



SCHOOL BOARD 2019 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Principal's Report

In 1992, Queen Elizabeth II reflected on her year as an 'annus horribilis', a Latin phrase meaning a horrible year. You might be wondering why my report might begin with such a bleak reference but the beginning of 2019 was something of a horribilis experience for St Albert's. During the Christmas holidays the network server decided to crash and on further inspection, discovered the back-up server had also failed. We lost a family to Adelaide and around the same time, the old wooden retaining wall in front of the COLA started to collapse and needed to be completely replaced. Fortunately, this turned out to be a blessing in disguise as it allowed for preparation of the new and much anticipated MkII Sports Shed, a thought-tick that Brogan had been scratching for several years!

2019 was by no means an annus horribilis. In fact in the diocesan year of 'peace be with you', it turned out to be quite the opposite. An upward trend in enrolments, along with a slight increase to federal and state funding, allowed capital projects outlined in our Annual Improvement plan to proceed without delay. By year's end not only had the retaining wall been replaced, remaining spaces around the fairy garden were added to, beautification along Geraldton street boundary completed, and the tired-looking chook yard transformed into a purpose built reflection area and dedicated sacred garden. The completion of these projects brings to a close 4 years of Landscape and Capital planning as overseen by the current school board. Installation of the sacred garden also fulfilled a personal wish to better connect the back perimeter of the church to our school grounds. The Junior Primary Precinct is now bookended by the statue of Mary and St Albert's church and I can't tell you how proud I am of that.

A cluster initiative called *Making Space for Learning Enquiry* was established amongst the four Riverland Catholic Schools. A project many years in the making, the enquiry is designed to look at matters of wellbeing, mindfulness and mental health for young children. It has seen a restructure of our instructional time, particularly those critical moments after transition. Early data would suggest the explicit teaching of a wellbeing curriculum immediately after Recess and/or lunch has both positive and immediate effect. The precursor to this program was looking at the executive functioning of the brain and how we can better regulate our emotions. We are looking at the Mindup Curriculum becoming a permanent feature of our wellbeing program in addition to other programs such as Prayerful Kids and the Biglife Journal. The Making Space for Learning Enquiry is a two-year project and was the catalyst for the appointment of a Wellbeing Coordinator at St Albert's, Mr Brogan Whitelaw, who is now overseeing the initiative.

Data, in all its forms, continues to be one of the key strategic drivers for the Catholic Education Office. It is a means to reflect on current practice and inform future teaching. For our part, Alison Uren has been instrumental in compiling various sources of student data from NAPLAN, PAT and various other Literacy and Numeracy assessment tools. In Alison's words, 'we monitor student growth from year to year and track each student's progress. With this data we are then able to offer students an intervention program and we have supported staff with differentiating curriculum to cater for students working at above the National Standard for their year level. With this data we are also able to see trends across the school and we can use this to inform our teaching.' Data can pose many questions but it is only in consultation with staff that any real purpose of it can be found. There are little humans who sit behind the data; children, whom our staff know exceptionally well. We use our data to allocate resources and shape intervention programs. We use it to celebrate success and plan for the future. Data analytics is an impressive science, but the interpretation of data is an art. It is essential that our staff provide an insight into what the data actually means. What story is it telling? How do we respond? Is there more to the data than meets the eye? Where is the parent voice? And so on. In this golden age of data we are excited at the possibilities that can be revealed to us as educators but mindful of our responsibility to seek a greater truth and meaning behind the numbers.

As mentioned earlier, the school grounds have come in for special attention. Capital works completed in 2019 brings to a close the 4 year Grounds and Maintenance strategic plan. I have honestly lost count the number of times people have commented about how the school has "never looked better". Improvements to perimeter security, including additional and replacement fencing, will be the focus of future plans but for now, I thank all those involved in the realisation of this project especially Andrew Tullet from Creative Pools and Landscaping. The collaboration with Andrew has professionally been very rewarding and was always positive. He often went 'over and above' his contractual obligation which included random visits during his own time to make sure everything was ticking along as it should. Our community is indebted to you.

The AFL Sports Ready program has greatly increased the capacity of the school to employ additional ESO staff. There are financial incentives for the school and the employee is remunerated while accessing their chosen field of study. Alanna Kurtzer has been a light and companion for Victoria Alm, assisting with all manner of things as she goes about her day. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Down Syndrome SA has been astonished with Victoria's extraordinary progress due in no small part to Alanna's care and commitment to her learning and wellbeing. With Chelsea concluding her tenure, we are looking to expand our partnership with the AFL Sports Ready program in 2020.

Something of a rare thing occurred at the end of year as we said farewell and acknowledged the support and dedication of two respected members of staff, Melissa Leach and Chelsea Gutschke.

Chelsea Gutschke joined the staff of St Albert's in 2017 and will be remembered for her boundless enthusiasm for learning and education in addition to many other co-curricular initiatives such Christmas Cards for the Hutt Street Centre, the Fairy Garden Project numerous other endeavours.

Melissa started at St Albert's in the same year as me and took responsibility for the Year 6/7 class for most of that time, before moving to Year 3/4. Melissa was an outstanding practitioner and could speak with great authority about any student in her class. She had an excellent knowledge of curriculum and could apply a variety of pedagogy to suit each child's learning needs.

We thanked Chelsea and Melissa for their commitment in helping our children to grow into confident, capable and caring young men and women and wished them well as they pursue new opportunities in Adelaide and Canberra respectively.

Stalwart of the St Albert's community, WWII Veteran, Knight of the French Legion of Honour, Volunteer and Patriarch to us all, Howard Hendrick was awarded an Order of Australia medal (OAM) for his services to the community. St Albert's was honoured to contribute to the nomination process which began about a year prior. Howard has for many years been a volunteer, parishioner and indeed parent of St Albert's Catholic Parish. We offer our heartfelt congratulations on this most deserving of awards. Howard continues to volunteer his time in the Year 5/6/7 class and regularly tends to his flower bed which surrounds the school administration building.

Chair of the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools, Professor Dennis Ralph, provided updates throughout the year as to what is happening at the State Government level with respect to election promises, funding etc. He reported that although progress is slow, there has been movement at the station. The State Government has agreed to fund schools at 22% of the resource standard. It is as yet uncertain as to what that will mean for St Albert's. They have also agreed to increase the amount of state capital funding to CESA which is considerable improvement on the previous amount of zero. A review of school bus services for non-government schools has been completed and submitted to the Education Minister. We are hopeful of a positive outcome. Professor Ralph and Director Neil McGoran are also lobbying the Government to support SACS Year 7 Transition to High School (Minister Gardner gave over \$50m to public schools for their transition programs).

Despite these small gains at the State level, I would suggest the main focus of our community with regards to local improvement and generational change, is the possibility of a Secondary Catholic School being built here in the Riverland. I think this is the second or third iteration of an idea floated many decades ago. That being said, there is an air of optimism with the current proposal and it certainly has our competitors a little worried! The Riverland has presented an excellent business case such that the project has now been given approval to move to Stage 2. This will involve further consultation, surveys and proposals for land acquisition etc. We anticipate a final recommendation to be made to SACS in March 2020.

As with every year since my appointment, our monthly board meetings are a joy to me. I'm not sure if that's how I'm supposed to feel, but the sentiment remains. Of course it's no accident I feel that way; one look of its membership, the many strengths that each person brings, the affection and love that is collectively held can only be a force for good. The glow that comes from within is the direct result of all of that, and so much more. In closing, I

thank my fellow board members, for your candour, hard work and good humour, especially during the challenging times. Principalship would be a very lonely place without you.

So although our year started with a touch of horribilis, the days weeks and months that followed gave way to measured improvement and numerous triumphs across each of our strategic goals for which our staff, parents and wider community should be justly proud.

Brett Czechowski

Principal