

Parish Report to PLDT: December 2022 and January 2023

As we entered December, our eyes and efforts were firmly on the looming great liturgical celebration of Christmas but before we got there, we were kept busy with many other activities of the parish.

We actually began the month with one of our most successful events of some time: the Parish Christmas BBQ. The weather was magnificent, the Brazilians of our parish and their friends were in fine form treating us to a 'real' BBQ and not a sausage-Q' (their words!). Parishioners from all Mass communities, and some who come to us from the Mission participated in so many ways: bringing salads and desserts to share; giving lifts to those who needed it; leading us in song; helping clear-up and package food for people to take home. There was great intermingling and all were certainly welcomed and felt part of a lively community. We can only once again thank those who put in so much effort to make this event work. It was the perfect way to close the year.

All parish committees and outside committees upon which we are represented, met for the last time: PLDT, Liturgy, Discernment Group, Parish-School, RCIA, Small Christian Community; Legion of Mary; Parish Retreat Planning Group, Ignatian Spirituality groups and the City of Port Phillip Multi-Faith Network all busied themselves with winding up their year and putting things in place for 2023.

St Vincent de Paul, with generous contributions from the school and parish, called for parish volunteers to assist in packing and delivering dozens of Christmas hampers, comprising both staple food items and Christmas treats of puddings, custard, chocolates and the like.

The parish workers celebrated the Graduation Mass with St Columba school and supported the Sacred Heart Mission Christmas service.

On the sacramental front, we managed to prepare and confer Eucharist on a small group of parish and school children who had, for one reason or another, missed out on making their sacrament with their cohort. This means they are now on the same level with the others and will make Confirmation with their year level group in the new year. Baptism preparations, the Baptisms themselves and funerals continued in a steady stream. Fr John, Christine and the Legion of Mary were called out for pastoral care and visiting of those with mental and physical ill-health, isolation and loneliness.

Members of the Safeguarding Committee received a visit from the Professional Services Unit of the Archdiocese, now known as the Safeguarding Unit (SU). Discussions were focused around the latest regulations, our compliance to date future requirements. Tamara, the SU Officer took a tour of the office and St Columba Church and was really impressed by how we have visually displayed the Code of Conduct and other information and our efforts to ensure compliance. She reminded us that when we have a parish event, such as the Parish Christmas BBQ or the forthcoming retreat, we must do a Risk Assessment. She also emphasised that our volunteer register must be up-to-date and all volunteers and workers need to have current WWCC and do the online video training: *Safeguarding Essentials*, the latter to be finalised in the first quarter of the year. She advised that the government are now sending out inspectors to do spot-checking on our levels of compliance. We are fortunate that the convenor of our Safeguarding Committee, our administrator, Jane has always been proactive in keeping us at the forefront of training and compliance. Tamara has previously said that we are quite the model for other parishes.

As Christmas rounded on us, preparations were in hand with spiritual offerings of personal and communal reconciliation by Fr John, well-rehearsed Christmas choirs and volunteer rosters well stocked for Christmas Mass ministries. Our four Christmas liturgies all saw full but not overflowing attendance for the varying Masses – Christmas Eve Family Masses with children dressed up as

characters from the Nativity story and Fr John reading a wonderful children's book on: *Today I changed the World* to the Christmas Eve late vigil Mass at Sacred Heart where the use of darkness into light poignantly reflected the joy and hope of the Christmas story, and of course our usual Christmas Day Masses. Hospitality with cake, wine, sandwiches and snacks followed each Mass. We were blessed with several teams who cleaned, set-up, served, collected and transported the catering to the various masses, and then stayed behind to pack everything up. It is activities such as these that indicate the level of vitality and vibrancy of our parish.

As we closed 2022, planning of holiday rosters ensured that the quiet January masses were resourced well and ran smoothly with music and mass ministry. The office staff took turns in taking holidays with Fr John being the last to take a break but not before doing two funerals and two baptisms, and of course pastoral work, which is an endless call.

At the end of January, all office staff had returned, the school year begun and groups and committees are once again filling the Parish House and the parish with activity.

Happy New Year and blessings of good health and happiness to all.