

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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PARISH UPDATE 41

Greetings all!

A new year opens before us! Blessings of hope and good spirits to you as its start-line is hours away and as we look back over our shoulders to 2020.

One indicator of the year that is passing is that this is letter number 41! Back in March I thought that it might be a good idea, and that I could keep at it for a few weeks and even a month!! Another indicator of where the year took us to is that we gathered about 1,600 people at our ten Christmas Masses – which was 1,000 or more fewer than the number who had gathered for past Christmases.

Nonetheless, there's a relief and thankfulness in the air, isn't there?

There are also serious reminders to continue to be careful – the worsening situation in UK, for example, and many other countries; and from Sydney. Our concern and prayers continue to reach out to those who have not finished 2020 in the healthy condition that Victoria has reached. The scars from the lockdowns still mark people who were impacted directly by the virus during the year. And all of us continue to be regulated by restrictions. 'Be careful, comply, be concerned for one another!'

The New Year starts with a new schedule for weekend Masses for our Parish. Commencing this weekend (2/3 January) our new timetable is:

SACRED HEART CHURCH:

Saturday	5pm (streamed) (Polish language Mass at 9.00am)
Sunday	7.30am 10.30am

EMMAUS CHURCH:

Saturday	6.30pm
Sunday	9am.

Bookings are essential – to ensure that we are complying with the limits that are on our numbers and to facilitate possible 'contact tracing' if that situation arises. See the attachment with this letter for details.

This new schedule of Masses will continue 'for some time'. It is influenced by:

- the requirement to clean the churches and allowing the crowds to disperse after each gathering and before the next group arrives;
- our having one Priest, and the possibility of his 'covering' all Masses if that is required
- the preferences of our people shown in figures for the past month or so.

I am in the process of securing the services of Priests to assist us on weekends. I'm hoping to arrange for a 'pool' of a small number of Priests who will be available for us on a

continuing arrangement – say three: that will enable our people and the Priests to establish some continuing recognition of one another. And it will enable them to ‘spread their wings’ into other Parishes when they’re not rostered for us. I will keep you informed of developments.

I am hoping that at the end of ‘COVID summer’, as it is being called, we will be in a position to reassemble our various ministry groups. That will be the opportunity to re-engage with our community in those well-established ‘tried and true’ ways, to re-form our groups and invite new participation, to offer ‘formation for ministry’ as a refresher or an introduction, to update our records (which now require details expected by the Archdiocese’s – and therefore our Parish’s – policies related to ‘Child Safeguarding’). In the meanwhile, make the most of a more relaxed feel during January!

This Sunday is the Feast of the Epiphany, whose Gospel Reading has ‘wise men from the East’ coming to Bethlehem and then ‘returning to their home country by another way’. They don’t share in the religious and cultural background of the Old Testament people who fill the rest of the story, and still they are people of faith. There is much in this story for our own world – respect, openness, tolerance, searching, ... You may enjoy one of the attachments which offers a light-hearted sketch of their visit, along with sketches of ‘Santa and the real meaning’. Each year I also enjoy bringing out ‘The Fourth Wise Man’ (see another attachment)!

As we head into 2021, let’s remember that the Christmas season has been about God’s commitment to us, so much that God was born into our human experience, becoming part of it. In his ministry Jesus will promise “I will be with you always!” God had spoken this word of hope to the people many times, for example to Joshua when the people emerged from the desert and faced the river Jordan, not knowing what lay ahead of them on the other side:

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

The voice of Yahweh came to the people:

Arise – it is time – and cross the Jordan here, you and this entire people with you, into the land which I am giving my people. As long as you live, no one shall be able to stand in your way: I will not leave you or desert you.

Be strong and stand firm, for you are the ones who will lead others into the Land I swore to your ancestors I would give. Never swerve from this to right or left, and then you will be happy in all you do. Have the book of this Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night.

Be fearless, then, and be confident; for, go where you will, I your God am with you.

Let’s enter 2021 open to God’s blessings that give hope and a boldness to our way!

Maurie Cooney
Parish Priest