

A parishioner reflects...

My links with Our Lady of the Annunciation parish at Pagewood go back quite a few years. When I was a child, though I lived in Randwick, my godparents, Veronica and Juzef Schmiehura, and Veronica's parents lived in Wackett St and we often came to visit them and their children. Juzef worked in the Holden car factory, as did many people in the area and I remember that there was a siren that would go off, telling workers when one shift ended and another began. It was an era when people kept chickens in their backyards and grew vegetables in their garden plots. My godmother was Latvian and my godfather Polish and they kept chickens, grew all kinds of vegetables and pickled cucumbers as many East Europeans do. They had bought a house in Pagewood, as it was a cheaper suburb in those days (the edge of the known universe in Sydney!) and very sandy. There were many migrants from many backgrounds - Maltese, Polish, Italian and Croatian among others and there were many young children in the streets, playing street cricket. And I saw the church up the road from afar and wondered what went on inside this brick building which was built to hold the growing population of Catholics. Little did I know that many years later this would become my parish church. Moving forward to 1995, and I remember 'dropping in' to the church and being touched by its simplicity, its Marian focus and the fact that it was a prayerful parish, being open all day. Anyone could drop in to 'pay a visit' to the Blessed Sacrament and in fact I noticed that quite a few people did. This was different from many churches being locked in the surrounding areas.

As things turned out, I don't quite remember how it happened, I think I volunteered, but I somehow ended up playing the organ in the church, helping out the organist at the time, Mary Walsh who had played there for many years. Mary and I became friends and we shared the duties of playing on Sundays and for special feasts. My idea was I would 'fill in' until another organist came along, as I am not really an organist, I just play the piano a little, but I am still 'filling in' after 22 years! While the children of the local school sing at Masses during the week or at First Holy Communions, I keep 'filling in' on Sundays and other times. During the time I have been there, it has been a privilege to see the wonderful priests serving here - the parish has been particularly blessed with loyal sons of the church coming here, giving us spiritual strength to face the difficult times we live in.

Sometimes strange things happen to organists. As I said, I am not an organist but I have tried to get to know the different stops and buttons on the church organ. Once I must have accidentally pressed a 'Samba' button as whatever I played ended up with a Samba rhythm. I was mortified and prayed like mad to fix the problem and finally realised that this weird button was pressed down and I pushed it up again. In this parish, people like to sing some older and more recent hymns. If there is one favourite it is 'Immaculate Mary we Praise God in You' which usually raises the roof. Another time I was going to play another old favourite 'Nearer My God to Thee' and just as I was about to begin, an acolyte fell down the steps from the altar and had to be helped up. My coming in with this hymn, usually played at funerals, did sound a bit funereal after this dramatic fall, but the acolyte was ok in the end. I recall a lady fainting in the church once and someone ringing the ambulance for her, and it coming and carting her out on a stretcher, all while Mass was going on. I was not playing any music then thank goodness. The priest said, 'Well, if you are going to go to the next world, what better place from which to start', which gave us food for thought. The lady who fainted was fine and stayed in this world a long while.

As this parish is a small one, it has not always been possible to have a large choir and people help out as they can. Whoever wants to, can join in with Christmas carols and

singing at Easter and Lizette Klobuchar is often lead singer for Sunday Masses and feasts. Frances Green has been invaluable organising the music and helping out with singing and various other people have helped with choral singing over the years. We sang carols in Spanish, Italian and I have played Polish ones on the organ to reflect the multicultural nature of the parish. Some Tongans joined the choir for a while and we had the benefit of their robust singing. Maybe we will have some Filippino and Chinese carols soon - we are always open to suggestions!! When I went to school at Brigidine Convent at Randwick all those years ago, little did I think that I would end up playing hymns at Pagewood parish. Life takes its own unexpected twists and turns. Though I have worked as a teacher, psychologist and writer, being the parish organist has been a very meaningful part of my life and it is always a privilege to praise God through music.