

St Mary of the Angels Parish

Annual Report of the Parish Pastoral Council

December 2024

The Year in Review

Prepared by St Mary's
Parish Pastoral Council

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Introduction from the Chair

It's been a big year for St Mary's Parish, filled with plenty to celebrate, some challenges to learn from, and lots of moments where we've seen the strength of our community shine through. As Chair of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), it's been a privilege to see all the wonderful things happening in our parish, from the small, everyday acts of kindness to the big events that bring us all together.

This past year, we've focused on finding ways to make everyone feel part of the St Mary's family. Whether it's through our Masses, community activities, or support programs, the goal has always been the same: to make sure we're living out our faith in real and meaningful ways. Of course, no year is without its challenges. We know there's still work to do in areas like reaching more young people, getting more volunteers involved, and fostering leadership to build the skills of those in our parish, so we can keep doing what we do best. But with the strong outcomes focus of the PPC, I have no doubt we'll meet those challenges head-on.

This report is a chance to look back at what we've achieved, reflect on what we could do better, and share our plans for the future. As a Council, we've spent time talking about the health of our parish as we see it, looking at what's going well and what could use a fresh approach, and we're excited about the road ahead.

Regards,



Georgia Cowdery
Chair, St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Acknowledgements

St Mary of the Angels (St Mary's) Parish acknowledges the Waddawurrung people, the Traditional Owners who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years.

We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation. We acknowledge and pay our respects to their local Elders, past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

We thank Parish Priest: Fr James Clarke and Assistant Priest: Fr Jude Johnson, all members of the PPC, and special guests who attended PPC meetings for their help, guidance, and leadership throughout the year.

Key Highlights

As part of the Parish and the PPC's commitment to monitoring and evaluating progress of the [2023-27 Work Plan](#), this report provides the yearly review of actions to deliver on the three aspirations outlined in our [Planning Day Report](#). Our collective aspirations are:

1. A spiritually fulfilled parish, actively participating in the celebration of the liturgy.
2. A genuinely connected and engaged parish community.
3. Respected and preserved facilities available for future generations.

Aspiration 1

As a PPC, and with tremendous effort and input from dedicated volunteers, Children's Liturgy of the Word was reintroduced. This included endorsing the creation of a sub-group of volunteers, who attended a formation session held by staff of the Archdiocese Proclaim Office. All volunteers completed the necessary safety checks and compliance requirements, and prepared the space ready for the children. The approach to Children's liturgy of the Word is consistent with the Parish and the PPC's commitment to hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children as a fundamental responsibility of the church and our commitment to making the church a safe place for children and young people and protecting them from harm.

It was noted in the workplan that the 'effort' to reintroduce Children's Liturgy of the Word required 'low' effort; however, PPC members agreed that this should be updated to 'Medium-High' due to new requirements on safeguarding.

The PPC also provided formal advice to the Parish to convene a Liturgy Committee, alongside recommendations of the makeup of the committee to be representative of the different masses and the community. The PPC determined that a Liturgy Committee should maintain a high-level of oversight of liturgical practice that looks beyond bulletins or specific wording of prayers of intercession. This action was handed over to the Parish priests and Parish office staff to implement.

Aspiration 2

In highlighting how parishioners can connect with parish committees, the PPC published a [Terms of Reference](#) for greater transparency on role and function. This marked the first time a Term of Reference document for the PPC was available to all parishioners and could be viewed by the general public online. The PPC also introduced further executive roles within the PPC including a Deputy Chairperson and Secretary. This will help not only to share the workload, but to provide more opportunities for leadership development of parishioners.

The PPC endorsed and provided support in the delivery of a further Alpha program, this included promoting the attendance of guest speakers at masses to talk to their experience of Alpha, as a method of promotion. The PPC is a proud supporter of the Alpha program and a number of PPC members assist in the running and organisation of the program, which acts as a parish tool for evangelisation where everyone is welcome.

The PPC endorsed and provided commitment to support the Parish in renewing its partnership with Mary Immaculate in Viqueque. A sub-committee for the organisation of Viqueque projects was endorsed. Further work is required to implement.

Aspiration 3

Accessibility of the Basilica was improved, with PPC members advising of the inconsistent wheelchair access provided at the South Transept and the need for the door to remain unlocked for all masses- with bulletins also placed at this entrance. This action was undertaken and implemented for all mass times.

PPC members received ongoing feedback from parishioners on the maintenance requirements of the Basilica (to be managed by the Parish Office), and received regular updates on priorities. The PPC endorsed advice of this nature to be published in bulletins for the awareness of all parishioners.

Vibrant Parish Health Audit

Members of the PPC attended sessions held by the Archdiocese of Melbourne Proclaim Office for Mission Renewal. These sessions included advice and resources for growing Vital, Vibrant and Viable parishes as part of the Take the Way of the Gospel framework for parish renewal. The [Parish Resource Guide](#) is strongly endorsed by the PPC, and was used as the basis for the 2022 planning day activities when the resource was in development, and continues to be used by the PPC.

As part of the PPC's end-of-year review, members undertook an audit of parish health across key domains using the Resource Guide self-reflection tool. The tool helps the PPC to identify the Parish's strengths and areas for improvement against the five characteristics of a vibrant Parish (worship, evangelisation, fellowship, formation, and service). The PPC recognises that this is only a limited view of PPC members, and notes that further work at a larger scale is required to understand the true health of the Parish, and should be open to all parishioners.

Worship

The PPC felt there was room to improve, but noted that the Parish celebrates Mass and offers opportunities for devotional prayer. The PPC felt that our parishioners would most likely agree that our liturgies and worship are spiritually nourishing and encourage them in their vocation of holiness. We felt more could be done such as the introduction of a liturgy committee or hearing more male voices in leading song.

Evangelisation

The PPC felt evangelisation was an area of growing promise for the Parish. This included programs such as Alpha and the success of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Members felt these opportunities were highlighted well to parishioners and help build confidence that as a Parish we are starting to implement a plan of evangelisation. The PPC

felt that this could be strengthened by introducing a formal evangelisation plan with steps to implementation and measures of success.

Fellowship

The PPC felt there was opportunity to grow our plan for welcome and inclusion, but noted the impact of Welcomers and the positive reception parishioners have had to this role. The PPC spoke of the ongoing need to highlight opportunities to contribute, to be able to gather informally, to build recognition of our volunteers, and to connect like-minded parishioners to build engagement and a greater sense of community.

Formation

The PPC felt as a Parish we could do more to advertise the ongoing opportunities for formation and spiritual conversation. It was noted that there were a number of opportunities available, but that these were not well promoted or understood. Examples include Rosary and Novena, Sacramental preparation classes, Faith and light, Lenten Reflection Group, Children's Liturgy of the Word, and bible study. The PPC wants to be able to see a Parish that has formation pathways enabling parishioners to keep growing as missionary disciples.

Service

The PPC felt that while there were community service and social justice programs available, only some of our parishioners were involved. The PPC noted that to improve in this area, the Parish itself does not need to create new opportunities, but should be able to link to existing ones for the benefit of the broader community. It was also noted that many young people are interested in, and engaged in parish life through social justice and outreach programs, which is an opportunity that can be leveraged. The partnership with Viqueque was seen as an opportunity here, one that is supported by parishioners, but that also struggles to get buy-in and help from more than a dedicated few.

What's Next

As we look ahead, the PPCs focus remains on strengthening our Parish community and ensuring we continue to meet the aspirations we've set for ourselves. We recognise that the role of the PPC isn't about doing all the work ourselves; rather, we aim to create opportunities, support those doing the work, and provide the framework to help our Parish thrive. As a PPC, we set the strategic direction, monitor progress, make recommendations, and, most importantly, represent the views and aspirations of our parishioners.

Building on the successes and lessons of this past year, we will refocus our efforts in the following areas:

Engaging Families and Youth

- We'll work to ensure that the Parish provides opportunities for families and young people to connect, contribute, and grow in faith, while supporting the ministries and groups already doing this work.

Fostering Leadership and Volunteers

- Recognising the need for new leadership, we'll encourage and support parishioners to step into roles where they can lead, contribute their talents, and grow our ministries.

Strengthening Outreach

- We will facilitate initiatives that deepen our connections with those in need, providing support and guidance to those taking action in this important work.

Enhancing Communication and Representation

- By listening to the voices of parishioners and communicating effectively, we'll ensure that our decisions and recommendations reflect the collective vision of our community.

To guide us in these efforts, we are planning to conduct our next parish survey in 2025. This will provide an opportunity for all parishioners to share their insights, ideas, and feedback, helping us to refine our focus and continue aligning with the needs and aspirations of our community to meet the vision and aspirations in our 2023-27 work plan.

By maintaining this strategic role—supporting, monitoring, and representing—we can ensure that St Mary's continues to be a place where everyone has the opportunity to live out their faith, feel connected, and be inspired to serve.

Conclusion

As a Parish, we have much to celebrate from the past year, and we look forward to addressing our challenges and building on our successes. As we embark on the coming year, let us remain united in our faith, mission, and commitment to serving one another in Christ's name.

Thank you for your support, prayers, and dedication to our Parish. Together, we can ensure that St Mary's continues to be a beacon of hope and faith in our community.

St Mary's Parish Pastoral Council