

Anglican Parish of Altona/Laverton Vicar's report to 2018 Annual Meeting

I acknowledge that we meet on the traditional country of the Yaluk-ut Weelam people within the Boon Wurrung clan, part of the greater Kulin nation. We recognise and honour the Indigenous custodians of this land over countless generations, and we pay our respects to their elders, past and present. We commit ourselves to the path of reconciliation, justice and healing.

As we honour the story of this land on which we meet, we also honour those who have gone before us in the life of the parish – those who have been known and loved in our midst, and in whose company we have walked the path of faith. We give thanks to God for the lives of those who have died in the last year: Veronica Jelinek, Connie George, Dawn Sibberas, Yvonne Atkins and Claudia Irvine. May they rest in peace, and rise in glory.

It was an important step forward this year for an acknowledgement of local Indigenous people to be agreed by Parish Council (and by the Boon Wurrung Foundation) and subsequently printed each week. At times we have read these words together in our worship, including during National Reconciliation Week. In our initial discussions, there was already a question of what would come next: how our words might be turned into action, and might indeed even change us. Later in the year, Parish Council agreed to budget for a payment to the Boon Wurrung Foundation in recognition of prior Aboriginal ownership of the land that we occupy. I'm grateful to Parish Council for supporting this move to back up our words of reconciliation with a concrete and even costly action.

The way the Anglican church is organised is deeply conscious of land and geography – every point on the map of Australia is officially part of a particular parish (even if the worship centre might be some distance away). The boundaries of our parish were established before the rapid development of new housing in recent years, and there are now 100,000 people living in our parish – equivalent to Ballarat or Bendigo. Within that number there are multiple local neighbourhoods and communities, each with different stories, characters, opportunities and needs. This is the context for our life and mission as the church in this place.

Our mission: serving others, nurturing a common life, growing in faith

This orientation towards our wider community and beyond is reflected in one of our three mission headings: *servicing others*. There are a number of ways that this happens already: at Soup and Sandwiches, our playgroups, and our Op Shop, we provide places of welcome for the local community, and enable conversations and relationships for people who may otherwise be somewhat disconnected. We also continue to partner with other agencies through our financial giving and in practical collaboration (for example through Laverton Community Integrated Services operating each week from the hall at St Eanswythe's).

In the coming year I want to continue asking together: How can we be a blessing to our local community? How can we be good neighbours? How can we understand better the struggles that people live with all around us? How can we pray more deeply for all of this?

This leads then to a second mission heading: ***nurturing a common life***. When we are a blessing to each other, we are more likely to be a blessing to others too. A common life is nurtured when we feel that we are first welcomed, and then known, and then drawn into belonging. None of this just happens! It is the fruit of intentional effort and care. So thank you to those who notice newcomers and enter into conversation; thank you to those who carefully learn people's names (and who make this easier by wearing name tags!); thank you to those who make a point not just of making conversation but of befriending and accompanying others.

Our common life is nurtured in so many things we do together: in social gatherings, in work in the gardens and for fund-raising, in talking and laughing and eating together. Thank you to those who faithfully show up for these shared activities.

Of course at the heart of our common life is worship: the weekly round of gathering, giving thanks, offering ourselves to God even as God comes to meet us. The task is always before us to make our worship the best it can be, for God. Thank you to those who fulfil particular roles of service in our worship; and I do want to share our particular thanks to Heather Francis and Lyn McDonald who accompany our singing week by week.

This then brings us to the third of our mission headings: ***growing in faith***. This is the heart of everything: the week by week journey into the mystery of God's love for us and for the world. This is what makes us a church, rather than a social club or community group. So this is what I am most interested in us enabling, encouraging and resourcing: in our Sunday worship; in opportunities for shared learning, prayer, and reflection; in our partnerships with other churches.

During this year we have offered two Pilgrim courses, on The Commandments (as our ecumenical Lent study material) and The Beatitudes (led by Dean Mason). The monthly reflective Bible study continues, and in recent months we have also started a monthly online Bible study by video conference, which shows some promise as a worthwhile format. In March a Lent Quiet Day, led by Linda Walter, was well attended and warmly appreciated.

I want to make special mention of the handful of people who regularly come to Morning Prayer once or more during the week at St Eanswythe's. Those 20 minutes of prayer, scripture and silence are a central work of the church, day by day. Obviously many have other commitments at that time, but if you are ever able to come once, or as a more regular habit, I do encourage and welcome you to take that opportunity.

Looking ahead

In Parish Council we have been talking in recent months about the need and value of doing more of our thinking and planning specifically for each centre. This is not in any way to undermine our identity as a parish, but to enrich that unity by seeking greater clarity about the particular ministries which are before us in each centre. I have certainly found in my own thinking that this has helped me to see more clearly some possible ways forward.

You will be able to suggest others, but I think some of the questions that are before us include:

For St Eanswythe's:

- How can we establish more connections with the new generation of people making their home in Altona?
- What will the St Eanswythe's site need to look like in order to facilitate this ministry?
- How can we enable the op shop opening hours to be significantly increased, to make better use of that resource?

For St Clement's:

- How can we be a base for some form of presence in the many communities around us (Altona Meadows, Laverton, Seabrook, Point Cook, Sanctuary Lakes, Williams Landing)?
- How can the St Clement's property be more effectively used for mission, community connection, and income to support ministry?
- How might we shape a youth ministry at or from St Clement's?

For Te Wairua Tapu:

- How do we continue to affirm and express our Maori Christian identity, in ways which speak to all generations?
- What does the good news of Jesus mean in the particular context of Maori people living here in Australia?
- What is needed for us to become more secure in terms of finances and of people?

Early in 2019, Parish Council will be organising conversations for each centre to explore these and other questions, and these conversations will then inform next year's mission planning process. They are questions to be explored with confidence and faith, trusting that with God there is abundance and joy. They are also questions to be explored with some sense of urgency, recognising that the way things have always been done will not sustain the life of the parish indefinitely.

These conversations will always lead us in some way back to those three mission headings under which we are seeking to shape our life: growing in faith, nurturing a common life, serving others. As we find fresh ways to live these out, Christ will be proclaimed among us and through us, and there will be blessing and abundant life.

Thanks

I want to thank all those whose hard work, dedication and creative energy is reflected in the various reports presented to this Annual Meeting. Every day of the week, different ones of you are working for the parish in many different ways, all of which are part of the sum of the life of the parish.

Thank you to Fr Danny for our partnership in ministry and for his willingness to step in to fill gaps when needed. I also acknowledge with gratitude the Rev'd Dave Thompson for his contribution to the life of the parish over 18 months, until his move to Christ Church Essendon in the middle of this year – and we pray for him as he prepares to be ordained priest this coming Saturday.

Thank you to the Wardens, Anita McAnda and Graham Wood, who have overseen considerable property works at both centres during the year; to our Treasurer Dean Mason; and to members of Parish Council. We covered a good deal of ground together during this year, and I am personally grateful for the commitment of those who have served the parish in this way.

Thank you to each of you who pray with care and love for the parish and the world, to each of you who share in worship week by week, to each of you who welcome others into our midst with joy and love.

As we move into another year, may we hear and be heartened by the apostle Paul's prayer for the Ephesians:

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, the Father may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 2.16-21)

The Rev'd Chris Lancaster

Vicar

18 November 2018