

The Gift of Joy - Regathering Us
Sacred Heart Mission's Christmas Celebration
Sacred Heart Church, Friday 16 December 2021

Reflection given by Karen Englebretsen, new Spiritual Care Worker

Warm welcome to you all, my name is Karen, I am a new member to the Sacred Heart community, growing into the evolving role of spiritual care worker here at the Mission. What a joy it is to be a part of this community and celebration today.

I have been asked to gently introduce the theme of today's celebration - Joy! In preparation for putting a few thought together I came across this quote by theologian G. K. Chesterton.

"Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home".

On reading this I thought - wow, yes, Joy gives birth to hope and we cannot live without hope. For such a small word there is an almighty amount of power in Joy. If ever the world needed joy, it is now! The birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home!!!

I those of those whose paths cross mine each day, just imagine if each individual is celebrated in every home! What a world we would live in, after all aren't we all homeless in one form or another?

Reminding me that joy is an encounter, an encounter that Sacred Heart Mission is built upon. From that first meal given 39 years ago by Father Ernie Smith when he simply opens his door and shared a meal, an act that has been replaying daily ever since.

We gather together on this foundation set in celebration, along with our Christmas season. Christmas is the story of a homeless couple on a journey. It became the journey of joy when Mary gave birth to a baby who we call the Prince of Peace. When we strip away all the Christmas trees, lights, festivity and commercial activities, we are reminded of the simplicity of the first Christmas.

The enforced simplicity of the first Christmas mirrors aspects of the life under Covid restrictions. The relative isolations of our lives also offers space to reflect on what matters most to us. As we look around our community, we can see those who are lonely, marginalised, weary and exhausted from not just the effects of the pandemic but decades of systematic and political failures. I cannot but count it as sheer joy that I, as equally broken, have been entrusted by something greater than myself, to be a little like Mary and Joseph, to be part of the scaffolding for our community, just like the larger team I work with, until we too can find our footing in this complex world that we live in.

(PTO)

I imagine Mary and Joseph's attentiveness to the needs of their newborn in the provision of nutrition and shelter, lavishing him like all new parents do, with encouragement for every little smile, new movement and capturing the wisdom given by their community, all in order to protect him. This is evident all over the Mission, it is in the heart, the Sacred Heart, of the Mission.

As we know, our mission at times feels challenging. To meet individual needs on a case-by-case basis is one thing; to tackle the systemic causes of poverty can seem overwhelming. Yet it is precisely through these efforts that we discover our common ground in solidarity with those who are struggling. In service we work towards a common good and dignity for each human person. And in moments when change of any form comes, oh, the Joy that accompanies it - wow.

In the past few weeks, I have shadowed the Pathway team and Father John around the Mission. Witnessing encounters where joy stirs the heart. As the gates open in the engagement hub, welcoming smiles, another chance to learn new names, listening to stories and forming new connections. Celebrate good news from the sunshine, housing, new friendships, laughter, joke of the day or even hear a joyful musical voice filling the air.

In the morning, the kitchen is a hive of activity, where community comes to life with preparation of restaurant worthy meals for the day. Each meal prepared in equal amounts of care, love and joy.

Adventures in the hostel where art decorates the walls capturing the talent and true expression for those who stay there. Conversations flow, friendships form, enquiry is met with compassion and the walls are built of love, joy and sacredness.

Even a visit to the IT office where I envisaged serious technologically advanced humans to work, was met with a hub of laughter, conversation, even a greeting by an IT worker wearing a Hawaiian flower necklace! Talk about celebration.

Together we stand in joy. Our community is vast yet as unique as everyone is, we are equally as important. Together we create joy and, in this season, let us grow in Chesterton's quote - *"Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home."*

Let us take a moment to reflect on the joy in each of our lives with an invitation to share what brings your joy with each other. On entering the church today you were hopefully given a little box with a piece of paper and pencil. The invitation is to write something that brings you joy ... It can be a memory, an item, a moment, an experience... the beauty is we all experience joy differently. We invite you to turn to your neighbour and share with them what brings your joy.

Now we invite you to come forward with your little box and symbolically unite our joy by placing it on or under the tree.