

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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ST ALBANS VICTORIA 3021

4th December 2020

PARISH UPDATE 37

Greetings all!

There are end-of-year signs around, aren't there? The early touches of summer (including bushfire warnings); juggling to organise end-of-year parties, graduations, Christmas shopping; puzzling how to celebrate Christmas day given the year we've had and where it has brought us; completing enrolments and staffing at Schools for next year; tentatively planning what 'holidays' in January will mean; and more

For some the 2021 School year has already begun! I was with our CRC Sydenham during the week for celebration of Eucharist which included commissioning of the School leaders for next year. 2021's Year 11s have been welcomed into the College, and set to work already. I feel that some might be calling out 'give us a break!!'. The commitment of our Schools and Colleges is relentless, so focussed on working together for the best possible outcomes for our young people. We will celebrate that at CRC Sydenham on Friday with the formal 'Graduation Ceremony'.

It is so important to celebrate what we have achieved during this year, even as the shape of these gatherings is greatly modified because of the continuing COVID-safe regulations and restrictions.

During the week our season for the Sacrament of Confirmation commenced, again in greatly modified way. We have begun with gatherings of four groups of young Parishioners from our Cana School at Hillside. For those liturgies I wasn't 'Parish Priest', but the 'Archbishop Delegate'. Archbishop Comensoli has given this formal authority to Parish Priests for a limited time to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation, urging us to arrange to share the Sacrament with young Parishioners before the end of this year, in line with restrictions that he has outlined.

They were great ceremonies, with a clear sense that we were participating in something sacred. Our young Parishioners are familiar with the saying 'when good connections are made, something new is created'. They know that in the Sacraments, God becomes more part of their lives, and they become more part of the life of God. With that 'connection' being made in the Sacrament of Confirmation, new parts of life are created for them and within them: this is the role of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

They each named Saints from the long story of our Church whom they have researched and chosen as an inspiration. I enjoyed telling them that when I went to Ballarat for a day last week, I stopped at Gordon for a coffee. By the door – it used to be a pub – there was a plaque telling that 'Mother Teresa of Calcutta slept here'! Inside I asked for the story.

Saints are everywhere – now wherever our young Parishioners live out the life of the Holy Spirit who has been stirred anew in their lives through the Sacrament of Confirmation!

Next week and the following week we will be gathering young Parishioners from Emmaus School at Sydenham and Sacred Heart School at St Albans for the Sacrament.

You might consider including them, their parents, their sponsors and their teachers in your prayer.

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The modifications required by COVID-safe regulations continue to affect our Mass schedule. For this weekend (5-6 December) and during next week, Masses will be at the same times as last weekend and this week – see the attachment with this letter for details. Beginning next weekend times will change. This is to give our Polish Parishioners the opportunity to gather in their customary way. Details of the new times will be in next week's letter.

The next challenge is to organise times for Masses for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Our 're-opening team' is exploring various options that may be possible once we hear of any further easing of numbers announced by the Premier. As soon as we have settled on the schedule for Christmas it will be included in this weekly update and in our Parish website and the newsheet linked from there.

Another end-of-year sign is that we have moved into the season of Advent. Advent, however, Advent is in fact the beginning of a new year already with us in the Church's calendar – we finished Church Year A with the feast of Christ the King, and began Church Year B with last weekend's First Sunday of Advent.

You would have noticed the change to the purple colours on the altar and the Priest's vestments for last weekend's Masses. And the Advent Wreath and Candles.

Notice that the three occasions when we change to purple are occasions of hope and anticipation: Advent for Christmas, Lent for Easter, Sacrament of Reconciliation for the forgiveness of God. There is the case that we could better use three different shades of purple to indicate the particular 'hope and anticipation' that each of these celebrations focusses on. Gardeners would be noticing the purple flowers showing around us on jacaranda trees and agapanthus plants.

Two attachments with this letter offer some reflections and understandings of Advent.

And there is this Advent greeting:

Advent is about learning to wait.

It is about not having to know exactly what is coming tomorrow,
only that whatever it is, God will be there with us.

Every piece of it, some hard, some uplifting,
is the place for the work of God to be alive in us.

We are becoming as we go.

We learn in Advent to stay in the present,
knowing that only the present well lived can possibly lead us
to the fullness of life.

Good Advent-ing!

Maurie Cooney
Parish Priest