

Parish Report for September 2024

Those who were present at the 9.00 a.m. Mass in early September were witness to a wonderful blessing by Fr John for an inter-faith, inter-cultural couple as they prepare for marriage. The bride-to-be was a proud First Nations Woman and appropriately, Fr John weaved an Acknowledgement of Country into the blessing and stated, in part, that, “While Country is place, it is more. It is family, life, connection and relationship... may your footsteps on this ancient land remind you of creation and connectedness to each other, to family, to community.” It was a joyful, moving blessing. This act of blessing was of great significance to the family. They are not regular attendees at our Masses but that is really irrelevant as one of our ‘bedrocks’ or areas of vital parish life is about welcome, hospitality and belonging. Fr John’s blessing clearly reflected, *Hospes venit, Christus venit* – ‘When a guest comes, Christ comes.’ The spirit of welcome, hospitality and belonging is not an add-on to our parish life – it is our parish life. It is the culture we try very hard to promote, reflected in so many ways, such as, the welcoming at the door is personal and inclusive, the language of the readings and prayers strive to be gender neutral, the opportunity for people in the pews to ask for intercessions during the Prayer of the Faithful, the invitation to all to the after-Mass hospitality – whether for five or for fifty people – the numbers are irrelevant. It is a place where those visiting, those who are homesick, those who feel alone, those who struggle with English, those who live on the margins are all welcomed to the table of hospitality, and we are invited to mingle and chat with one and all as part of this welcoming culture. Having hearts of hospitality leads to practising hospitality.



Storytelling is a powerful way of making connections, evoking emotions while highlighting and bringing the personal into what otherwise may remain an issue that we understand but do not necessarily take into our hearts. With this in mind, we invited three speakers from our community on Migrant and Refugee Sunday to speak about their stories. At St Columba, Emer spoke about how her father first came to this country as an Italian prisoner of war, and despite this, used his gifts of building and connections to make friends. He made some promises to people for the future, and after World War II ended and he was repatriated to Italy, he returned as a free man to fulfil those promises and to pave the way for a better life not only for his family but for many other Italians. Ancita spoke of the great migration journeys that have been part of her family’s history over time. The migration of her immediate family was prompted by riots in India and with the help of some wonderful nuns and St Vincent de Paul, first she and her aunt, then the rest of the family of eleven were beneficiaries of faith, hope and love extended to them, which enabled them to re-establish in a new world with promises for a hopeful future.



Sadly, this was not the case that Sr Brigid Arthur spoke of at the 11.00 a.m. Mass. While many individuals give much support to the work of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP), Sr Brigid pointed out that the legislation that governs refugees and asylum seekers is put into practice in an arbitrary and often, unfair manner which results in, seemingly, indiscriminate visa approvals. This results in devastation, desperation and misery for those who are simply seeking a home where they can rebuild in peace and security. The work of BASP and similar organisations are once again about welcoming the stranger is to welcome Christ.

After conferring the sacrament of First Eucharist upon 16 children, Fr John left us for a month of rest and recuperation. We welcomed a group of Passionist priests as our presiders who were well received and slotted in seamlessly into the rhythm of our parish. They had to cope with a few 'extras', such in-Mass Baptisms, hearing confessions, people wishing to have some private time with them, shortening their homilies to allow speakers in the Masses, and for one, having several photos taken with a large group of very joyful visiting Filipino girls, all seeking blessings! With the absence of Fr John, funerals, one of busiest 'activities' dropped off markedly! From eight in the previous month which had Fr John and the funeral team on the run, to one funeral in the parish and none in the Mission! Quite bizarre.

Weekday Masses became Communion Services managed by Mel, the Spiritual Care Worker in the hostel, Sr Trish at Sacred Heart and Christine at St Columba. Pastoral visits and calls remained quite high with the Pastoral Ministry Leader, community visitors and the Legion of Mary kept busy with multiple visits each week. It is wonderful to see parishioners in outreach activities, either going out to visit those who are home-bound, those who have gone into care and bringing those to Mass who can no longer come by themselves. What a blessing this is to our parish. Those brought along often stay for a coffee and chat and it continues that sense of belonging, even though life's circumstances has changed for them.

The Discernment Group re-gathered to discuss their next step in the journey of formation for our parish over the next ten years. A planned workshop session with the Parish and Leadership Development Team (PLDT) on possible scenarios for the future (scenario planning is a tool for thinking, designed to make an organisation resilient, nimble and responsive to change and unexpected factors because thought has been put into a range of things that might happen), has been postponed until early next year. This is because the PLDT has seen several members step down in the last two months. There is a current invitation to parishioners to consider joining the leadership group. The Discernment Group wants to wait until things settle in the leadership group before proceeding so as to maximise the value of this workshop.

With school holidays and long weekend, there have been less people at masses and many missing from committees. This will all change with everyone returning in October, including Fr John, who we hope is now well-rested and ready for action!