

Chapter 9

A NEW MILLENNIUM & NEW CHALLENGES

THE interregnum following the departure of Fr Andrew Cheesman was protracted: it lasted for ten months. The formal announcement of his retirement had been made a year in advance at the conclusion of his Annual Report to Vestry on 26th March 2000. He had also informed the Archbishop early in the hope that a replacement would be found swiftly with a minimum of disruption to the flow of Parish life.

Protocol demands that formal discussions regarding a new Rector can not be initiated with the Archbishop until the former one has retired. Within days of Fr Andrew's official farewell on 4th March 2001 the Nomination Committee, comprising the Wardens and two members of Vestry, held their first meeting (one of many) with the Archbishop of Adelaide, the Most Reverend Ian George. They went well prepared with a 'wish list' of preferred candidates, but it appears no common ground could be reached between them and the Archbishop.

It was a difficult period for the Archbishop also, with up to eight parishes either vacant or becoming so within the next year. Unless new clergy could be found it would result in a domino effect throughout the Diocese. Once approved by the Archbishop a new priest must then give three months notice to his own parishioners before moving to a new parish.

REVEREND BRIAN SMITH

During interregnums it is usually retired clergy who act as locum tenens, and ever mindful of the well-being of his flock, Fr Andrew was able to arrange for his dear friend Fr Brian Smith to accept this position. Writing in the *Pew Bulletin* on 4th February 2001 he announced: "All will be delighted to learn that the Reverend Brian Smith, a much-loved former Archdeacon of Adelaide, has been licensed by the Archbishop to be locum tenens of the Parish during the forthcoming interregnum."

Fr Brian was well known to many at Mitcham, a strong bond having developed during his years as Rector of the neighbouring Parish of Hawthorn from 1984 to 1992. He also had oversight of the Mitcham Parish when Fr Andrew was on sick leave in January 1993.

The friendship between the two men goes back nearly sixty years. Writing in the *Herald* at Christmas 1997, Fr Andrew recalled:

When asked recently to farewell the former Archdeacon of Adelaide, the Reverend Brian Smith, it came to my mind that we shared origins in common. In the 1940s Brian was a senior choir member and crucifer at St Cuthbert's, Prospect. As probationer choristers we would often roll

marbles along the choir stalls; a look from Brian would at once quell our ardour for this sport.

It was during an evensong sermon when the Rector, H.C. "Birdie" Thrush, was reminiscing about his time in England as an Air Force chaplain that it struck me like a bomb from a Lancaster that one day I would preach from a pulpit. In panic the thought was dismissed, but as often as the notion was suppressed it returned evermore strongly. I wondered whether something similar had happened to Brian Smith, for by now he was announced as a candidate for holy orders. I longed to ask him but could not bring myself to do so. Nevertheless I felt a thrill of pride when Brian led the choir processions and spoke in Sunday School as a student teacher. He was an encouragement and a challenge to a whole generation of St Cuthbert's youth.

Years later I had cause to be grateful to Brian again. Now ordained and a very new Reserve Army chaplain, I was apprenticed to Senior Chaplain Smith. We shared a tent and he gave me much wise counsel and taught me afresh the value of the daily Offices, "the continuing story" he called it. His own example as a chaplain was exemplary; friend of the Commanding Officer whose job he called lonely, he spent the greater part of his time with private soldiers and taught me the art of befriending those of every rank.

This biblical example rubbed off on all chaplains who came under Brian's fatherly care. His archidiaconal oversight will be much missed.

PARISH LIFE DURING THE INTERREGNUM: A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE OLD & THE NEW

As the months passed Mitcham's quest for a suitable Rector broadened beyond the Diocese and State borders. It was the end of September before it was announced that a successful outcome had been achieved.

A measure of the health of any parish is its ability to sustain and develop its activities during periods of change. Mitcham measured up well, with all groups continuing their normal programs. Our scribe completes the story with a series of short e-mails.

4th April 2001

Hi Liz,

After all the excitement and round of farewells leading up to Fr Andrew's final day as our Rector, there was a certain sense of loss and bewilderment once he and Mary had vacated the Rectory. However, Fr Brian Smith has quickly endeared himself to all, as has his charming wife, Laurice [Fig. 9-1]. She is the very epitome of an ideal



Fig. 9-1 Fr Brian Smith and his wife, Laurice, photographed at the 2001 Mid-Winter Dinner. (Meg Nicholls)

parish priest's wife: a very warm and friendly personality, sincere concern for those in need, a ready laugh and an ability to make everyone feel at ease. They live at South Brighton, so have quite a way to travel up to Mitcham.

We know it will take some months to find a new Rector, and we have all been encouraged to pray each day for a good outcome. A special prayer card has been issued and the Wardens have invited parishioners to join them in a prayer vigil to be held at 7.15 a.m. each Friday morning in the Church until a new priest is found. In an unusual move the Wardens placed an advertisement in both the *Advertiser* and the *Australian* on 24th February seeking "Expressions of Interest from clergy who would like to be considered for the position of Rector". It obviously caught the eye of the Editor of the Careers Section of the *Advertiser* for, two weeks later, he featured a half-page coloured photo of Fr Andrew standing before the altar and Morris window.

Meanwhile, Parish life continues. Although there are tenants in the Rectory, Fr Brian is continuing to use the Rector's Office there whenever he is on site. As a measure of his commitment, Fr Brian wishes to be known as 'the parish priest' not 'the locum'. Members of the Parish Council have each taken areas of responsibility for the future and we have volunteers to staff the office each weekday morning between 9.30 and 11.30 a.m. As usual, a lot of the burden has been placed on the broad, but willing, shoulders of our beloved Warden-cum Parish secretary-cum factotum, Meg Nicholls...

18th June 2001

... Last Friday we had our biennial Parish Mid-Winter Dinner in the Hall. The theme, *As Time Goes By*, was devised by Raelene Evans and based on her favourite film *Casablanca*, starring Humphrey Bogart. We were all asked to wear something from the 1940's era. About seventy people attended and it was an outstanding success – both socially and financially – with a profit of \$831 made. The money goes towards assisting the work of the Church Missionary Society, especially our link missionaries, Drs Owen and Mary Lewis. They are South

Australians who are being sent by the CMS to serve under the United Mission in Nepal. They will be seconded to a government teaching hospital in Dharan, East Nepal, where they will be involved in post-graduate training for district hospitals.

The Parish is part of the IT world: we now have our own website. It has been developed by Richard Irving and is very extensive. You will be able to sit at your computer in Surrey and see what we are doing here in that other Mitcham in the Antipodes. The address is: http://www.senet.com.au/~mitchtor/Homepage_intro.html.

30th September 2001

... Good news! At long last a new Rector has been found. His name is Reverend Canon Nigel Mitchell. At present he is Precentor of St George's Cathedral, Perth. When the announcement was made by one of the Wardens at the start of the service today, it was greeted with sustained applause! Being Michaelmas it was a most auspicious time for this to happen, particularly as the whole Parish was worshipping together, there being just the one service at 9.30 a.m. at St Michael's.

But this was not the only good news. As a result of our recent Stewardship Campaign the target of \$123,000 over the next two years has been achieved. A team of thirty-three visitors called on 214 households, of which 160 agreed to participate in the envelope system. However, this amount will not be enough to employ an assistant curate.

One of those serving as a Lay Assistant today for the first time was Murray Evans. At a Special Vestry called by Fr Brian on 12th August, approval was given for both Murray and Martin Day to be appointed as Lay Assistants. Service in the sanctuary is one area of Parish life where there is a great need, in particular for more young people to train as servers. We seem to be down to two or three regulars at present ...

22nd October 2001

... As part of the Australia-wide celebrations to mark the Centenary of Federation, the past week was designated as South Australia's 'special week'. Yesterday was Federation Sunday, and all churches were called upon to offer special thanksgiving prayers. The date traces from Sunday, 21st October 1897 when, as part of one of the inter-colonial pre-Federation conferences, local church leaders asked all South Australians to pray for the success of the 'Yes' vote for Federation.

Even the children are 'getting in on the act'. Our Federal Member, Dr Andrew Southcott (who is a parishioner) presented the Parish with an Australian flag [Fig. 9-2], a book and a CD containing various versions of *Advance Australia Fair* – including one by a group called 'The Wiggles' (pop-stars of the pre-schoolers) – which the children have been learning at the Family Service. These 9.15 a.m. services held each Sunday are still popular, and are organised by Ruth Butler and Holly Runnegar.

Last Saturday the ladies of the Parish provided a luncheon in the Hall for delegates attending a 'Footsteps from Federation' seminar arranged by our Mitcham Historical Society. As a result \$650 was raised for Parish



Fig. 9-2 Dr Andrew Southcott, M.P., presenting an Australian flag to the Parish as part of the Centenary of Federation celebrations in October 2001. Fr Brian Smith looks on while Thomas Fairchild and Taliesin Evans hold the flag. (Ruth Butler)

funds. A similar amount was raised by the Mothers' Union at their 'Federation Fundraiser Feast' held on 11th July. That money went towards a special appeal to buy a 4-wheel drive vehicle for M.U. workers in Kenya.

Now, some more news regarding our incoming Rector. One could easily assume that a member of the clergy from Perth would be most unlikely to have any previous connections with Mitcham. Wrong! In the early 1980s Fr Nigel's parents and brother and sister lived in the house adjoining St Michael's which the Parish had been renting as a curatage. By then Nigel had left home, but his younger brother Paul (who is also a priest in Western Australia) was a member of our Youth Group. Their father is also a priest. But there is more! Fr Nigel's wife, Pru, is the daughter of Fr Bill Goodes, a former Rector of St Columba's, Hawthorn, where they were married. We always joke and say "Adelaide is a small place"!

25th November 2001

... Our magnificent Morris window above the altar is 100 years old. It was dedicated on Advent Sunday, 1st December 1901. In lieu of his sermon next week Fr Brian has invited our Parish Historian to tell parishioners about the window and its generous donors, Robert and Joanna Barr Smith.

Beginning next week Fr Brian is going to introduce us to a new form of liturgy. Services previously using AAPB (*An Australian Prayer Book*) will be changed to APBA (*A Prayer Book for Australia*). Mitcham, I gather, is dragging its feet here, as most other parishes have been using it for some time. Certainly it has been in use at the Cathedral since it was first published in 1995. The former Dean, the Very Reverend David Richardson, was on the Liturgical Commission responsible for the new book.

In the Preface to APBA the Chair of the Commission, Canon Lawrence Bartlett, wrote that it "represents liturgical evolution rather than revolution". He goes on to explain that, when published in 1978, AAPB was expected to have a life of at least ten to fifteen years. It has stood the test of time well. In the meanwhile, Australian society and the Anglican Church have

experienced significant changes. The demand for more contemporary liturgy has grown:

The publication of An Australian Prayerbook in 1978 was a significant step for Australian Anglicans. Prior to that, The Book of Common Prayer had been used for over three hundred years. In Australia, apart from sympathetic deviations in accordance with section 4 of the Constitution, there was little opportunity for flexibility. The quality of that book, however, was such that it had served well...

However, no prayer book is the final word in worship and this will be no exception. It is rather a stage in the progress of the Church designed to meet current needs. The fundamentals remain the same: the expression of those fundamentals must change from generation to generation.

This book contains the words for liturgy, but only the words. Liturgy is more than words. Words provide a framework to encourage worship, but the important thing is the spirit in which the words are used. No prayer book can determine that...

So here we are, facing new challenges at the start of a new Church year (St Michael's 150th) in the first year of a new millennium.

*That's all for now,
Love,
Pamela*

THE INCOMING INCUMBENT: FR NIGEL MITCHELL

In a letter distributed to parishioners at Michaelmas, the following information regarding the new Rector and his family was made available:

Nigel was born in Adelaide in 1960, attended Magill Demonstration School and Concordia College, and trained for the Priesthood at St Barnabas College, Belair. He was ordained in 1984 in the diocese of Ballarat, and served as assistant curate in the parishes of Colac, Horsham and Warrnambool. He was Rector of Heywood from 1987 until 1990, when he moved to Perth to be assistant chaplain at Guildford Grammar School. Four years of school chaplaincy were followed by three years as chaplain to The University of Western Australia, and since 1997 Nigel has been the senior associate Priest at Saint George's Cathedral with particular responsibility for liturgy and music. He has shared the roles of preaching, leading worship, and pastoral care of a large and diverse congregation with the Dean and several associate clergy. Nigel has also had primary responsibility for marriage preparation and ministry to young families, organising services for schools and community groups, and the design and maintenance of the Cathedral website. In 1999 he was elected as a Canon of St George's Cathedral by the Synod of the diocese of Perth.

Education is a strong emphasis of Nigel's work as a Priest. As well as his ministry as a school and university chaplain he has been a sessional lecturer at Edith Cowan University and the Anglican Institute of Theology, and

served on the managing bodies of several educational institutions in the diocese of Perth.

His interests include reading history and cooking, and he shares a love of music and singing with his wife Pru and their fourteen-year-old daughter Clare.

Once the tenants had vacated the Rectory a flurry of activity ensued to prepare the house for its new occupants. When tradesmen had completed the necessary repairs an urgent plea went out to parishioners to assist with the final clean up. Even though it was the New Year's Day, nearly thirty parishioners rolled up their sleeves to help (Fig. 9-3). Everything in sight was scrubbed and polished, the garden weeded and annuals planted. By 2nd January everything was ready for the arrival of the Mitchell family from Perth (Fig. 9-4).

Fr Nigel Mitchell was commissioned as the thirteenth incumbent of St Michael's by Archbishop Ian George on Friday, 18th January 2002 (Fig. 9-5). The service, which included the Eucharist, commenced at 6.30 p.m. to enable families with young children to attend. It concluded with supper in the Hall.

The New Priest's Vestry & Music Room

It had been hoped that a new Priest's vestry would be under construction, if not completed, during the latter part of 2001. In spite of the fact that all necessary approvals had been granted, many frustrating delays were encountered and when tenders were eventually opened in March 2002 the project came in well over budget. It is currently under review (see page 180).

SESQUICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

In July 1997 a Sesquicentenary Committee, chaired by Peter Cooper, was set up to plan a series of events over a four-year period culminating in celebrations in October 2002 to mark the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Church. These included a re-enactment of the laying of the foundation stone on 27th September 1998 and a Bazaar and Street Party on 6th November 1999. Under the title of

Fig. 9-3 Working bee at the Rectory, 1st January 2002. (L. to R.) Tommy Lyon, Beth Mills, Joy Wescombe and Meg Nicholls. (Cicely Bungey)



Fig. 9-4 Fr Nigel Mitchell and family. Both his wife Pru and daughter Clare sing in the St Michael's choir. (Pamela Oborn, 2002)

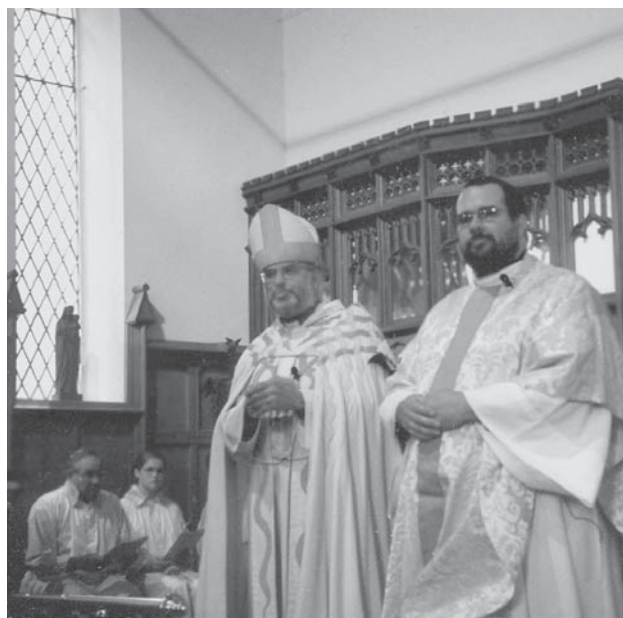
'Mission 2000' various projects concerned with spiritual Outreach and Mission were held during that year.

On Sunday, 29th September 2002 – Michaelmas – special services will be held to mark the 150th Patronal Festival. This will be followed by ten days of celebrations and thanksgiving beginning on Thursday, 17th October – the 150th anniversary of the first service held in 1852 in the Church of St Michael in the Village of Mitcham. God willing, this book detailing 150 years of life in the Parish will be launched during that period.

In his first report to Vestry in February 2002 Fr Nigel Mitchell said:

In October this year we will be celebrating 150 years of Christian worship in St Michael's church. This is an occasion for great rejoicing, and it is also a reminder that we hold these things in trust for those who have gone before, and those who will come after us.

Fig. 9-5 Archbishop Ian George commissioning Fr Nigel Mitchell as the thirteenth incumbent of the Parish of Mitcham on 18th January 2002. (Meg Nicholls)



WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

With so many congregations declining in numbers, the problems associated with the maintenance of buildings and the payment of an adequate stipend to the clergy is becoming increasingly difficult for many parishes to cope with. In March 2000, Fr Andrew Cheesman referred to the Archbishop's challenge to "think strategically" and, where possible, "to co-operate in practical ways with neighbouring parishes". This could lead to a saving of resources, sharing of special skills, growing friendships, strengthened Outreach, and ultimately, "team ministries with structural integration of plant and manpower".

Fr Andrew went on to give several examples, one of which involved Fr Frank Kernot, a former Mitcham curate and presently Rector of Belair:

In the eighties when Fr Frank was at Findon that parish began successfully to embrace Seaton, Flinders and Kidman Park, combining ultimately in the new Parish of the Resurrection sited on Grange Road. An equal sacrifice was made on the part of all four former parishes with the replacement of four much loved buildings by one new church with adjoining hall and parking facilities...

Under the oversight of Archdeacon Barry Davis a similar co-operative effort is currently underway between the parish of Plympton and the neighbouring Edwardstown and Glandore parishes. It is small wonder then that Fr Barry Davis, our Archdeacon, the initiator of PEG as it is known, is encouraging the friendships that have grown in recent months between Mitcham, Unley and Colonel Light Gardens.

Now don't jump to conclusions, there is no operation MUG planned for this area! But we would be foolish indeed if we did not foresee the possibility of like combinations in the future to strengthen and increase flexibility of ministry while reducing overheads which at present exhaust so many dwindling congregations.

In August 2000 the Archbishop called a Lay Forum at All Saints, Colonel Light Gardens, to which Hawthorn and Mitcham parishioners were invited (see page 145). Although over half of the eighty-or-so people who attended

were from Mitcham, it is probably true to say that, deep down, many were more concerned about the future of St Wilfrid's than of All Saints!

At present our daughter church is under-utilised, being used only for a said Eucharist at 7.45 a.m. each Sunday, Evensong at 7 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Sundays, and a 10.30 a.m. Eucharist on Thursdays (except the 2nd, which is a Friendship Service at St Michael's) – in all, about ten hours per week. With the neighbouring parishes of Unley and Colonel Light Gardens both struggling to survive financially, can Mitcham afford to maintain and service two buildings? And what of St Michael's Church itself – her walls continually cracked by moving soil conditions – how will it fare when the next earthquake hits? If it were badly damaged, would it be rebuilt, or would parishioners become part of a large combined district parish serviced by "team ministries with structural integration of plant and manpower"?

* * *

At the conclusion of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1912 the Rector, Albert Wyndham Clappett, summed up life at St Michael's in these words:

True, our Parish Churches cannot compare with the many old parish churches in the home land. Yet what they in their beauty and enrichment are to them, ours are to us. The truth they hold and teach, we hold and teach. The truths our fathers prized, we prize. We have no break in the continuity of the past, in creed or doctrine, in office or in sacrament. Here, we have a shrine set on a hill, beautiful in its aspects, offering its silent and spoken witness to our village and to the passer by...

Again, this church stands in our midst to-day, and it is what it is, because it holds on to and proclaims, through storm and sunshine, through indifference, misunderstanding, through doubt and sin, the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, the doctrine of the living Lord, as revealed in the inspired and written word.

Our commemoration marks no end. 'Tis but a brief period in the flow of time, urging and calling us to go onward from strength to strength.

ST. MICHAEL'S MITCHAM

High on a hill which looked down upon
The dusty streets and lanes they now called home,
The people of Mitcham built their parish church
And named it for St. Michael, who had become
For them a guardian in their journeyings.

They built of local stone a slender Gothic line,
Almost hidden by the trees that surrounded it,
But with a lofty tower that out-topped them all
Foursquare and sturdy and to them inspiring,
Looking westward to the distant seas
That brought them years before to this paradise,
And pointing upward to the Source of all aspiring.

A sad decision later, and "oh, the pity of it",
Forsook the first design, and built a second nave,
Making the church a square; but the Gothic plan
Triumphed in a glorious eastern window
Which filled the church with light and ran
Rivulets of colour, vermillion, green and blue,
Over walls and pews down to the western door.
The central figure of Christ, the shepherd true,
Is flanked by Michael, in warrior armour clad,
And Gabriel with his Ave and flowers of peace.
At the feet of Christ flow the four rivers of Genesis
With his sheep grazing at peace and unconcerned,
Trustful of their Master's all embracing care.

Looking westward from the lofty, narrow porch
Through boughs of clustering trees and shrubs
The line of Gulf St. Vincent shines, blue or grey
In sunshine or in shadow, swept by southern breeze,
The bust of Albert Wyndham Clappett, for six and forty years
Rector of this parish, looks down with lively eyes and Irish wit,
Recalling how he shared the joys, and calmed the fears
Of countless folk, in times of war and peace.

At Mitcham, where the gully winds swirl and blow
Sweeping down from the great Brown Hill beyond
St. Michael's stands a place where we may go,
Where angel faces hover on noiseless wings,
To find the blessing which Christ's presence brings,
Securely held in God's eternal bond.

L.E.W. Renfrey
1999



Bishop Lionel Renfrey after an ordination service at St Peter's Cathedral on 2nd February 1980.

He served as a catechist in the Parish of Mitcham during 1939 and 1940. (MPA)

PART TWO

CHAPTERS ARRANGED BY SUBJECT MATTER

Fig. 10-1

Eastern aspect of
St Michael's Church
and grounds c.1853.

Note the simple
post-and-rail fence
and the rough dirt track
(now Carrick Hill Drive).

The sketch is by Richard
Ernest Minchin (1831–1893)
a noted artist who later
served as the first Director
of the Adelaide Zoological
Gardens. (MPA)



Fig. 10-2

Eastern aspect of
St Michael's Church
and grounds c.1873.

Another sketch by
R.E. Minchin showing
additions and improvements
made over a
twenty-year period.
Construction of the south
nave began in 1863 and
the priest's vestry was
added in 1872.

The pine near the bottom
left-hand corner of the
drawing and some of the
Pencil Pines are still extant.
(MPA)



Fig. 10-3

St Michael's Church c.1909.

The new fence installed in
1875 is backed by a neatly-
trimmed, low olive hedge.

It still stands and is now
over two metres high.
(MLHC)

