Welcome:
No one person can know the vast operations within our parish. People who are actively involved in some aspects of parish life cannot possibly know everything in every aspect of its life. Even I, who am supposed to have my hand on the pulse of all things at St. Mary’s, find it hard to know everything of all the groups activities; I guess, nor should I, because they are dealt with competently by people we entrust.

This AGM is a way to inform you, the parishioners with very wide brush-strokes of our pastoral activities, education & formation, planned developments & our activities that extend us beyond our parish to our deanery, diocese, other churches, our local community as well as our financial status.

Our AGM is also an opportunity for us who exercise leadership in our parish to be accountable to you. So, I would like to thank you for the interest you express by coming today and I’d especially like to publicly thank those who have given their reports for their dedicated service to St. Mary’s as well as the so many who are involved in practical ways of ministry, leadership and maintenance.

I’d especially like to thank those I work with directly almost on a daily basis and upon whom I greatly depend – Jacinta Bright, our PA, Helen Anderson, our school principal, Jo Giudice our secretary and more recently Frances Ollofsson, who has begun working part time in the office to supplement Jo, Maureen Lonsdale, the chair of our PPC and all its members, John McEntee, the chair of our School Advisory Board and more recently vitally important in his presence & voice at our School & Church site meetings, Paul Girolami, the chair of our Finance C/tee, Len Bainbridge, for his work with the weekly collections, as well as the members of the many other groups, committees and school staff.

With all the building activities well under way and with more work planned in the near future, 2010 promises to be a very exciting year. But I’d like to go back briefly in our recent history to set the basis for what is happening now.

Since the general parish gathering in November 2004 and a concurrent assessment of the school’s facilities, it was decided by the Parish Pastoral Council that a Strategic Planning Committee be formed with a mandate of producing a General Master Plan for the parish property and buildings by the end of August 2007.

At our general parish gathering held in November 2004 we arrived at 3 priorities that require attention: 1. The employment of a Pastoral Associate, 2. Engaging with school parents & 3. A Gathering Space in the church. The first two of these priorities have been addressed. The idea of a Gathering Space in the church demanded further work and has to do with alterations being made to the church to accommodate
Discussion about the church also raised other issues such as the need for internal toilets and developing a larger chapel, piety stall and library.

A group was also formed out of the Bereavement Committee which explored the development of a memorial garden near the church. This group had done much work culminating in a plan for the garden on the Grimshaw St. side of the church. The c/tee is now working on final details.

In discussions with Phil Doherty and Helen Anderson, our former and present school principals, it was ascertained that the school buildings required developments – the prep portables; the original outdoor toilet block and the 50 year old original school block. Our traffic flow and parking also require attention.

The need to develop the administration block of the school and making it more visible and accessible prompted consideration for housing all parish and school administration in the one area to better utilise resources and promote the understanding of the unity between school and parish. It would then become the pastoral and educational centre of the parish.

Rather than attend to each of these developments individually and possibly in a haphazard way, it was thought that we would develop a master plan through consultation of parishioners. It would necessarily involve a projection 10 -15 years into the future and would be revisable during that time because several of these works will impact on one another.

Consequently the Strategic Planning Committee was created with four sub-committees:

1. School
2. Church
3. Parish House
4. Grounds

The Church, School and Grounds sub-committees began consultations among parishioners and submitted preliminary reports at the end of 2006. Their final reports and plans have been scheduled for the end of August 2007. The School sub-committee, essentially formed out of the School Education Board, inspected some new and redeveloped schools and is to present a brief to some recommended architects to draw-up plans. The Parish House and Grounds committees have found that their plans will be very much determined by the plans of the school and church and may be finalised later.

Everything will be built in stages according to our financial capabilities of taking out and paying back loans. We were very fortunate to receive several government grants, including the large $3 million to commence our school works without, at this stage, requiring us to take out a loan. What was scheduled as a 2nd & 3rd stage of the works
sometime well in the future can now be embarked upon. Parish Support Campaigns have been held every three years in recent times with the last one concluding just a few weeks ago.

Finally, it is important to note that there are some fundamental theological, liturgical and pastoral principles that underpin what may otherwise appear to be a Master Plan that is concerned solely with the parish's physical assets – its property and buildings. A Catholic parish is the human face of the Church in the local community. The community of faithful has a mandate and responsibility to be the sacramental presence of Christ in the world. It must therefore be foremost a praying community which gathers in worship. All the plans for the development of our church are to assist us in this area of our parish life. The gathering space in particular can assist us to welcome people as we engage one another in the prayer life and liturgy of the parish. Liturgy begins in the gathering space where members of the assembly enter – it is where we already begin to assemble, begin to be Church.

Faith formation and holistic education of our parishioners is fundamental to the mission of the church. It is of prime concern that our parish offers the best possible opportunities especially in our primary school for learning and preparing the young for secondary school and for life with an integrated formation of Catholic Christian faith. The Catholic school works in partnership with parents in the raising of their children in faith. The developments proposed for the school have the aim of providing facilities that ensure a safe and secure environment for staff, students, parents and for members of the wider community who use the facilities. The valuable asset of the school’s facilities are also intended to be available for wider use than just the primary school students and staff. Thus, education and formation opportunities would be made available for the wider parish community out of school hours. It is envisaged that the Parish and School Administration will be incorporated into the design of a new Administration Block that would be both welcoming of parishioners and provide greater security to students.

The development of the Master Plan by the Strategic Planning Committee has involved many parishioners through consultation in order that they be given the opportunity of having a voice in our future planning but also with the intention that they have a sense of ownership. Therefore, there are many people to whom we can be grateful for the extensive work that has been carried out thus far. In particular a few need to be named for their directing roles in this process: Dan Donovan for his professional leadership of the Committee and Helen Anderson, Mary Jahne, Anthony Traynor and John McEntee for heading each of the four sub-committees.