

From The Rector's Desk

17 February 2021

The Rectory Family:

Introducing, Melinda and I have moved in. Our youngest son Edward is now studying full time at Moore College and residing on campus. Our eldest son Matthew and his wife Einasleigh have the joy of recently becoming parents with the birth of a beautiful baby girl, Dorothy, who arrived the week before the Commencement Service. They live in Wagga. Thomas, our middle, and his partner Nicole have a six month old baby, William and live in Riverstone. They were able to attend the Commencement Service. Thomas has started his own business, air conditioning and refrigeration. The next member living at the Rectory is Millie, a chipoodle. Millie is a small dog and I am organising to further dog-proof the back yard. Melinda is the section manager in sonography at the SAN and is trialling a seven-day working fortnight for the next few months.

Around the Parish:

Thank you to all who have been involved in making Melinda and I welcome to St. John's. We appreciate all the work that was carried out on the Rectory in preparation for whoever the LORD called to become the Rector.

The Service of Commencement was well done, and I appreciate all who were involved in ensuring the service went well. The church was beautifully decorated with the floral displays which highlights the creativity of those involved. One of the guests to this service shared how coming into St. John's was like coming into the "house of God" and enabled her to draw closer to God in worship during the service.

Albeit I was on two weeks leave when Melinda and I moved into the Rectory, I did have the occasions to attend several meetings and started to experience the various aspects of the life of the parish. What a lovely and dedicated group of people who volunteer in the Op Shop. The fellowship between these volunteers is evident. All working together—serving God by serving the local

community. This is not the first time I have been Rector of a parish which included the ministry of an Op Shop. As well as “serving the community”, the Op Shop belongs to the category of a *connecting ministry* between the church and the people of the area. Well done to all who are involved in this work. The Op Shop will be open on Saturday, 27 February. The Wardens and I will review the frequency in March with the Op Shop team and subject to NSW Health information. Let us continue to pray that the Op Shop will be able to return to twice per month sales in April.

Melinda and I watched early one morning the crane and the “cherry picker” move into position. The work was being carried out to reinstall the cross on the church spire. Several times I watched the cross being moved into position. It must have been disheartening to the tradies, engineers and the rest of the team as they came to the decision; the installation could not proceed; it was not quite right; so, the cross will be reinstalled after further modifications are made.

From the Diocese:

On the twelfth of February, Archbishop Glenn wrote:

“As announced last week, an amended Public Health Order was published last night. For our churches, the two most significant relaxations are:

** Masks are no longer compulsory in church. The number of people we can accommodate is now only restricted to one person per 2 m².*

** Weddings and funerals continue to be capped at 300 persons and the number of singers is still recommended as being no more than five, suitably distanced from each other (1.5m) and from the congregation (5m).*

While we still long for the day when we can all sing again in church, our prayers should concentrate upon the containment of the virus, rather than merely the restoration of our previous freedoms. We should also pray for the speedy distribution of the Pfizer vaccine, the one approved vaccine in Australia, as part of our prayers for the elimination of COVID-19 on our shores. Meanwhile, Christians in other parts of the world are struggling with COVID-19. I would appreciate you remembering in your prayers our brothers and sisters in Myanmar. Archbishop Stephen Than Myint Oo is a friend of Sydney and I have assured him of our prayers for wisdom and grace in the challenging circumstances of leading his people in the wake of an army coup.”

Sunday Services:

After receiving the letter from the Archbishop, the Wardens and I are delighted that the parish of St. John's will return to having both morning services in-person. It is important to note:

- * The wearing of masks is no longer compulsory in church—it is now your choice.
- * The number of people we can accommodate is now only restricted to one person per 2m².
- * No congregational singing.
- * Whilst “mingling” inside the church is still not permitted—the congregation no longer has to remain seated throughout the service. This means that we will return to distribution of the Host from the chancel steps with queueing in the side aisles, following the red crosses on the floor for social distancing.
- * Various aspects of the liturgy can now be said by the people (not sung at this stage).
- * The 9:30AM service will be in-person and also live-streamed via Facebook.
- * The Wardens greatly appreciate and strongly encourage you to continue using electronic funds transfer via your on-line banking to make your offertory, as this provides for minimum volunteer and staff time and greatly improves budgeting. However, as from this Sunday, at the request of some parishioners, a retiring offertory plate will be in the narthex for a cash offertory. (This will not be handled on the day, but will be disinfected and left in a zip-locked bag in the church safe for at least 72 hours to eliminate the virus before being counted later in the following week.)

What a joy it is to have both morning services open, especially as we now move into the season of Lent. I would remind everyone that if you personally at any time feel uncomfortable in being in a crowd until the COVID-19 vaccines have been rolled out, it is appropriate to watch the service on-line.

The pandemic is not over—this is evident by the recent action taken by the Victorian state government to try and keep their people safe. If there are changes in the NSW Health restrictions that are directed at “places of faith”, whether they be reinforced or further released, we will continue to let you know. I personally appreciate and respect the good leadership and directions given by the Archbishop during the pandemic.

Bishop Michael's Bible Study:

Following a “false start” due to communication problems with Bishop Michael (who was in remote areas of North Queensland) last Thursday—we will recommence our studies of the Book of Revelation this Thursday. Having said that—the group embarked on a fascinating journey in the absence of Bishop Michael—as a number related their faith journeys and the integration of their faith and relationship with God within their professional and day-to-day lives. I am personally looking forward to what will be an encouraging and stimulating group.

From the Scriptures:

On Tuesday, I conducted a funeral of a faithful and long-term parishioner of St. Paul's, Wahroonga. I had been ministering to him since Christmas. Whilst preparing for his Service of Thanksgiving, I reflected on the beautiful phrase “fallen asleep”.

“Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have **fallen asleep**.” 1st Corinthians 15:20

Have you noticed that when the New Testament writers refer to brothers and sisters who have died, they use the beautiful phrase *fallen asleep*. This is not because they wanted in some way to sanitise death or deny the reality of death. Death was real. For the writers of the New Testament, crucifixions were common occurrences as they were living under Roman occupation. Experiencing people dying was an ever-present reality.

The New Testament writers employed the term to reinforce that death was no longer the final say.

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”
She said to him, “Yes, Lord: I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.” John 11:25-27

In the funeral liturgy, the above quote attributed to Jesus by the Apostle John is often used. Yet at first glance, it seems something is wrong. *Though he die, yet shall he live*; the evidence points to the resurrection and we can agree with that statement. But what about *whoever lives and believes in me shall never die?*

I heard it suggested that John must not have recorded “Jesus words” correctly. I do not agree with that suggestion or assertion: the question that really needs to be asked is: “What did Jesus mean when he spoke those words, *shall never die?*”

Theologically, we know that death has no more dominion over the people of God. The New Testament writers obeyed Jesus’ teaching. They developed and employed the phrase “*fallen asleep*” to try and explain that the believer “**will never die**”. He/she has fallen asleep and will be raised to life eternal. That is why we say in the Creed—we look for the resurrection of the dead. I personally find the following verse from 1st Thessalonians 4:14 able to explain this reality:

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again,
even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those
who have **fallen asleep**.

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