

# The Heart of the Matter



## St Mary's Matters

Autumn 2009

Donation \$2



### LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Sean Leahy	3	Marg Ortiz	11	Peter Moss	18
A Mother	4	Mike Sherman	12	Kerry White	18
Margaret Smith	6	Patricia Ryan	13	Gerard Bromley	19
Dermot Dorgan	8	Brendan Ryan	14	Chris Roberts	22
Monica & Justine Martini	10	Peter & Marie Brown	15	Barbara McKenzie	22
Peter Breen	11	Gary Fuller	16	Anne McLay	23

### ST MARY'S MATTERS PUBLICATION

Convener	Maggie Boyle	Finances	Doc Ortiz	Proofreading
				Jan Murray
Editor	Margaret Ortiz	Community Photographs		Printed by John Hallett
		Tony Robertson		Xavier Grafix

Articles, Advertising or Letters are always welcome. Send to: [margdoc2@bigpond.net.au](mailto:margdoc2@bigpond.net.au).



## Editorial

**F**or me the heart of the matter, the essence of St Mary's, keeps changing over the years.

I was first attracted to St Mary's because the priest treated us like intelligent human beings and gave thought provoking homilies. I then became part of a community that is now a big part of my life. And always I have a sense of the sacred and profound

when I am in that space – the space that is my church— where the mystery of God within enfolds me.

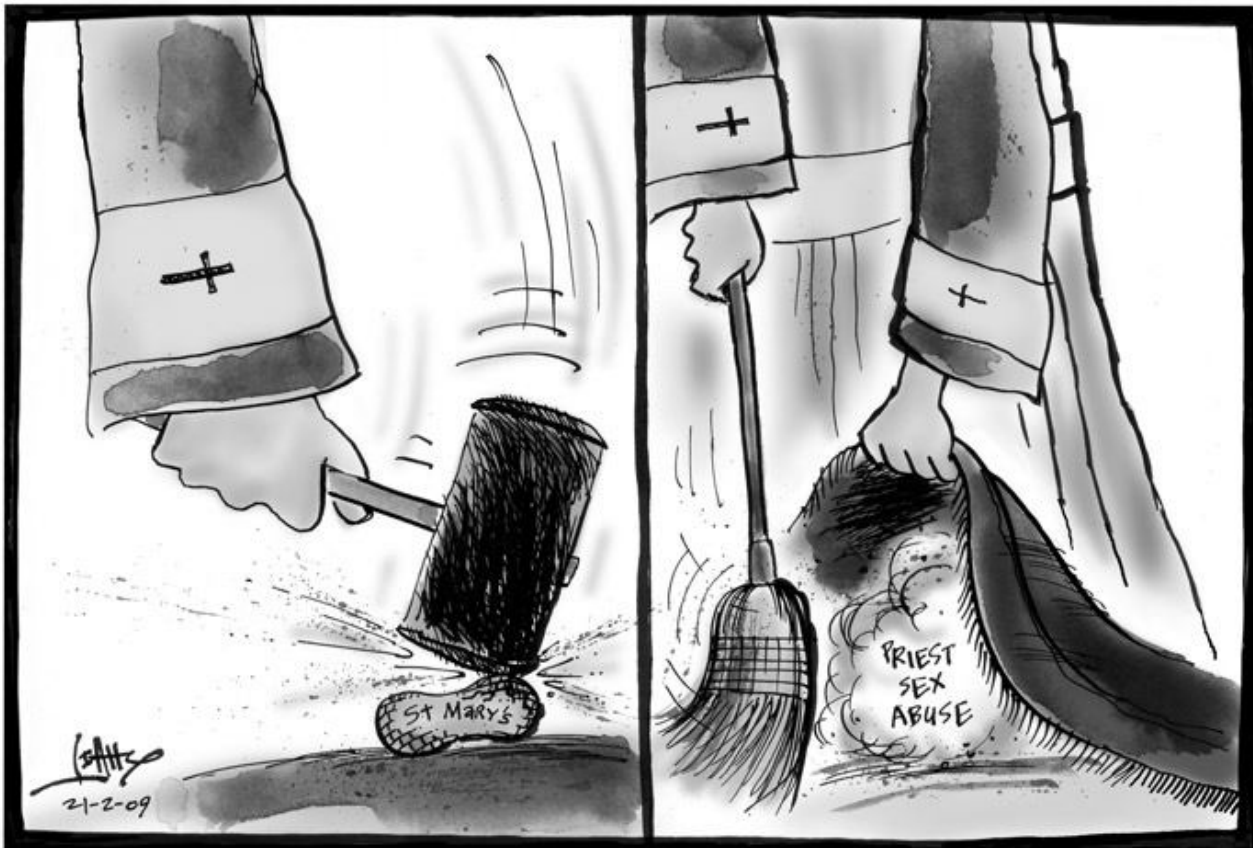
But right now I know the heart of the matter is that I love those men – our priests, our leaders, our friends. Terry, friendly, hardworking and personable. And Peter – it is not because he is warm, compassionate, sensitive and reflective with a great sense of humour. Although he is all of those things, he is also irascible,



occasionally heavy handed and at times every bit the cleric he rejects. However I know that whatever happens at our church I am willing to follow where he leads.

Because I love those men – I just do.

*Marg Ortiz (Editor)*



*Used with permission of Sean Leahy*

# Letter From A Mother

**Homily of Saturday  
21/Sunday 22  
February, 2009**

To my darling boys:  
There will come a day  
sometime in your life -  
maybe brought on by  
unrequited love, or the  
painful end of something  
you thought was a given  
— when you'll feel that  
grey mist descending and  
maybe then, you will  
remember something of  
the struggle at St Mary's  
and how we felt as it all  
unfolded. How we felt and  
how we fought.

I want to tell you this: it  
truly was your Church. You  
sat in the playpen at first  
and then you progressed  
to the pews, ending up  
there as slightly reluctant  
teenagers trying to recover  
from not enough sleep. I  
don't know exactly what  
you'll remember about St  
Mary's. I don't think it'll be  
the building itself, not the  
protest signs flying at the  
front, not Colin and his Big  
Issues, not the fridge of  
Heavenly Drop water  
bottles that gave you  
something to do in those  
long masses. I suspect  
you won't remember the  
way the community used  
to gather around the table  
and certainly not the

Eucharistic prayer we  
used or the Timor Leste  
stoles Peter and Terry  
wore.

I suspect it'll be  
something more abstract,  
a feeling, an idea,  
something to do with  
Hope and Justice, those  
two delicate birds that  
hovered around us when  
we were there.

Maybe you'll think,  
looking back, that we  
were just a bunch of  
religion-obsessed  
nutters, struggling after  
something unattainable,  
but I hope you'll feel it  
was more than this. You  
might just hold onto the  
memory of two priests  
and a community who  
tried damn hard to make  
those birds fly. I'm pretty  
sure you'll remember that

St Mary's was a place  
that tried to make Jesus'  
example real and  
compelling. That was  
what it was all about.  
You'll realise in years to  
come how rare such  
places of the soul are.  
The Celts had them,  
indigenous people have  
them and St Mary's was  
such a place. When you  
were baptised, your  
godmother wrote on your  
card that she hoped you  
would find a home for  
your spirit in the Catholic  
Church. I am so sorry if  
you feel that place has  
been taken away from  
you. It happened too  
early. I was going to try to  
make you come to Mass  
until you were sixteen –  
perhaps unrealistic in this  
day and age! - but I was  
thinking of the nuns and

*(Continued on page 5)*



## Letter From A Mother

*(Continued from page 4)*

priests who had inspired your father and myself in our twenties to think that we could help make the world a better place. Sure the Catholic Church was not perfect but it was our culture, our coat, our home and we believed we could offer this to you also. A deep, sustaining spirituality and a rich tradition of social teaching. It was all there. Hildegard of Bingen, John Henry Newman, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day.

The Gospel that is being read today, on this the first Sunday that Peter is no longer allowed to say Mass, shows Jesus curing a paralysed man. This reading is the first of five conflict stories in the early chapters of Mark, these stories all introducing various opponents of Jesus – scribes, Pharisees, John the Baptist's disciples. From Chapter 2 to 3 in Mark, Jesus' opponents move from a position of admiration to one of

active hostility. Two things stand out about today's reading. One is that the paralysed man is able to be brought to Jesus only because his disciples break open the roof to do so. The second is that Jesus sees forgiveness as an incredibly powerful act. So powerful in fact that in order to make the scribes believe in his ability to forgive, Jesus makes the paralysed person walk. And so we have a God who will break down things that are proper and right: roofs, relations with scribes...all this to bring his people close, to heal human frailty and pain. We have a God here whose message is radical not because it is about miracles but because it is about the gentlest and hardest of human things, forgiveness.

The first reading today sees the Israelites in exile in Babylon and we can see Isaiah struggling to maintain his people's hope when they are displaced from their rightful home. So you can see that the St Mary's story, the story of a community struggling to be closer to God, has been told before and felt before. Countless women and men have suffered for their belief in this story. My boys, I want you to

remember this, remember and find out about Mary MacKillop, Mary Ward, Oscar Romero and Leonardo Boff.

In the light of our story at St Mary's, what do I hope for you now?

I pray that in your lifetime you will see a "new deed" done in the Catholic Church, to use Isaiah's words. I pray that you will live to see the road built that will bring the Catholic Church home to itself, so that it can be a sacred place for you and for those you love. In this place, women and homosexuals will be enabled to reach their full human flourishing. In this place, Mary will be held up, not as a model of obedience and domesticity but as the feisty woman she must have been. Don't forget that Mary sang the Magnificat. She can't have been other than a brave defender of justice and peace.

My dear boys, I know you have seen me crying a lot this week but I want to assure you that the grey mist is not the end of the story. Romero reminded us that it's a slow process, this building of the Kingdom of God:

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Letter From A Mother

*(Continued from page 5)*

“beyond even our vision.” He comforts us with the thought that “we are just planting seeds that one day will grow...providing yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities... We are prophets of a future not our own”.

At least we, the community of St Mary's, have had the privilege of knowing what Church

can be in a way that will forever inspire us. We have tried to add the yeast, to plant the seeds. As our children, you have seen us trying to change the Church from within, from a position of love. Maybe that's our legacy, our legacy to you. And thanks be to God, we have certainly

seen those little birds, Hope and Justice, in full flight.

See, here they come again.

Love Mum X



*Planting the Bunya Pine*

## A NEW THING

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Is. 43:18)*

Last week we heard the heartfelt letter of a mother offering hope to her boys amidst the apparent demise of St. Mary's. Referring to the Gospel story of the healing of the paralytic, she reminded us that the roof was broken open to bring the man to Jesus. That it was the friends of the man who did this is of great significance, for it was on seeing the depth of their faith that

Jesus said to the paralysed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' It was then, to demonstrate his authority to forgive sin, that Jesus healed the man by telling him 'to stand up and walk'. When the heart is touched by forgiveness, healing happens. Here it was because of the strength of the faith of his friends.

In the present context, the Catholic Church can be seen as the paralysed man, who can be forgiven and healed through of the faith and

perseverance of his friends. St. Mary's is being called to be those friends, and in faith to persevere in the face of obstacles for the sake of the wider church. She is being asked also to follow Jesus in his way of handling the series of conflicts related in Mark's Gospel. Each time Jesus is challenged he replies with clarity and calm authority.

When challenged about eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus responded that *'those who are well have no*

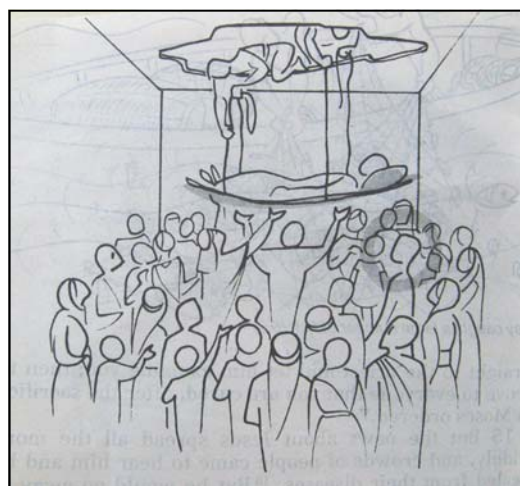
*(Continued on page 7)*

## A New Thing

*need of a physician, but those who are sick'. St. Mary's is called to the healing of the brokenness of the Church, including her own brokenness, by continual acceptance and forgiveness of those who oppose her. We are being called to love more deeply and more tenderly, and to put the new wine of life in Christ into the fresh wineskins (Mk2:22) of continual transformation and renewal, following faithfully our resolve to be like St. Francis, and true to our deepest selves, feed only the*

wolf of compassion, patience, and graceful equanimity.

The words of Isaiah 43:19 also referred to in the letter, *I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert'* remind us that in the midst of trials and difficulties, something new is being brought to birth, through the power of the Spirit. St. Mary's role as faithful, persevering friends of



the paralysed Church can make possible the Spirit's work of forgiveness and healing within the Archdiocese and Australian Church.

*Margaret Smith*

## CELEBRATING THE SIGNING OF THE TREATY



## THE HOT LINE

One morning at the Pearly Gates, St Peter's mobile rang,  
While nearby on a fleecy cloud, the heavenly choir sang.

"Turn the volume down!" he roared, "this call is STD"

"It's coming from St. Mary's and they want to speak to me!"

The choir's voice fell silent, not a pin-drop could you hear,

As St Peter stood there motionless, his Nokia to his ear.

"Ah Peter, Peter Kennedy!" came the Galilean drawl.

"It's good to hear your voice, my friend - the Boss said you might call!"

"Now what's this all about?" he said, "I haven't read the file"

St. Peter's pacing up and down and listening for a while.

Then suddenly he's stopping, as if rooted to the spot,

"I can't believe my saintly ears", he murmured, "they did WHAT??!!

"What – cameras? tape recorders? notes? – they must be off their rocker!

"I've heard some beauties in my time, but this one is a SHOCKER!

"The VATICAN has backed them up? They've got a bloody nerve –

"I'll send an email straight away and give those blokes a serve."

"I knew they'd prob'ly lose the plot and wander off the track,

"And see the trees but miss the wood, and try to take things back

"To concentrate on rules and regs. and trivialities.

"But let me reassure you, Peter, I HAVE GOT THE KEYS!"



## THE HOT LINE

"Those children you baptized down there – they're all enrolled up here.

"And half the heavenly choir is gay; the Buddha? – he's up here!

"Your Eucharistic prayer is great, your Sunday Mass is fine –

"And we gave up using vestments here in 1539!"

"Don't let this business bother you – you know the Boss's son?

"He had to cope with stuff like that before his job was done.

"Remember what he said back then – a point he would belabor –

"There's only one big rule that counts – love God, yourself, your neighbor.

"All other rules are only there to serve the peoples' need,

"And if they don't, then out they go – well, that was Jesus' creed.

"I hope you tell St Mary's folks to take that word and spread it –

"And... sorry, mate - I've gotta go – I'm running out of credit!"

*Dermot Dorgan*



## MORE SPIRITUALITY THAN RITUAL

**M**y husband and I have three daughters, now adults of course. We gave them a solid Catholic education. As students of a contemporary education system in the '80s and '90s, the girls were taught to question things, and think for themselves. And that is just what they do. They are no rebels; on the contrary, they are each very successful in their own right, socially conscious citizens, even the youngest at 26.

It was the middle daughter, aged 34, loving and caring, who discovered St. Mary's in South Brisbane three years ago and excitedly asked me to go along one Sunday. We are still there together, and I have taken along to Sunday Mass each member of my family, extended family and Catholic friends who have visited Brisbane from all over Australia from time to time. All were impressed and found no practices at St Mary's to object to and wished they had similar parishes in their home cities. I have to say, there was one person

that did find things a little confronting and different and that was my dearest 90 year old mother. And I think that just about speaks for itself; she is of an era past now.

There is a critical place for the regular Parish church with its school attached. In fact, I agree we must have these. We must continue now more than ever to educate our young in a holistic Catholic Christian way, where the sacraments are received and morality is taught. But in this information age we now educate and encourage free thought, and contemporary life requires our children to question and think for themselves.

It is not unreasonable to expect thinking adults, especially those outside the scope of the regular Parish school church (for one reason or another), to want to have a church community that provides for their very different matured needs and spirituality.

There is a need for priests like Peter Kennedy and Terry Fitzpatrick to bridge the gap and connect. The simplicity and truth of the

Eucharistic prayer brought me to tears the first few times I prayed it at St Mary's, and knew then that our priests were very special with their sincerity and determination of spirit to make a difference.

St Mary's offers recognition of other spiritual thought such as Buddhist philosophy and Eckhart Tolle and constantly challenges us in our thoughts and beliefs which keeps one actively engaged and living one's faith.

This, our new generation of adult Catholic (universal) Christians *is* questioning our current structure and practices, and the answer lies in returning to Christianity as it was in the beginning: Jesus' teaching that godliness... goodness lies within, as in The Sermon On the Mount.

In today's terms the future generations of Catholics are seeking far more spirituality than ritual.

*Monica Martini  
Justine Martini*



## UNDER THE TREE

### What people are reading



#### **Hope Endures**

By Collette

Livermore, Random House 2008

When someone leaves work, it can be sad for a few days. Morning tea and off she goes to the next job or retirement and we change gears and adjust. When a priest or a sister leaves a religious order or church voluntarily after taking vows for a lifetime of engagement and service and spiritual formation, there is a story to be told.

In "Hope Endures" former Mother Teresa sister Collette Livermore tells such a story. It is a rambling narrative full of transparent honesty and soul searching as the

author sits us down and unpacks her life in vignettes all over the world as a Novitiate in Melbourne and then to the ends of the earth: Bourke, PNG, Manila, Calcutta, Hong Kong. Running through this narrative in a kind of collapsed time subtext is the struggle to find meaning in all the rigidity, discipline and inconsistency of the communities of the Missionaries of Charity as they attempt to follow Mother Teresa's dictum to feed Christ in the poorest of the poor. Finally Collette Livermore walks away from the order after 11 years and, at 29, enrolls in Medicine at the University of Queensland and begins to work with Australian Aboriginal

people and the East Timorese. There is no bitterness in this story. Hope always emerges in this remarkable woman and her world. But she does highlight the struggle religion always has, even in an iconic order like the Missionaries of Charity, when free thinking, education, the search for meaning and all embracing love challenge "the system" by their very integrity.

There is a resonance for me here with what is happening at St Mary's and the Archdiocese of Brisbane. The outcome for one sister is less complex than what might happen to hundreds of parishioners at St Mary's. But there are strong parallels in the battles.

*Peter Breen*

#### **From Sand to Solid Ground**

By Michael Morwood  
Spectrum 2007

This is a book that the people of St Mary's have embraced wholeheartedly.

Michael Morwood raises questions of faith that are on the minds of many Catholics and other Christians today. Church authorities will not permit academics to raise or discuss any of these controversial issues publicly. Morwood boldly delves

into the questions with clarity, courage, hope, and inspiration from his extensive experience in spirituality and adult faith formation.

A very worthwhile and accessible book.

*Marg Ortiz*

## BELIEFS ARE NOT FACTS

**B**elieve nothing just because a so-called wise person said it. Believe nothing just because a belief is generally held. Believe nothing just because it is said in ancient books. Believe nothing just because it is said to be of divine origin. Believe nothing just because someone else believes it. Believe only what you yourself test and judge to be true.  
Buddha

What a different approach from Rome is that of the Buddha. All human beings form their beliefs from their life conditioning. These beliefs then form the filters through which we view the world. What we do is make up a story based on our beliefs; and so all we can ever see is a projection of our own belief system. That is why we cannot ever judge another person – we do not live in their skin. Jesus Christ was very severe on judgment – “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone”. I don’t think he managed to exclude the Pope or Bishops here.

All revelations, however divine, are never any more than a finger pointing to the moon. As we say in the east, “When the sage points to the moon, all the idiot sees is the finger.”  
Anthony De Mello

The Jesuit priest, Anthony De Mello, brought out the same idea. So anyone who thinks they have all the truth is living in a world of delusion. The only place you can find truth for you is in your own heart; and that is not necessarily the truth for someone else. Wasn’t this what Pentecost was all about?

Let me finish with a beautiful Zen story:

One day a young apprentice devil came running to the chief devil and said, “Chief devil, sir, something awful is happening to planet earth!” The chief devil frowned and growled, “What’s happening?” The young devil, very afraid, stuttered, “There’s a bloke called

Jesus, and he’s teaching everyone to love one another. He’s also telling them that God is love and not fear.” The chief devil was busy writing his book, “The Joy of Politics.” He told the young devil to keep an eye on things for a while and report back later. The young devil soon returned looking even more worried than before. “Chief devil, sir,” said the young devil, “now Jesus is encouraging people to give up fear, hate, and resentment, and to start practising forgiveness.” The chief devil was still busy writing. He was halfway through a chapter on “Bureaucracy.” He frowned and growled at the young devil, “Go away and watch for me.”

*(Continued on page 13)*





## Beliefs Are Not Facts

*(Continued from page 12)*

It wasn't long before the young devil returned again, looking totally terrified. "It's gotten worse, chief devil, sir.

Now Jesus is talking about joy and that the **Kingdom of Heaven is within.**"

The chief devil put down his pen. He had just finished the final chapter on "Control." He frowned and growled at the young devil, "Why do

you worry so? As soon as Jesus dies, we'll enlist people to organise, control, and make rigid his teachings. We will create another religion! And soon the love Jesus speaks of will be lost in dogma."

*Mike Sherman*

## LOVE, ACCEPTANCE, CHALLENGE

**L**ove, acceptance, challenge — these are the things that keep me coming to St Mary's.

People who have suffered are invited to tell their stories and I am often touched and filled with admiration at the way some of these people have overcome difficult odds to be able to stand up at the microphone and witness to God in their lives.

If the body of Christ is a living body, and I think it is, it must change or it is dead. We are living in the 21st century and an image of God in the heavens above with his scribe beside recording our misdeeds (did he record our good deeds too?) is no longer meaningful.

Peter has brought many in the community with him to an understanding of the God within us and

within every other person in the world as well as in and through all of creation. Some have found this confronting but most have listened with their hearts as well as their minds and embraced this idea and become adult Catholics no longer dependant on those who claim that they and they alone can filter God's word to his (sic) children.

One incident a year or two ago still epitomises for me the spirit of the community and Fr Peter's acceptance of everyone who joins us to pray.

This derelict came into the church — no shoes, no shirt, trousers that looked as if he had slept in them that were tied up with rope. His hair looked as if it had not seen a brush or comb let



*Patricia and Brendan Ryan*

alone water for a long time but he WAS wearing a Santa cap - Christmas was not far away. He was carrying a tattered, coverless book that looked like a bible.

He sat on the carpet runner about half way between the mike and the table. Nothing odd about sitting on the floor — we do it all the time though most do sit

*(Continued on page 14)*

## Love, Acceptance, Challenge

*(Continued from page 13)*

around the perimeter of this open space! During the readings he rose and stood surveying the altar and no one took the slightest notice until he picked up the cup and downed the wine. Fr Peter saw what he was doing and

approached quietly. Our friend heard him, turned around and, as his face lit up with a beatific smile, put out his arms to hug Peter. The fellow quietly returned to his place and when a hymn spoke of my soul thirsting for God he smiled and said innocently, "I'm not thirsty, I drank the

wine." No one laughed and the smiles on their faces showed only love.

After Mass he asked almost incoherently for our prayers for an approaching court appearance. Yes I did see him again the following Sunday – far more conservatively dressed - or was that another of the homeless?

*Patricia Ryan*

## A VISION OF HOW CHURCH COULD BE

For most Sundays over the past decade Patricia and I have gladly driven the 40 kilometre per round trip to church at St Mary's – a very special community fortunate to have been guided by a very special priest, Father Peter Kennedy and his assistant Fr Terry Fitzpatrick. We are continually

challenged to look at the way we live and see Christ in others as we struggle with faith seeking understanding. The old style suburban churches and clergy uninterested in anything that might rock the boat have failed to inspire most of our eleven children - only one of whom regularly attends Mass. They are however

loving and caring people who live lives of love and authenticity.

I see St Mary's Community as a vision for what the **Australian Catholic Church** could be.

For this I pray,

*Brendan Ryan*



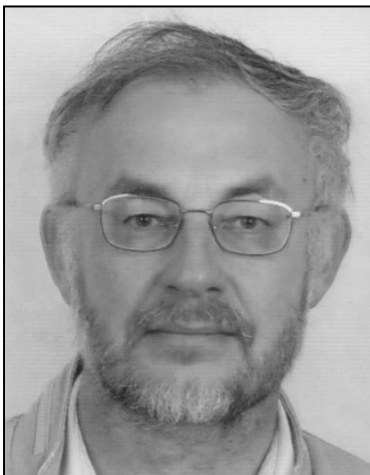
### Everyone Here is Interesting



## No GOING BACK

Unlike many of the St. Mary's community, I have always been a practising Catholic. Rarely during my life have I missed Sunday Mass. I must have always had a very dutiful nature, because I remember that I often found the sermon to be more of a test of faith than an inspiration: an elderly Irishman giving a simplistic and irrelevant instruction to an audience of bored old women and crying babies, frequently sprinkled with mindlessly reactionary ideas and political conservatism.

When a series of random events led me to St. Mary's, I immediately felt I had come home. It was a long time ago, but I remember the feeling that I had been away for



a long time, but now I was home.

What do I mean by 'coming home'? Even though it is my phrase, it just came to me at the time; recently I have been wondering what it means.

It doesn't mean I felt secure and comfortable. I was often a bit startled by the non-standard prayers and vestments and furniture, and challenged by items in homilies. One aspect that did appeal to me was that ideas were put out there and discussed. As an amateur intellectual, I was not looking for homilies that were condensed instruction from the grade 6 R.E. textbook.

In the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the devil tempted Eve by telling her she could learn the nature of good and evil. We can see from this that thousands of years ago, in a primitive culture on the other side of the world, thoughtful people puzzled about what is good, and what is evil. It



has always been a great mystery, an unanswerable but vital question. You can see it cropping up everywhere as a question, from police shows on TV to the background of political policy. I think this is where I suddenly found myself at home. I was leaving behind a culture whose version of 'good' was following the tribal church, attending its liturgies, paying for its upkeep, converting non-believers; and whose version of 'evil' was pornography, divorce, communism, abortion. And then at St. Mary's I found an understanding of 'good' as love, truth, justice, human happiness. I can relate to that, and there is no going back.

*Peter and Marie Brown*

## DOES ST. MARY'S MATTER?

**M**y name is Gary ... Prior to relocating to Warwick some three years ago and for the best part of twenty years prior to that, I was closely involved, to one degree or another, in this wonderful community of St Mary's, South Brisbane.

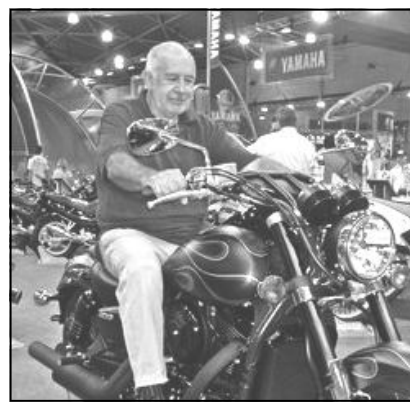
It was at a rather low point in my life and having recently moved to Brisbane that I vividly recall when, late one Sunday afternoon and by chance, I walked through the door opposite the men's home at the side of the Church and knew within minutes I had found my spiritual home. It was what I like to think of as my epiphany moment and has been a source of great spiritual comfort to me ever since. Over the intervening years I have had many wonderful experiences in this Community, met so many people as they come and go and made deep and enduring friendships, including my dear friends of the mindfulness meditation group.

And so it is that we find ourselves today confronted with an attempt by faceless

others and with the assistance of Church officials to bring it all to an end. You are all familiar with and understand the circumstances, so it is unnecessary for me to go into them further now.

But what we need to realise that this is not the end of St Mary's – it is, indeed, only the beginning.

What the Church's self-appointed leaders, known collectively as the hierarchy, fail and refuse to recognise is that they are up against a fundamental, irresistible force of nature that operates in every corner of this vast universe ... and that is evolution. Some might care to think of it as the Holy Spirit. This force simply states that any organism or unit which no longer has a useful function, that is, it has become irrelevant, will die out, to be replaced by one that continues to drive this universe forward. As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin puts it, this energy directs everything, including us, collectively and individually, towards the Omega point, towards higher levels of consciousness. This universal energy field



cannot finally be resisted.... and that is where this St. Mary's Community and a growing number of like-minded communities and individuals across this world are at today. Although they often find themselves up against a well-entrenched, irrelevant resistance, they are, as a matter of fact, at the beginning of a renewing and most importantly relevant way of living their faith ... in tune with this universal force, the Holy Spirit.

In this context, I would like to offer you a poem that I've had amongst my bits and pieces for some years ... it was composed by Una O'Higgins O'Malley (who could well be Irish!) and for me portrays where the Church finds itself to day.

*(Continued on page 17)*



## RESTORATION

So – is it all unravelling,  
the ritual of book and candle,  
of jewelled mitres and the golden staffs  
of stern authority,  
the labyrinths of polished corridors, the swelling organs and the potted palms, the  
whispered confidences  
and the solemn portraits done in oils to emphasize the ego?

Are we dealing with re-vision  
in this new century?  
The antique titles and the purple rings,  
the convent parlours and the Confirmation banquets,  
even the customary deferences – all are going,  
disappearing back through time and time  
from gold to bronze to copper  
and finally to carpenter's timber;  
to the smooth carved wood of a shepherd's crook  
and the cot of a simple manger,  
to the savage strength of a criminal's cross  
suspending in shame  
our one necessity.

Are we tracing back and back to bread and wine  
laid on a supper table,  
to the problems of hungry lambs and sheep,  
to the challenge of caring,  
to an empty tomb laid bare  
of the risen Saviour?  
And when we have got that far  
will we then address his simple question  
**'Do you love me?'**

*Una O'Higgins O'Malley*

Does St. Mary's Matter? You bet it does! Thank you and keep the faith.

*Gary Fuller,*

## THE STORY OF THE WAYWARD SHEEP

Once there was a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One afternoon he noticed only ninety nine had come home so he waited for the last sheep to arrive. Just on sundown the hundredth sheep came skipping in through the narrow entrance of the sheepfold. But the shepherd noticed it had burs and strange grasses in its coat. The following day the same thing happened. The shepherd became anxious about where this sheep might have been. So next morning he decided to follow it. For some time it grazed close to the other sheep. Then it wandered away

on its own.

Shortly it came to a field with a high hedge. The sheep looked through the hedge and smelt sweet grasses on the



other side. It struggled through the hedge scratching itself on the way. There were strange looking sheep in this field with long horns but the wayward sheep ate grass with them. Later it came to another field. It

had a fence made with jagged stones but the wayward sheep was determined and clambered over these.

In this field were some black sheep and the wayward sheep ate grass with them too. Late that afternoon it set out for home but the shepherd went ahead and barred the entrance to the sheepfold for fear the wayward sheep might lead the other sheep astray and the burs and strange grasses might infect them. So the wayward sheep lay down on the grass outside the sheepfold and spent the night there.

*Peter Moss*

## HISTORICAL PRECEDENT

In 428 Pope Celestine I upbraided the Bishop of Arles for introducing a special dress, namely tunic and belt. This was monastic habit and an innovation. Hitherto, **priest's dress was exactly the same as that of other men**. For celebrating the Liturgy they merely wore *clean* clothes. Celestine wrote to the Bishops, 'We should be distinguished from others, not by our dress but by our knowledge, by our conversation, not by our manner of life'.

*H.Norris (1949)*

*Contributed by Kerry White*

## OBEDIENCE TO CONSCIENCE OR TO THE HIERARCHIAL CHURCH

In response to a call for articles on the heart of the matter affecting St Mary's, I present an edited version of a letter which I presented in person to the Archbishop on the 14/2/09. With no surprise the letter to date hasn't received a response.

Differences may arise when one doesn't understand the intention behind the language used in one's communications. This if anything is a simple example but it touches upon much bigger issues which are currently affecting our church, the diocese of Brisbane, the parish of South Brisbane and more specifically the flock which has been attending St Mary's.

The Bishop's current 'dialogue' with the community at St Mary's, in many ways is technically correct. I however draw an analogy: if I came to a pedestrian crossing and despite seeing a car approaching, still made a decision to cross, if in doing so, the car was to hit me, although

technically under the law I would have had right of way and I could also say that the car should have stopped as I had the legal right to cross, it however wouldn't make a difference to the injuries which I would sustain from the impact.

It is easy to react to something unpleasant, by distancing oneself from the cause of pain; many people also dislike conflict. Jesus didn't avoid situations which would lead to conflict; instead he responded with humility, compassion and the truth; ultimately He triumphed.

In his letter to Fr Peter on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2009 the Bishop felt that he had no reason to further discuss the situation of St Mary's South Brisbane; this deeply saddens me. I strongly believe from decrees such as Vatican II's *Christus Dominus*, which illuminates the church's wisdom on the topic of pastoral office of bishops that the approach currently being taken isn't the only way.

In the second chapter of

*Christus Dominus* it begins with the definition of a diocese as 'a portion of the people of God' and as a 'particular church'. The phrase 'a particular church' is very significant especially when viewed in the context of the decree on Missionary Activity in c.3. From this the diocese is not seen primarily as an administrative division of the universal Church, but in itself a church, a microcosm of the whole. It points to the truth that the Church grows up from its local constituents rather than coming down from its administrative centre [1].

Within *Christus Dominus* there is a clear summary of the diocesan duties of a bishop, much of which is a repetition of *Lumen Gentium*. In outlining the bishop's position and functions the decree stresses his apostolic and pastoral character. Whilst at times a bishop is an administrator, alongside this image is that of 'shepherd and teacher' [1].

It has pained many within the community

*(Continued on page 20)*

## **Obedience to Conscience or to the Hierarchical Church**

*(Continued from page 19)*

that their individual letters or the letters of its steering committee have not been responded to. The letter from the steering committee at the end of November 2008 was the fruit of many parish consultations, the final of which was attended by over 250 parishioners.

My sadness is that with the exception several years ago of the centenary celebrations of St Mary's, the Bishop's refusal to communicate directly with the parishioners, with the flock which gathers at St Mary's has been very apparent. It gives me no pleasure to say the pastoral role to the flock of St Mary's has been ignored when it has been most sorely needed.

The letters written by the Bishop since the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2008 although referred to as discussions, haven't been. They have been filled with accusations and a command for

obedience. Instead what is needed is the compassion and love of pastoral ministry.

In his letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> February, the Bishop reminded Peter that he is ultimately the leader and shepherd of the flock at St Mary's. He has been the leader and shepherd of this flock for 28 years and this flock recognises him. Replacing him with another shepherd, one whom they are not familiar with and one whom many feel whose personal style is very different to that which they are familiar with, is done without consideration of the pastoral needs of the flock.

This 'particular church' has a flock which is very different when compared to most other parishes; if you excuse the pun it is full of black sheep! Many within the community suffer from mental illnesses, many come to the community through Micah's ministry of outreach as previous victims of sexual abuse by the clergy, many consider themselves to be lapsed Catholics, many aren't even Catholic, others hold

positions of responsibility within Catholic schools and hospitals. Others come from a sexual orientation whereby in other parishes the phrase 'love the sinner, not the sin' has not been the reality which they have experienced. More importantly whether it be a matter of sexual orientation or other areas in one's life, the philosophy of accepting all comers and not judging them affords the parishioners the dignity of respecting their informed conscience in all aspects of their lives.

If the current decision made by the Bishop remains, then unfortunately like the recent bush fire disasters, I see this as the catalyst for a schism to grow, initially from the parish. But it will infect the diocese; later it will infect other dioceses and it will spread. Public opinion is not the arbitrator on matters of truth. However public opinion serves as a good barometer in recognising whether actions demonstrate areas of compassion, humility and love. Or alternatively an

*(Continued on page 21)*



## Obedience to Conscience or to the Hierarchical Church

(Continued from page 20)

insistence upon obedience to remain in communion with Rome.

With an informed conscience although one may disagree with church doctrines, it is also possible to remain in communion with the church [2].

This doctrine of the primacy of the adequately informed conscience has been part of the church's moral teaching for centuries. The Second Vatican Council made an important distinction between infallible and non-infallible teachings. "A Catholic who feels compelled to dissent... from infallible teaching... has no option but to sever his connection with the church. **On the other hand, when the question at issue is the obligatory force of non-definitive teaching... then Catholics may dissent from such teaching for serious conscientious reasons and still consider themselves**

**to be in full communion with the church."** [2]

The person listens to what the Church says with great respect, but that's not the be all and end all of the matter. According to Vatican II, in forming one's conscience, a Catholic must pay "due respect" to what the Church teaches (see the *Decree on Religious Liberty-Dignitatis humanae*) [3].

Some of the bishops at the Second Vatican Council wanted a stronger statement i.e. Catholics must obey official teaching. This version was voted down in favour of the softer statement mentioned above. Before he became Pope, Cardinal Ratzinger stated that sometimes a Catholic must follow one's conscience, even when this means disagreeing with the Pope. "Over the Pope as the expression of the binding claim of ecclesiastical authority there still stands one's own conscience, which must be obeyed before all else, if necessary even against the requirement of ecclesiastical authority. Conscience confronts

[the individual] with a supreme and ultimate tribunal, and one which in the last resort is beyond the claim of external social groups, even of the official church." (Pope Benedict XVI [then Archbishop Joseph Ratzinger], *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Vorgrimler, 1968, on *Gaudium et spes*, part 1, chapter 1) [3].

For those who are interested, a collection of pdf files from the internet has been collected on the subject of the informed conscience. Please email [gerardnb@yahoo.com.au](mailto:gerardnb@yahoo.com.au) if you would like these commentaries.

### Footnotes

[1] A Concise Guide to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, Volume Two, by Adrian Hastings, 1969

[2] The Primacy of the Catholic Conscience, by Emmet Costello SJ, [www.costello.au.com/sermons/catholic.html](http://www.costello.au.com/sermons/catholic.html)

[3] The Internal Forum – A Concise Explication, by Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church, [www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/internal\\_forum\\_1.htm](http://www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/internal_forum_1.htm)

Gerard Bromley

## THE HEART OF THE MATTER

**W**e were asked the question at Mass on Sunday, “.....what is St. Mary’s all about?” I pondered this – but not for long – and would like to share with you what St. Mary’s means to me.

I immediately thought of love, support, kindness and generosity.

Towards the end of 2007 I was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma – a form of bone cancer - and spent three weeks in hospital. Members of St. Mary’s community – some I knew and some I didn’t – visited me, sent flowers, cards and

drawings that their children had done for me and on arriving home we even had meals dropped off from time to time.

This support along with many prayers continued throughout 2008 during my radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatments but the best was yet to come.

After not being able to attend St. Mary’s for many months the time came when I felt well enough to ‘go to Mass’. My partner, Chris Harkin, was the greeter on this particular Sunday and after he alerted the



community to the fact that I was actually there, I received a standing ovation to welcome me back. I immediately broke into tears as the members of this wonderful community showed how open and caring they were. Love, kindness, support, generosity – it’s there in abundance for all.

*Chris Roberts*

## TOO PRECIOUS TO BE RELINQUISHED

**T**o put it simply, St Mary’s represents my one hope of remaining within the church.

It’s a place where my faith need not fight with my intellect, where questioning and debate are not only condoned but encouraged. It’s a place where the liturgy has real meaning in our modern age, where the teachings of Jesus see

practical expression, where doctrine doesn’t obscure the truth, where inclusiveness is paramount.

Without St Mary’s there is nowhere for me to go — not within the Catholic Church or, I suspect, within any other church — and I feel sure there are many who feel the same. In some shape or form, our community and all it stands for **must**



survive. It’s too precious to be relinquished.

*Barbara McKenzie*

## MY NEW VISION AND UNDERSTANDING OF GOD.

The more I learn about the new story of creation from contemporary scientists, the more I feel myself in touch with Earth's energies through the ecological movements of today, the more I reclaim the feminine face of the divine, and the more I continue to immerse myself in very ancient wisdoms, the more I realize how deeply my understanding and images of God are changing. God is certainly big – "real big" – much bigger, much more of a mystery, than the God of my childhood

traditional concepts.

I now need a liturgy that helps my new vision of God to grow and not be stifled by formulae set in concrete. I find the sacred in women's rituals, to be sure. But I also need – rather desperately - a new language, a new openness to the unknown, that still resonates with the Christian tradition which is so much a part of me. The Catholic Christian community is my community, my spiritual – and

in so many ways my earthly - tribe. I need a new ritual but I need it within my lifelong spiritual home.

That is basically what St Mary's offers me. I am appreciative of its social justice orientation and I feel a sense of community there. But what keeps me coming there for my regular celebration of the Eucharist is the fact that it does not affront, but rather supports and helps to grow.

*Anne McLay*

## CHRISTMAS AT ST MARY'S



Scenes from the Christmas Story — St M's Style



Putting together the Hampers distributed for Micah by the Community Members



