

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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8th January 2021

PARISH UPDATE 42

Greetings all!

It's quiet all around, I've found this week. It's that great 'slow gear' mode we go into each year at this time. If only the weather was a little warmer and the sky a little more blue! As Mark Twain, that American novelist, humourist, commentator wrote about Melbourne at the end of the 1800s: 'They talk about the weather so much out there: but no one seems to do much about it!'

We're still cautious and careful, though. The news from other countries' struggle with out-of-control COVID figures begs for our concern and prayers. That keeps us alert to observations and guidance from our local health and government advisers.

Our Parish has purchased 'fogging equipment' for use in our churches, and our re-opening team is trained in its use. It is recommended as an efficient way of sanitising our churches in place of the 'wipe down'. Thank you to everyone who has stayed for a few minutes after each of our Masses to use those wipes – we all appreciate greatly your keeping us safe! The 'fogging' will be done after each Mass – and Baptism and Funeral. Being in indoor spaces, masks are obligatory again in our churches.

Sunday's Feast will be the Baptism of Jesus as his adult ministry begins. Before we leave the Christmas season, there is a blessing on an attachment with this letter, taking last Sunday's feast as its starting point – the 'wise visitors from the East following a Star'. I suggest it could be a good New Year prayer to take some quiet time over its words, holding in that prayer those who are important in your life, and those you are concerned for.

The week before that was the feast of the Holy Family. I hope these January days are giving you an opportunity to enjoy connections and gatherings with family. What an experience, though, for those families in their car cutting their holiday away short and waiting in the car for seven hours at the border!

Family life can have its stresses and burdens in many ways. Included with this letter is information about the 'Family Care Sisters' (formerly known as 'The Grey Sisters'). There are brochures about their ministry in the foyers of our churches, too. The Sisters' key ministry was originally to care for mothers; this was later extended to include all women in need of care.

With the Baptism of Jesus being Sunday's feast, I'm reminded that our RCIA Team (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) is one of our ministry groups whose 2020 was stop-start, zig-zag. The process for guiding adults to Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist is focused on Easter each year, having commenced in the previous August. For the first time in many years the process was unable to get started in 2020: and so there will be no adult Baptisms at Easter 2021. And that stirs the question at the back of my mind: what will Holy Week-Easter look like this year - Palm Sunday is just 11 weeks away?

Our Baptisms for children have resumed, with a busy programme for our Baptism Preparation Team to 'catch up' inside the restrictions with the line of enquiries that stretch back to March last year – and continue to come in. Baptism preparation by ZOOM – who would have thought?

At whatever stage of our lives we were baptised, we have been initiated into the life of Christ and the life of the Church. As much as that is a gift to us, it is also a role we have been given – 'to carry out the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit'. For two Sundays after this one we will have stories of Jesus gathering around him those who will do this with him during his ministry, reminding us that we are those people now and here.

Supporting all gatherings in our churches are our teams of Sacristans, led by Marc at Sacred Heart and Les at Emmaus. They are busy this week packing away the festive Christmas settings for another eleven months. Unseen by most Parishioners, they prepare and follow up every gathering in our churches – Sunday and weekday Masses, Baptisms, Funerals, Weddings; with appropriate 'decoration' for the changing seasons of the Church's year. The atmosphere they provide is a great support and encouragement to our prayer when we gather – thank you!

This weekend we continue the new schedule of Masses, now including a 'visiting Priest'. For January and February that will be Fr Peter Hudson, who has just retired from being Parish Priest of Horsham in western Victoria. Welcome! See an attachment for the times of this new schedule – remember that bookings are essential so that we comply with the number limits for our churches and can cooperate with 'contact tracing' if it ever comes to that.

I'll let you know as a longer term plan for 'visiting Priests' comes together.

Stay calm, keep relaxed – be hopeful and of good spirits!
Blessings to all!

Maurie Cooney
Parish Priest