

17 December 2020

Dear Friends

Welcome to our latest weekly newsletter.

I am thankful to Susanna Denham for the music and the flowers, Denise Brown for the prayers and assisting at the altar, Edith Hoy and Marea Niland for advancing the slides and Lynn Mulley for the Pew Sheet. Services at St John's coming up will be as follows:

Holy Communion

- Saturday at 6pm – **19 December 2020**
- Sunday at 9am – **20 December 2020**
- Wednesday at 9am – **23 December 2020**
- Wednesday at 6pm – **23 December 2020 – Blue Christmas**
- Thursday at 6pm – **24 December 2020 – Christmas Eve Family Service**
- Thursday at 11:30pm – **24 December 2020 – Midnight Mass**
- Friday at 9am – **25 December 2020 – Christmas Day Eucharist**
- Morning Prayer – livestreamed daily at 8am – Tuesday to Saturday
- Evening Prayer – livestreamed daily at 5pm – Tuesday to Saturday

May I take this opportunity of thanking everyone for your continuing support throughout this difficult year – for wearing masks when we as Church seem to be the only place where they are worn; for being adaptable in how we have had to do things, and for being a part of the changes we have needed to make during this year. From an administration point of view there are times when I seem to be drowning in paperwork – but we get through it. There is an old saying – “Many times in the Bible it says, ‘it shall come to pass ... nowhere does it say it shall come to stay!’” The signs are promising that we are coming out of this difficult time – but we must continue to be on our guard – the old ‘short-term pain for long-term gain’ – so, whilst there has not been an outbreak in the Hunter-New England health district for over 4 months, we need to be ever vigilant.

It is good to be singing hymns again at Church. The hymns will be on the screens. Latest advice from the NSW Department of Health and the Diocese is that we should wear masks to protect the health and well-being of others when we do. There will be signs placed at Church as follows:

**Our concern is for the health and wellbeing of all people who come to this church. Together we can help make our community and our church COVID-19 safe. “In order to ensure the health and wellbeing of other people, NSW Health advises that members of the congregation should wear a face mask when they are singing.” Thank you for your understanding as we implement COVID-Safe worship practices.**

There has been some discussion as to the rules we need to follow at Church that don't seem to be followed in other areas of our community. The rules we are following are those from the NSW Department of Health and are important for the age-group of our congregations. As you are aware, mask wearing is not mandatory; but is **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED** because we take, as a Church, the health, safety and well-being of all who attend, seriously.

Everyone realises that “contact-tracing” is very important in the management of COVID-19 – and it's up to us to play our part. The recent outbreak in the Northern Beaches area of Sydney is testament to this. If you are part of a group and meet at the Church or Parish Ministry Centre, I need you to provide me with a list of attendees and their phone numbers on the same day of the meeting. The QR code comes into play here too. It is important, too that chairs and tables used be wiped with disinfectant at the end of the meeting. Cleaning products are stored in the accessible toilet. We have been told that we are all in this together. So, I am asking that we all play our part in keeping our church COVID-safe. I met with a group of people yesterday in the PMC and at the end, we wiped the table and the chairs used. It doesn't take long and assists greatly. So, what we need is for someone in each group who meets to act as a COVID Marshall to ask the questions that need to be asked and make sure the appropriate contact-tracing records are kept.

If you have a smartphone – whether an ANDROID or I-Phone, I encourage you to download the “**Service NSW app**” onto that phone please. We began using the QR-code recently. Some people have asked me about CHECKING OUT after they had checked in. Only through using the Service NSW app, I have discovered that there is an option to go back to a previous check-in, and check-out. I'm happy to show people this if you haven't already discovered it yourself.

It was decided at our recent Parish Meeting that from the first Sunday in February 2021 that we would return to 2 services on a Sunday – 8am and 10am.

Thank you for continuing to support our parish financially. It is important that we all continue to support the Church through our giving. If you have internet access, you might like to consider making a direct deposit into our parish account. Thank you to those who already use this method. The parish account details are as follows: BSB 705-077 and the Account Number is 00041040 – and our account is with the Anglican Savings and Development Fund. If you don't have internet access or prefer not to give electronically, give our Treasurer Edith a call and she can work with you on the best way to do this.

If you would like to explore what's available in studying the bible more or praying more, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or by text message – 0401 061 789, Facebook Messenger, or email – [frsteve@bigpond.com](mailto:frsteve@bigpond.com)

**Prayer points for this week:**

- A continued and sustained reduction in the spread of the coronavirus around our nation.
- Those who travel on our roads
- May we all continue to **patiently and diligently obey** the directions of the health department and use caution in all our dealings
- Peace between and within countries in our world and increasing respect for and between people
- Children to be brought for baptism and their families
- For politicians and their advisors, to be guided to get the appropriate balance between Public Health needs and the needs of the economy
- **People who are on our parish prayer list and those who mourn**

Under the heading: “**Bliss**”, I was directed to Song of Songs 8:10 – “*I am now a form wall of protection for others, guarding them from harm. This is how He sees me – I am the one who brings Him bliss, finding favour in His eyes*”

Think about this: we bring the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sheer bliss. Before we continue to read, give this truth a couple of moments to sink in. We delight GOD's heart, and He is not disappointed with us. When He thinks of us, He is stirred with joy. GOD does not mark us by our failures. He sees us through the sacrifice of perfect love. Even when we are displeased with ourselves, He's standing with His arms wide open, ready to flood us with grace. We are our own worst critics. We judge ourselves much more harshly than the LORD does. Remember, He sees us with the finished product in mind. He doesn't look at us and wonder how He will ever mature us to the point of perfection. Even when He corrects us, it's done with the conviction of tender love. It is with pleasure that He knows us. And He truly knows us – more than anyone else in the world – and we still bring Him joy.

*Father, if I truly bring you bliss, and I know I do, then come close. Let's spend the day together. All that is good and pleasing in Your sight is a gift from you. I can't even take credit for the love I love you with! Thank you for loving me so completely and giving me the honour of loving You. Amen*

*The Divine Romance – 365 Days meditating on the Song of Songs – Brian Simmons and Gretchen Rodriguez*

I have celebrated a couple of anniversaries recently:

30 November – 8 years as a Priest

14 December – 9 years as a Deacon

18 December – Marea and I married for 38 years

May GOD richly bless you as you journey with Him this week and may all the blessings of Christmas be upon you.

Fr Steve