish Community.

Following up on the previous minister Warwick Dingle, there is a parish council email address, a new website which includes the parish newsletter, and, thanks to the effort of Michael Bermingham and Peter Albion, we are on Facebook and up to date.

I thank everyone for their support and patience. The job could not be done without the help of so many!

God bless you all and it was a pleasure to serve in that ministry.

Susi Pfeiffer

Spirituality

The Spirituality Ministry at St Thomas More's strives to provide the Faith Community with a hands-on pathway to live the call of our baptism. Ensuring open lines of communication between parishioners, parish groups and members of the parish pastoral council is an embedded principle of the Spirituality Ministry.

Parish Groups

Social Justice Group: meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month. The aim is to become aware of the social teachings of the church and to help build awareness of this within the parish community. Action for justice is also undertaken. Some highlights include:

- Initiating the fund raiser to help the Mehari family to purchase a suitable vehicle to transport their daughter, Sarah, who has a sever disability. Parish members have also provided emotional and personal support to the family.
- Keeping issues on the broader agenda particularly through material shared on Page 3 of the Parish Newsletter and communicating relevant information to the Parish.
- Supporting the Advent manger collection which in 2017 raised \$3200 for South West Community Support, an initiative of the Sisters of Charity to help people in rural and remote areas in the South West of the State.
- Inviting a representative from Toowoomba Regional Council to speak to members of the Parish about waste management and recycling, including suggested actions we can take.
- Continuing to review our environmental footprint through, for example, the installation of more low-power, LED lighting in our premises and the initiative of the sewing group to provide reusable shopping bags for sale at \$2 each.

In addition, the Parish has moved, through the Social Justice Committee, towards establishing a sister parish relationship with a parish in Timor Leste. This process, at this point in the year, is still in its infancy.

Emmaus: meets on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month. This is a time of contemplation, prayer and praise and discussion of the Sunday Readings and a shared lunch.

Other Activities of Parish Life

Ecumenism: Parishioners are encouraged to become more informed on ecumenical issues and to participate in initiatives that promote unity with people of other faith traditions.

Lenten Programs: are offered for small group and individual participation.

Other important activities were highlighted on several weekends in the year. Some of these include:

- Migrant and Refugee Sunday
- Child Protection Sunday
- Family Sunday
- The decoration of the church for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday which was celebrated on the second Sunday in July in conjunction with NAIDOC. Special elements were added to the liturgy including the Aboriginal Our Father and a thanksgiving prayer composed by an Aboriginal woman

- Prayer Sessions led by our Parish Leader to reflect on and celebrate the Season of Creation during the month of September 2017.

From a personal perspective, I have enjoyed participating further in Parish life as part of this ministry. I see people from St Thomas More's contributing to our society through their actions and prayers and I believe we make a positive contribution to our society as a faith community.

John Kennedy

Faith Education

The Faith Education Ministry aims to enable children and adults to grow in the knowledge of their Catholic Faith. The key objectives include:

- Offering support to families who are preparing children for the sacraments through Baptism, Penance, Confirmation and First Communion.
- Helping the parish community in the development of the Church's understanding of the Catholic Faith through participation in Adult Faith Education.
- Offering the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) to those who have asked to join the Church, including those who have never baptised and those whose baptism in another faith tradition is recognised by the Church.
- Helping in the development of faith understanding for those in our community with an intellectual disability.

Faith education continues to be offered every Tuesday morning during school terms. The weekly bulletin provides faith education for parishioners. The column on page 1 provides a scholarly reflection on the weekend readings, outlining the present-day application of living out the Word of God. Page 3 provides reflection on the Word and topical material to enhance our faith knowledge. Time is set aside at each monthly meeting of the Pastoral Council for devotion to our own faith formation. The two Strategic Planning Days in October 2017 and February 2018 with Sister Margaret Endicott provided an opportunity to reflect together about our faith and about our mission as disciples of Christ in our parish and beyond.

The Sacramental Programs comprising Baptismal Preparation, Penance, Confirmation and First Communion Preparation were well received. It was most uplifting to witness 29 children receive their First Communion on the weekend of 23 and 24 June 2018. I acknowledge the time, commitment and effort of the parishioners who prepare children and their families for Baptism and school staff who have assisted our Parish Leader in preparing children for the sacraments of Penance, Confirmation and First Communion. Volunteers are always needed to assist in the sacramental program.

Every year, to encourage participation in Parish life, Family Sunday includes invitations to families of children who have participated in the Sacramental Program during the year.

Last September we were blessed to welcome David Seiler into the Parish Community. David, who was baptised Anglican, approached our Parish Leader about becoming a member of the Church. A journey of prayer, reflection and learning culminated in David's reception into the Church. We have also offered an extended baptismal preparation to families who bring older children to be baptised. They are then baptised, confirmed and receive their first holy communion in the one ceremony. Towards the end of 2017 we welcomed the Russell family into the Church community.

Another part of the Faith Education Ministry, which is very important, is responsibility for the SPRED Ministry in our Parish. This is about **Special Religious Development** for people with Intellectual Disabilities in our Parish. It is a program aimed at developing friendships and self-esteem for our friends and relies on a wonderful group of volunteers to support them. Volunteers are always needed to allow for continued growth and participation in this Ministry.

In closing, I would like to thank our Priest Directors, Father Peter Dorfield and Father Michael O'Brien, Father Peter Schultz, Parishioners, fellow Pastoral Councillors and Donna and Jenny, from the Office,

and in particular our Parish Leader, Michael Bermingham, for their support, advice and friendship throughout the year, particularly this year, having so much time away.

To say it is most appreciated is a gross understatement. It is an honour to serve our Community at St Thomas More's!

Pat McNamee

Worship

St Thomas Mores' Parish vision statement acknowledges that the St Thomas Mores Parish, is a welcoming people of faith, lives out God's Mission, embracing love, justice and peace. The Ministry of Worship embraces our Vision and enables our Parish community to be a worshipping community that is liturgically alive. This ministry's objective is to enable parishioners to participate in thoughtful and meaningful liturgical prayer.

The liturgy group pay great attention to each feast and celebration in the church and aim to improve it each year. For example they continue to try to improve the celebration of First Communion and Confirmation in the Parish. This year they have concentrated on the seating of the candidates and their families and have included the whole-family participation as each child received Holy Communion for the first time. This is to stress the importance of family involvement in the spiritual life of each child.

As a way of involving St. Thomas More's school with the life of the Parish the liturgy group have this year instigated a Family Mass once a term. There has been three this year and the third one was even better attended than the first two, so we are hoping there will be a positive outcome in that it will create a habit of family participation at mass.

Smaller, but effective initiatives in the celebration of the mass have had quite an impact.

Firstly, Reading at Mass has been formalised. The readers now process together at the appropriate time, bow to the altar and then proceed to seats at the side of the altar where the second reader sits during the first reading and then the positions are reversed. Both remain seated for the reading/singing of the psalm. (The psalmist also sits there if they are singing from the pulpit). This procedure adds a feeling of formality and reverence to that part of the mass.

Secondly, the Liturgy Group have instigated a little more ceremony with regard to Children's Liturgy. A Missal is now displayed in the sanctuary and the children gather there before the readings. One child volunteers to carry the book to the Liturgy class. The children gather in the foyer and return to the sanctuary after the homily. They return the book, show their work and are invited by the presiding priest to share their thoughts on what they have learnt. This procedure has meant that the children must feel more included and the congregation certainly enjoys the interaction.

As for training in our ministry. We are grateful to Michael who each year meets with all ministries – readers, welcomers, Ministers of the Eucharist, Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist – for brief sessions to train each in the correct procedures expected in each area.

Julie Hintz and Maree Keating gave a very successful presentation on Child Protection which was open to the whole parish as we implement our policies and procedures in this important area.

Members of the Consolation Team, attended a presentation on the conduct of funerals given by John Briffa from the Diocesan Liturgy Office. This meeting was held in our parish meeting rooms and we welcomed members of the Helidon Parish.

Michael and some of the Music ministry attended a Music Workshop which was held in Brisbane under the auspices of Liturgy Brisbane. This was a very worthwhile workshop where the participants experienced new and innovative music provided by dedicated musicians.

Michael attended the Proclaim Conference in Brisbane in July.

It has been a privilege to work with this fantastic group of volunteers. Through their commitment we have good liturgy. I thank Margaret Devine for the eloquent report on the groups' achievements this year. I have truly enjoyed my 3 years on PPC, especially working with the Worship Ministry in this my final year.

Suellen Sedl

Outreach

The Outreach Ministry is made up of the following groups; Care and Concern, Playgroup, St Vincent de Paul & the Consolation Team. These groups are run by devoted volunteers who give a great deal of their time caring and ministering to those in need within St Thomas More's Parish Community and the wider Toowoomba area.

Care and Concern:

St Thomas More's Care & Concern Group serves our community in practical ways in times of need. The Group offers emergency assistance in areas of home-cooked meals, visitation, consolation, transport and minor maintenance.

During the last 12 months the group held 4 committee meetings. One of these meetings including training by Maree Keating on the Parish Safeguarding practices currently being implemented in the diocese and in our parish to protect children and vulnerable adults.

Care and Concerns volunteers have coordinated and assisted with the provision of morning teas after each of the 4 Anointing Masses. Additionally, offering assistance at funerals (e.g. hall set up and serving of food – excluding catering) to members of the funeral party after the ceremony. The team has also ensured that meals have been made available to several families on occasions of illness etc.

New parishioners have been contacted and provided with relevant information about church activities, and some follow up visits or contacts have been made to families who have experienced the death of a loved one.

The team was also actively involved in a lunch that was held for the Parkinson's Society at the parish on the 3rd May this year. The Care and Concern team provided assistance with the setting up, serving at tables and cleaning up afterwards on the day.

Overall, as a community of faith, we are called to be aware of those around us in the community. This awareness of others could include (e.g.) regular attendees at mass not being present for a period of time, someone who is going through a tough time or someone who is socially isolated and could benefit from a visit from a fellow parishioner. We are thankful that we have groups in our parish such as Care and Concern and our local Vincent de Paul conference and the wider parish community who may be able to offer support.

St Vincent De Paul:

The local conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul continues to meet at the Parish Office on Monday nights, as well as undertaking their constant assistance to people in need. Christmas 2017 again saw them very busy, and the office filled with gifts and groceries, as they prepared and distributed hampers to those in need in the Toowoomba community. The parish has promoted various St Vinnies appeals during the year, while efforts have been made by members of the local conference to recruit new members. This is a fantastic ministry that often goes unnoticed as it impacts so positively on the lives of many people.

Support for the Mehari Family:

Members of the Parish community would be well aware of the ongoing challenges facing the Mehari family since the backyard accident in September 2016 that resulted in Meskel and Mehret's youngest

daughter Sara sustaining a severe disability. Since this time, it has been identified that there was a strong need for the family to have access to a modified vehicle that would allow them to take Sara to medical appointments, school, Church and other activities.

Parishes in Toowoomba, Brisbane and the St Vincent de Paul Society came to the family's aid. St Thomas More's initiated an appeal to raise money to buy the vehicle as the Mehari family were well known members of our parish community. In conjunction with parishioners from the Mehari's Brisbane parish at Bracken Ridge, St Vincent de Paul Society of Brisbane Northern Suburbs, the Brisbane Eritrean Community and other donors, just under \$35,000 was raised. The appeal was also well supported by The Catholic Leader. Donations included a single generous donation of \$10,000. As a result of the generosity of others, the family took delivery of a specially modified vehicle in July 2018.

Friends from St Thomas More's Parish Mary and Peter Taylor and Madonna Wills made a trip to Brisbane to be with the Mehari's when the vehicle was delivered. Mary and Peter Taylor deserve particular recognition for the ongoing support they have provided to the Mehari family since Sara's accident and for playing a key part in the initiative that was the vehicle fundraiser.

Playgroup:

The parish playgroup is run by a small group of parents and dedicated volunteers and runs every Friday morning during school terms. It is a combination of structured and free play usually with a theme each week. It also has a dual purpose as an outlet for Mums and Dads to have the opportunity to socialise and offer assistance and companionship.

Currently there are 66 families on the Playgroup email list, with regular attendance averaging 25 to 30 families over the course of the year. The current leader Jenny Bartkus works diligently to promote an active link between playgroup and school as many of the children go onto St Thomas More's primary school. Ongoing assistance to help set up and cleaning up after Playgroup is always welcomed.

Since last year, the Tierney's have made and erected signs promoting the contact details for the Playgroup on the Hall walls facing Ramsay Street and the main entrance (via the Church car park entrance).

Consolation:

The Consolation Team involves a small group of volunteers who assist with Funeral preparation, the Funeral Mass or Service, and any necessary follow-up. The team has held 4 committee meetings during the last 12 months. At these meetings discussions have been held relevant to the team's understanding of death and funeral proceedings.

Since September 2017, 17 funerals have been conducted in our church - most of them had been parishioners of St. Thomas More's. Our Parish Leader, Michael, and team members work together and now have a system where procedures seem to run smoothly.

Thank you for affording me the opportunity to be part of the St Thomas More's Parish Council for the past three years. God bless.

Michael Keating

Education

The role in our Pastoral Council I took on this year was Education Ministry.

The goal of this Ministry is that the children in the parish school receive a good standard of Catholic Education. To ensure open lines of communication between parishioners, parish groups and Pastoral Council and to support the work of education in the parish school. I have been an ex-officio member of the board and attended their meetings.

Our school has at present four hundred and fourteen students and forty one staff who continue to provide a high quality of education for our future generations.

This year there was a review of the school in April that gave some directions for growth and where to for the future. The principal Mr Michael Cash was happy with the report. The board has been reviewing a number of policies including the tuckshop policy which is completed and continuing to review the anti bullying policy, code of conduct and student behaviour policy and once completed they would be accessible on the school website. Catholic education was looking at 'the poor and marginalised' who are they now? and sent out a parent survey on Catholic Identity 'What is it?' A lot to consider. At the Bishop's in-service day some facts were shared with the staff that the only Catholic connection a lot of children and families are now receiving is through the school, as fewer families attend Mass and most children in Catholic schools across Australia have never met a Priest or Nun. Something for us to think about.

This June the school secretary of about 40 years Mrs Goodsell retired. We wished her well in her retirement.

A new building that will have 4 new classrooms and an outdoor area is currently with Toowoomba Regional Council and hopefully work will commence in December this year. All going to plan it will be in use before the end of 2019.

This year the school and Parish have implemented a school weekend Mass having one a term, the first one on the 10th March, then 10th June and the next to happen on 8th September. Its pleasing to see more school families and staff participating in our weekend celebrations. Also at our parish Friday Mass the school have included one class to attend each week. I have been to a Friday Mass and it was lovely to see the school children sitting among the parishioners. During the homily Father asked questions and got the children to converse with the parishioners for the answers.

I have enjoyed my first year on the pastoral council. I really enjoyed the Parish Planning day and we as a council are implementing and planning what came out of it.

It has been a pleasure to be involved with the school by attending the board meetings. All parishioners can be very proud of our school.

I look forward to what next year will bring.

Kathryn Boulus

Administration

While the focus of the Parish must remain on the spiritual, much occurs on the administration level to ensure that the whole parish runs smoothly.

Part of the Administration Ministry is to attend The Parish Finance Committee meetings during the year and report on the activities of the Parish Pastoral Council. Close cooperation between the Council and the Committee ensures the communication is clear and up to date. There is an annual joint meeting to enforce this relationship.

The Parish is currently in a sound financial state, but we need to continually look at the revenue streams that keep the budget in the black. This has led us into the formation of the Parish Revenue Development Committee to enhance the financial position of the Parish. This committee has been in action for over 12 months now and has started to suggest different ways of raising e.g.:- Spring Clean/Garage Sale on 8th Sept, Sausage Sizzle @ Bunnings, Car Raffle. Over the years it has been recognised that our numbers of regular planned giving (Thanksgiving Programme) contributors is in decline so more work needs to be done on this continually to keep our Parish financially sustainable.

Our Parish contributes annually to various groups throughout the community, these include Project Compassion, Catholic mission/Propagation of the Faith, Retired Priests Fund, SPRED Appeal, SVdP and some special events are chosen in times of need. This year included an appeal for the Mehari family to help purchase a suitable vehicle for their severely handicapped daughter. This was a combined effort across the community and a vehicle was purchased and presented recently.

Council recognises the efforts and skills put in by our staff: Donna Pugh, Jenny Bartkus, Michael Lutvey, Veronica McGovern and Anthony Jacob, professionally led by our Parish Leader - Michael Bermingham. Council also recognises the time and effort that is given to the parish by the many volunteers who help to make our organisation function successfully.

Each year we do an assessment of the Parish buildings to ensure they remain serviceable and safe. There is a report presented to the council which allocates the work to contractors as needed. Council acknowledges the time and skills of Lawrence McNamara (Builder) to do these inspections each year.

This year Sister Leonie and Sister Marian vacated the convent building which is now under consideration as to what/how the building will be used in the future. The Sisters have occupied this building for the past 57 years when they started the school. There was a farewell mass on 1st July with Bishop Robert celebrating and 15 Sisters of Saint Joseph attended. There was an exchange of gifts to honour and remember their wonderful contribution to our School and Parish.

Thanks to everyone involved in the weekly money collections, the weekly money counting and the administration and maintenance needs of our parish.

Warwick Dingle

Hospitality

It has been my privilege to have served this year in the Hospitality ministry.

It seems that parishioners have had many opportunities for Social interaction

Whilst there has always been a cuppa after 8.30 am Sunday Mass, those attending Saturday night mass have enjoyed Wine and cheese evenings on several occasions during the year . I hope this will continue as this has been well received and people have been encouraged to bring a plate to share.

The Open Door gathering on Wednesdays is as popular as ever giving an important chance for a get together for many ladies who attend. .

The Men for All Seasons group has well planned monthly outings , locally and out of town . The group has just celebrated its fifth year of operation . This is a very lively and enthusiastic group which forms an important part of our Parish community.

Special farewell events have been held for Carol Talbot, Ian Crosby, Arthur and Joan Bateman and the Sisters of St Joseph.

Thanks to the enthusiasm and generosity of Peter Vernon a very successful Dinner Dance was held in June . Over 80 people attended and many participated in the dancing under Peter's instruction .

The pot luck dinner was once again a huge success . Many people were on hand to help set up , help with the catering and tidying up afterwards .

On behalf of the Parish Council members, I wish to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of Parish functions during this year.

Peter McDonald