

Parish Advisory Council Report 2020

When the Parish Advisory Council met early in 2020 high on our agenda was the development of a strategic plan in consultation with the community so that the vibrancy and strength evident in the parish could be further developed and enriched. In our first meeting in February, a process for engaging the community and commencing the process was determined.

By mid-March, we had received specific directions from the Archdiocese related to restrictions brought about by COVID 19. Many of these continue at time of writing. When we reached our second meeting for the year, our focus turned to the impact of the newly announced COVID restrictions. That day we received the news that churches were to close indefinitely and our focus turned to ways in which we could remain connected to the community during this time.

We quickly recognised that our focus needed to be on *being church* during this pandemic, with its consequent lockdowns and restrictions on gathering as a parish community. At the same time we have endeavoured to adopt a forward focus, learning from the ways we have been called to be community for one another and incorporating the best of these into a *new normal* for our parish community.

Our most significant response to the quickly unfolding events necessitated by the pandemic was the development of an online newsletter which continues to be emailed weekly to over 800 parishioners and others. The early newsletter included links to prayer sites and masses online with reflections from Father Wayne which were well received. Some print copies of the newsletter were also distributed to those who were not able to access it otherwise.

Face to face meetings of the Advisory Council ceased during April and May and were replaced with email conversations and resource sharing. Meetings recommenced in June prior to Masses beginning with limited numbers in July. The sacraments of first communion and confirmation were necessarily put on hold but we look forward to celebrating with families again in 2021.

On 19 July, when some restrictions on gatherings were lifted, we held a Carmel Conversation session in which the community was challenged with the question of *Where to from here?* We borrowed from the Parish Mission Statement in exploring how we could own the life and work of the Parish as a fully involved, outward looking, ever-evolving community in extraordinary circumstances. Using the Carmelite tenets of Prayer, Community and Service, much valuable discussion and feedback was generated and discerned. Those unable to attend the event were invited to submit online.

Carmel Care initiated a project in which a roster was developed of parishioners to regularly telephone those in the community who were isolated in some way. The St. Vincent de Paul team, with the assistance of Carmel Care, also began Mt. Carmel Place, a fortnightly drop in morning tea for those needing companionship. This has been a fine example of the Carmelite commitment to the isolated in our community. Carmel Care's Meal Train emergency provision of meals continued throughout the year.

In September we were able to celebrate together the ordination to the diaconate of Brother Matthew Tonini. Discussions in the latter months of the year focussed on the news that we were to welcome Father Martinho as our new parish priest, and to farewell Fathers Wayne and Janu.

Using feedback from the parish gathering in July and conscious of our desire to develop a strategic direction for the parish, we determined that 2021 would be a Year of Prayer in our community. This focus began with a Taize style liturgy in Advent and will further evolve in 2021.

We continue to discern and listen to your feedback in developing strategies to nourish and enrich the ways in which we offer opportunities for prayer, community, and service now and into a future which will inevitably be changed by our present circumstances. We are always interested to hear from you and will continue to keep you informed. Contact can be made by email to mtcarmel@bne.catholic.net.au