

February Parish Report to the PLDT

The shortest month of the year did in no way mean it was the least busiest in the parish!



In early February on a Saturday morning, we were at last able to hold a memorial for three women who had a long history of active participation in our parish: two parishioners, Cynthia and Noreen and pastoral worker: Maria. Covid had prevented us honouring their lives in our parish but friends and family welcomed this opportunity and came to pray, to share memories and to mingle afterwards in a potluck lunch. It nourished all present on so many levels.

The following Saturday, our next major event was our Parish Retreat, which we had planning since last September. Thirty people attended from across the various mass going communities, plus some visitors. People listened to the speakers, were led in meditation, took time to ponder in silence, shared personal reflections and met others that they may not have met previously. We left that Saturday feeling hopeful for the health of our parish now and into the future.

Speaking on the health of our parish, our Discernment Group (DG) held its first meeting for the year in February. The group continues to work on Phase One of the Parish Roadmap, which is working towards establishing the framing question that will guide our journey in being the best church God wants us to be. At this meeting we examined the material that been collated from the interviews with the parish leadership group (PLDT) and from which a Framing Question has been proposed. An Issues Report and a Summary version had been prepared and the meeting examined this to consider whether any major issues had been omitted and tweaked with the wording of the Framing Question. This now been sent out to the Leadership Group and they have been asked if they were truly represented in their responses, and whether they see any glaring omissions, plus their thoughts on the framing question. We are now awaiting their responses and after this, any amendments will be made and the Summary Report will be inserted into the newsletter, while the full Issues Report will be made available in hard copy in the churches and digitally on our website, and parishioners will be able to respond, if they wish. This will complete Phase One of the Roadmap, of which there are four phases. The second phase will call on the participation of parishioners via workshops, its focus: 'Developing a Shared Vision of our Ideal Faith Community'.

We have had a couple of celebrations of note. First, despite inclement weather, some parishioners and staff members travelled out to the Holy Cross Centre in Templestowe to bear witness to the final vows into the Order of the Passion and Cross of Sr Karen, who resides in our parish and works as a Spiritual Care worker at Sacred Heart Mission. It was a joyful ritual, guided by the head of their Order, who had travelled from Northern Ireland, and incorporated elements of Karen's heritage along with family members via video messages. Priest members of the Order, plus friends from other parishes in which the Sisters have resided celebrated in presence, prayer and later, gathered around a wonderful meal.

Our other celebration was the Confirmation of one of our RCIA candidates, who is actually a parishioner of St Patricks Mentone but at this time, that parish is not running any RCIA groups. Similarly, our RCIA catechumen (unbaptised) comes to us from another parish, who also are not running any RCIA groups. Our small RCIA group continues to welcome all in a spirit of hospitality and accompaniment on their faith journey.

Our staff and the Legion of Mary joined with school parents and members of the school committees in the celebration of Mass for the Opening of the School Year. It was a wonderful service of prayer,

song and many blessings for the children, not least the preppies embarking on their school journey, the student leaders and the new teaching and supporting staff. A sense of eagerness for the year ahead rose from the gathering of the little school with the big heart!

A week or so later, the school were to join with the Parish again for our Ash Wednesday Mass at St Columba, which took a more 'child-friendly' liturgical focus. The second Ash Wednesday Mass for the day was held at Sacred Heart Church later that morning. Previous to this, the Liturgy Group had met and decided on the parish theme of this year's Lent, which is: 'Being Regathered into Life by God's Mercy in the Community'. As part of expressing this theme in the masses, each week a parishioner(s) has been invited to speak for three minutes on how the Sunday Gospel focus is expressed in their lives. We heard from Jim Finlayson in the first week of Lent on how Jim witnessed to the Word alive in his life through his work last year in Timor-Leste. Aside from this, the Liturgy Committee decided on special focused prayers and symbols. The music sub-committee of the Liturgy Group met to set the Triduum repertoire for our combined Easter choir and rehearsals are well underway. Lenten offerings of reflection groups, prayer resources and online formation have been offered to the parishioners as part of their Lenten focus.

Aside from these 'big-tickets' items, Fr John, staff and community visitors, such as the Legion of Mary and others, have been busy with community visits, pastoral care, funeral preparations and funerals, baptism preparation and baptisms, wedding preparations, specifically tailored sacramental preparation, network gatherings with SKEGS (ecumenical ministers group), Friends of the Elwood RSL (for ANZAC Day celebrations), City of Port Phillip Multi-Faith Network and Common Grace (ecumenical alliance looking at Voice to Parliament); Safeguarding compliance (see Jane's report), professional developments sessions plus an assortment of groups meeting in the Parish House. We welcomed back the Small Christian Community in their first face-to-face meeting since lockdown! They were definitely excited to be back in person!

We have grappled with technological issues a bit this month, especially the fickle zoom room in the Parish House but hopefully this will soon be resolved and we can confidently resume our hybrid meetings (some zooming in, others attending in person). In the meantime, the parish house got a sprucing up with the windows cleaned and new blinds ordered. Thus, by the end of February we are looking good and travelling strong.

Christine
Parish Ministry Leader.