



March 2025 Parish Report

This month signified the beginning of Lent. Ash Wednesday saw two Masses within our parish. In the morning, at St Columba with Fr John, St Columba school students took leading roles in the liturgy and participated well with sung responses from their newly learnt Mass Setting. It's a simple setting for children aimed at encouraging the learning of prayer responses within a Mass. They need a wonderful job in participating. During the evening, Fr Martin presided at Sacred Heart Church to a well-attended Mass, where adults responded with a more adult Mass setting. They did a good job too!

The first Sunday of Lent saw the colours change in the churches and the work of the Liturgy Committee come to fruition through prayer, image and song through the chosen Lenten theme, signifying renewal, conversion and transformation: 'Our Hope: to become, do and change into the fullness of life'. While we have people in the RCIA group either exploring or determined to join our faith tradition, they are not quite ready to go forward this Easter with their initiation. They continue to enjoy the journey of curiosity, understanding and greater encounter with God and Jesus. We also have two children who are wrapping up their RCIA journey of the best part of a year and will be welcomed into our faith over the next few months. They have done really well maintaining their commitment to such a long process.

At our self-termed monthly, 'Brazilian Sunday' at St Columba we were privileged to witness the blessing of two of our favourites, Mizael and Priscila as they prepared to return to Brazil for their wedding in late April. Since joining our community, these two travel regularly from Altona to be part of our masses as readers and singers, volunteers for social events and working bees and many other activities. In fact, most of 'our' Brazilians (all our favourites!) travel from great distances outside our parish boundaries to our Masses, as in their own words, they feel a sense of welcome and belonging among us and they love the homilies of Fr John. We are certainly privileged to have them with us.

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Last year we wondered why there was a dearth of Baptisms in our parish. Was this a new trend due to increased secularisation or a dropping birth rate? It remains a mystery. However, we have seen a turn-around in the first quarter of this year with a resurgence in those seeking infant Baptism conferred at both our 12.30 p.m. Sunday time slot and within the masses. We even had a couple of Baptisms where the prayers written and proclaimed for the children were done in another language. Language doesn't really matter as God is always listening! On the other end of the scale, Fr John and the Spiritual Care Workers of Sacred Heart Mission had a steady stream of funerals and memorials for people from Sacred Heart Mission and Community. Fr John and the team work hard to provide unique, meaningful and powerful farewells to many who, more often than not, have had a life-time of struggle, plus estrangement from families. The team appreciates parishioners who turn up to provide a prayerful, supportive presence. At St Columba, we had one funeral of a long-term, well-loved person resident of Elwood. Her popularity reflected in the huge turn-out at her funeral.

As ANZAC Day approaches in April, the Friends of the Elwood RSL, of which we are members, met to begin planning for the local event, which takes place outside Elwood Sailing Club on the Beach at 9.00 a.m. on ANZAC Day. The Committee is a bit concerned of the timing of ANZAC Day this year. The new school term will open that week on the Tuesday following Easter holidays but ANZAC Day falls on the Friday, providing opportunity for another long weekend. This could affect numbers attending and in numbers joining the Children's Choir. Despite this, planning for a meaningful event of Remembrance with prayer, poem, speakers and music will still be on the program. This year we have decided to reinstitute morning tea after the service. We are fortunate that a student from St Columba Primary has volunteered to do the prayer, which opens the event.

While the St Kilda Ecumenical Group is in abeyance, we have managed to pull together to organise an ecumenical, outdoor service at Bishop's Residence at Christ Church, to be led by First Nations man, Rev Glen Loughrey. Fr John will be part of the prayer ministry and our other responsibility will be managing the after-service hospitality. These ecumenical services have always been inspiring with its unity of God's people among the varying Christian denominations. We are praying for good weather and a great turnout for this rich and diverse spiritual experience.