

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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PARISH UPDATE 50

Hello everyone!

There are more signs that we are recovering into something of a 'normal' turn of life, aren't there. The vaccine will give us reassurance for that, too.

Across our Parish, events that were cancelled last year have reappeared on the calendars. Our Sacred Heart School and our Cana School have students away on camp. So has CRC Sydenham – I'm heading to the Scout Camp at Gembrook (on the other side of the Dandenong Ranges) for Mass with one group on Friday. Once again, I am impressed by the ways in which our Schools and Colleges continue to express that they are *Catholic* communities, including prayer as part of these activities, and setting programmes in place for active engagement beyond themselves to support those in need.

We have celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation with young Parishioners at our Emmaus School during this week. Fr Peter Hudson and Fr Tom Cleary joined us for those three ceremonies. Usually 'First Reconciliation' comes in their Grade 3 year. Having had that opportunity cancelled last year because of COVID restrictions, these are Grade 4 children who will now also celebrate First Eucharist later in the year. We began to 'catch up' with last year's First Eucharist children by celebrating that with our Sacred Heart School young Parishioners at two Masses last weekend.

Restrictions on the size of gatherings in our churches stay in place. In that context, the Archbishop has delegated Parish Priests to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation again this year as was the case in 2020. Plans are under way with our Schools to schedule suitable dates.

Also last weekend we celebrated a wedding at Sacred Heart church; and have a wedding at Emmaus this weekend.

We have 'caught up' with the Baptisms that were postponed from last year. Our Baptism Preparation Team met last week and planned the schedule for our process of preparation and celebration of Baptism for the rest of the year.

Our ministry group for Communion to the Sick – in their homes and at the five Aged Care facilities in our Parish - gathered recently, too. We are waiting for the vaccine roll-out to be completed before we resume regular visits to these Aged Care places. Our home visits are on the basis of all involved being comfortable about that.

Following the Government's release during the week of Reports on Aged Care and on Mental Health, the attached article makes a fundamental point clearly: 'Affirming human dignity for all'.

Our planning for Holy Week and Easter is well under way. See an attachment with this letter for the timetable for Sacred Heart and Emmaus churches. Fr Peter Hudson will be with us for Palm Sunday. Fr Tom Cleary will be with us for Holy Thursday-Good Friday-Easter. Bookings will be required for all these gatherings so that we comply with COVID-safe requirements.

Considering Holy Week suggests that we are moving into the second half of Lent. With the Season coming towards its close, we will have the customary 'Service of Reconciliation' during the Fifth Week of Lent: that formal opportunity to name our need for the forgiveness and grace of God, to hear that gift proclaimed for us, and to plan our 'new way'. These Prayer Services will be followed by the opportunity for the First Rite of the Sacrament of Penance [i.e. 'individual confession']

- Sacred Heart church: Tuesday 23rd March at 7.30pm
- Emmaus church: Thursday 25th March at 7.30pm.

(The First Rite of the Sacrament of Penance continues to be offered on Saturdays at Sacred Heart on Saturdays at 10.30am.)

A major planning exercise is under way for our Good Friday Stations of the Cross procession. Our customary gathering in Alfreida Street was cancelled last year because of COVID. This year we are permitted to gather for a 'private' ceremony on the sports ground by Sacred Heart church – at 11am. Bookings are essential for this, too; and 'signing in' when you arrive.

Amongst that planning, we continue in the middle part of Lent.

Have you been 'giving something up for Lent'? Have you 'taken something up' in its place? Even the simple things in our lives are hard to change. It's hard to give up always having a biscuit or piece of cake with a coffee – not because it is so difficult when I remember to do it, but because it's so much part of my routine; it's a habit; it's just what I do; it's who I am!

Lent is calling us to renewal of 'who we are': people in the image and likeness of God, people who are part of the Body of Christ, people of Christian faith: are there routines and habits in me that I should give up because they are not true to who I am at least trying to be? Are there better attitudes, actions, words that I could take up in their place?

Fast from discontent: feast on thankfulness

Fast from worry: feast on trust

Fast from anger: feast on patience

Fast from self-concern: feast on compassion for others

Fast from bitterness: feast on forgiveness

Fast from discouragement: feast on hope

Fast from media hype: feast on honest reflection

Fast from idle gossip: feast on positive conversation

Fast from problems that overwhelm: feast on prayer that supports.

Keep at Lent - look forward to Easter renewal - blessings!

Maurie Cooney
(Parish Priest)