Issue No.14 June 2020

The Eyrie

St John's Catholic Parish Heidelberg

Let your heart sing!

Fr Mario

Dear St John's parish family,

These are the last days of being here with you in Heidelberg. There are so many things to talk about and share before I leave, the problem is where to start and how to put words to my emotions. A dear friend suggested that I simply *'let my heart sing and it will be great.'* I have never been any good at singing, but I reckon this time I will manage!

As I shared on other occasions, seven years ago I had absolutely no idea where Heidelberg was. When asked I probably would have answered that it was a city in Germany! I arrived back in the country from Manila in September and Archbishop Hart asked me to come and support you until a permanent parish priest could be found for St John's. That is how the adventure started and three months turned into just short of seven magnificent years.

When I came to St John's I knew no one here, it was all new to me, parish, primary school, two regional colleges, a few hospitals, and the rest! I admit the beginning was a bit challenging, trying to put my head around this new environment. It only took a few days for strangers started knocking on the parish house door, and a few moments later left as friends. The list of friends did not take long to grow and I soon found my new family here. I still laugh at some of the incidents that happened in those first few weeks until I got the hang of doing things the Heidelberg way. On the very first evening, as I was being shown around the church and locking up for the night, I went into the 'nuns' chapel' and, with the intention of locking, I turned the knob on the door. A voice behind me reprimanded: 'You have unlocked it now!' I remember this small incident every time I go to lock that door.

(Un)fortunately we all have different characters, and Fr Ted and I, apart from a twenty-five year difference in age, did things quite differently, and people had to get used to my quirky way of doing things. I thank God that Fr Gentle Ted hung around and supported my leadership. I truly appreciate his friendship and respect.

One thing I always enjoyed doing in BC years (before Corona), was to hi-5 children as I walked down the aisle. It is a very simple way of connecting with children and making them feel important. Soon enough some adults also started to raise their hand for a hi-5, one of these was Sylvia Cross! At her funeral her husband Jim told us that my hi-5s won Sylvia over as a friend!

...continued on next page

Every Monday morning, at 8:30, I walked over to the school yard to welcome our beautiful students at the beginning of a school week. Yes, you guessed it, there were lots of hi-5s to go around with school children, their younger siblings and their parents. This was a great way to get to know children and their parents. I had many deep conversations with school parents both on Monday mornings, and on other occasions.

Monday was my 'school day.' After my morning Mass the first item on my agenda was my weekly catch-up with the principal, the religious education leader, and other members of staff. I enjoyed hearing about the good news coming from our parish school, it made me very proud of the good work that was happening all the time in our parish. At times I tried to visit some classrooms and chat with the students, teachers soon got used to my unannounced visits at any time of the day! At other times we had school Masses, level Masses or class Masses.

At times I was called upon to celebrate with OLMC and Marcellin College. At Marcellin I was part of a group of priests providing Mass every Thursday. Both colleges always welcomed me as a friend and I totally enjoyed working with principals, staff and students.

The hospitals were never too far and, although I will not miss my pager or my night calls, I thoroughly enjoyed my hospital visits and visits to our nursing homes. Once again I often had many deep conversations with patients, family members, members of staff and members of the spiritual care department. I made some good friends at the hospitals. Most of my calls were to the palliative ward in the Olivia Newton-John Centre. My visits were so regular that when I rang the ward, I had no need to introduce myself, I recognised their voices and they recognised mine! At the hospitals and the nursing homes I was assisted by many other priests and parishioners who worked hard to give a good service to the patients.

The next part of my ministry was meeting with people, preparing for the sacraments or asking for some advice. Journeying with parishioners, listening to their stories and sharing their experiences is a most beautiful part of my ministry. At times I was also invited to parishioners' homes for a home blessing, a prayer or a delicious meal. Meals are an ideal opportunity to get to know each other, to share experiences and to build friendships. It is always easier to relate to people after having shared a meal with them. On my first Saturday in the parish I told parishioners that I liked to be invited for a meal with families. In the front seat were two young boys together with their parents; they happened to be visiting their grandmother, a parishioner, for the weekend. No sooner had I gone back to the parish house, the phone rang, and I was asked to go over for a meal! Not a bad start at all!

My work was made easier with the help of a very efficient parish secretary, a top class master chef, the various members on the parish council and finance committee, the pastoral team and the many many other parish volunteers who stepped forward in one way or another to offer their ministry. Thank you all for your patience with me. Discussions always took their time until we could reach a consensus and tried to journey on together as a united body. The four parishioners who served as parish council chairpersons and the chair of the finance committee deserve a special mention. They often worked behind the scenes, but that is where work really happens! I was often carried, and always greatly supported, by these wonderful people who I

cannot help but call them dear friends!

The highlight of my week was always the weekend Masses, which I shared with Fr Ted. It was always a great joy to watch the community come together in the Father's house to celebrate as one big family. In our community we come together from different spheres of life and different ages; we had young children only a few days old and parishioners who had already celebrated their ninetieth birthday! All came together and all raised their voices as one. The younger children praised God in tongues while older parishioners used words we could understand!

Dear sisters and brothers, it is not easy to leave home! But, as we all know, there is always a time to say goodbye. I have avoided mentioning names, because there are too many to mention, but I will carry with me very many beautiful memories and friendships. I totally enjoyed every moment of my stay in your home.

Thank you!

Blessings and thanks

The Parish Council

St John's Parish Heidelberg has been blessed over the years with shepherds that give their all to tend their flock and in that tradition Fr Mario you have excelled.

With your missionary zeal you arrived to help us in our time of need with Fr Ted ill and then retiring. Carlene and I greeted you as we happened upon you when we were checking things were in order for our new priest. Your smile and pleasure at seeing some of your new parishioners was delightful and hasn't changed.

To know him is to love him. We have grown to love and know you as a friend and loving shepherd over the past seven years. As parishioners each time we get a new priest there are those who welcome the change, those who don't want the change and those who work with the change and accept the new priest and their way of doing things.

Fr Mario we have much to thank you for..... the way you have given yourself so lovingly and generously adding so much to the spiritual journey of us all – old and young alike. You encouraged many more to be part of our parish ministries.

You brought a special greeting for children – one they treasure and understand in the form of your hi-5. Watching little ones move to the end of the pew to get your special love and smile has been a delight. The bond you created with the school staff and the children has assisted in the unity of parish and school and the children's journey in faith, love and friendship.

As your parish family..... we were able to share in celebrations including your 50th Birthday and your 25th Anniversary of Ordination. Both were very special occasions and true cause for celebration. Your energy is hard to keep up with at times and you put so much into our Eucharistic Celebrations especially at Christmas and Easter. Every detail is thought through and preparation made to enhance these special times for us- you even made readers and ministers come for practice beforehand!

You have understood..... valued and maintained our historic church and buildings. You have tended the gardens and seen our new meeting rooms in the parish house come to fruition; they are now well used and welcoming. You agreed we needed a screen in the church (which can be nicely tucked away when not in use) and now it is there. You are the one that has done all the prep with the presentation before each Sunday Mass and celebration to ensure the flow of slides present well for us, match the readings, hymns and music played.

Your homilies .....are alive (do not go on too long!) and your sharing of the gospels with us has given us great insight into Christ's message, what it means for us in today's life and times and how we can bring Christ to life in our parish, community and our onward journey.

May you know that on your onward journey you have our prayers, our friendship and our love going with you. We will miss Mario the friend, Fr Mario our shepherd and your smile. Your St John's Heidelberg Parish Family wish you happiness, strength, peace and love in all you do.

Michelle Robertson, Chris Ratnayake, Maureen Hegarty, Michelle Penson.
(Past and present Chairs of the Parish Council – on behalf of the parish)

We respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri People and their Elders past and present, the traditional custodians of this land on which our church and school stand. The St John's Community joins together in solidarity with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, working for justice and reconciliation.

FAREWELL MESSAGES

Mario you have always been so gracious and welcoming to me since I retired from full time work. I have appreciated it and am very grateful to you. Your welcoming approach has allowed me to feel useful and keep in touch with people I have known for many years. You have brought people on board in many areas of parish life and ministries. You have seen people and things through fresh eyes and attracted people I could never have attracted.

The overheads in the church are a great innovation.

Each of us is called to be a missionary wherever we are but there is something more in being a missionary in a foreign country like the Philippines.

I wish you well for the next few months and every blessing for your new ministry in the Philippines

God bless you – Your brother in Christ , Ted Teal.

The pager goes off at 3:20am. End of life care/last rites has been requested by the family of a patient dying in the Austin hospital. A nurse anxiously awaits a phone call to say that the priest can come in – when she hears Fr Mario's voice, she relaxes and goes to reassure the family that a priest is on his way. When Fr Mario arrives he shares a gentle joke and some kind, supportive words with the staff before greeting the family and patient. He is not just there to perform a rite. He is there to pastorally care for them all in their time of suffering and grief, embodying Jesus' love and compassion for them. Even though he is tired and sleep-deprived, he takes the time to listen to their stories, to get to know the patient who is nearing the end of life. When he finishes, he leaves behind a family who have experienced God's comfort and mercy, and grateful staff members who are reminded that spiritual and religious needs are so fundamental at times like this.

Fr Mario has been integral to the pastoral and spiritual care ministry of Austin Health over the past six years. His calm, pastoral presence has been valued by staff, patients and families alike and his sense of humour and capacity for teamwork has helped build very successful relationships within the Pastoral Care Department and on wards such as the palliative care ward. Many nursing staff have spoken of his care for them and the renewed respect

they have for the priesthood and the Catholic church because of their encounters with him. Fr Mario's capacity to work with the administrative complexities of hospital administration has made my role as manager so much easier and I have enjoyed his collegiality immensely. His commitment to Sunday masses at Austin and Repat and his engaging manner in leading liturgy have brought comfort and hope to those stuck in hospital.

Fr Mario, you will be dearly missed here at Austin and we thank you for all that you have offered us in your ministry – we have been blessed!

Sue Westhorp

Manager, Spiritual Care
Austin Health

Dear Fr Mario

I do so hope you get this message. All of us at Ward 8 South will miss you so much. Thank you for all you have done for our patients and their families. We will miss your smiling face and good humour. Wishing you all the best and many blessings.

Hilary and the Ward 8 South Team

Austin Health

FAREWELL MESSAGES

Fr Mario arrived in Heidelberg not long after Juliet, our youngest, was born. We have had the real privilege of growing in faith and friendship with him since. Many parishioners will have witnessed the special bond that Mario and Juliet have shared from when she was a small baby to the little lady she is today. Alexandra, Liam, Juliet and ourselves have enjoyed the times we have shared with Mario from regular weekend Masses, sacraments, Christmas dinners, movie nights and games through to sharing a 'Mars bar' cake for his birthday recently. We are sure the time we've spent together, in particular those meals prepared by our children, will provide him with many fond memories he will carry on from Heidelberg.
Mario's new undertaking to work in the Philippines is where he feels called to now. We are excited for him and we wish him well. Until the next time our paths cross, we will grow our friendship from afar.

Farewell and smile often.

Daly Family

Father Mario has been an important part of our journey as a family, he has seen us grow from a married couple to a family of five over the last few years. He has always made us feel welcomed at church and encouraged us to attend mass with our little ones, especially when this has felt like such a difficult thing to do for us as parents. Thank you Father for your love towards our family, we will certainly miss the high fives and the cheerful hellos every Sunday after mass, and we will forever cherish the beautiful memories of our children being 'baby Jesus' in your Christmas masses. All the best and may God bless always.

Hernandez Family

Over the past seven years I have been fortunate to know Fr Mario as an employer, parish priest, friend and mentor. I will truly miss him in each of these facets of my daily life.

As an employee I have been encouraged and supported by Fr Mario to share my faith with my students. In his role as Parish Priest, Fr Mario has broken open the word of God through his insightful and "user friendly" homilies. He preaches of acceptance of all and he lives that message and he reminds me that LOVE of God and others is the ultimate way to be truly faithful.

My most treasured times with my friend and mentor, Mario are during our two mission trips to the Philippines where his Missionary Society of Saint Paul charism was so very evident. During these special weeks I walked with a humble man who accepts all and extends his kindness, love and acceptance to those who are vulnerable and hurting. There are no fancy robes or titles, just my friend, Mario who gets in and gets his hands dirty. He listens to and encourages those in need and is passionate about every facet of his ministry.

I am so very grateful to call him a friend of both mine and my family and know that the people of the Philippines are so very lucky to be getting him.

Sue Lew Kee

When Fr Mario joined the parish it didn't take us long to grow close to him and when we heard the announcement that he was staying with the parish we were delighted. Our wedding was one of the first he celebrated at the parish and he made our wedding mass so personal and special for us. More recently he baptised our first son Leo, we have truly been blessed to share these sacraments with him. We have been nourished by the sermons at each mass helping us to understand God's word better and we have be blessed by his friendship. We are thankful the he welcomed us into the life of the parish and into his heart. We will miss him and wish him all the best in the Philippines.

Bernadette, Tatenda and Leo

FAREWELL MESSAGES

Thank you for your contribution to the life of St John's Catholic Parish Heidelberg. On behalf of the Parish Finance Committee we have valued your financial expertise and guidance you have made to St Johns. We have appreciated your input to and support of the Committee.

The results of your stewardship are evident in the improvements made to the parish house and meeting rooms. We regret that you are not here long enough to continue with the plans you had in mind to preserve our wonderful heritage listed church.

Outside the scope of our Committee, we say a sincere "thank you" for the contribution you have made to the spirituality in our parish.

Mario you have left us with so much and we are grateful. We will miss you.

On behalf of the Finance Committee.

Des O'Brien, Chair

As President of the tennis club it has been an absolute pleasure to work with Fr Mario. Early on we agreed that a mutual objective was to further improve the interconnectivity between the Parish, school and tennis club. Mario has been exceptionally supportive of the Tennis Club in progressing with initiatives such as affiliation with Tennis Victoria, the appointment of a new Club Coach and future plans to improve the security and landscaping of the club. The tennis club has an active volunteer base that contributes enormously to the many competition, social and fundraising activities that encourage participation of juniors and adults in our Parish Community.
It was great to have Mario in attendance last year at our Inaugural Social Dinner Dance and his support each year at our Annual General Meeting is always appreciated.
Previous Club President of 10 years, Des O'Brien had already created a solid relationship with Fr Mario that allowed us to build on an already solid foundation. We have tried many times to get Fr Mario onto the court without success. Perhaps it may happen prior to his departure!
Many thanks Mario for your genuine guidance and support. The entire tennis community at St John's wishes you every success in your next endeavour.
Best Wishes,

Paul Marcon

President SJCTC

The St John's Netball club evolved into an official association in 2017. Built on a foundation forged from the dedication and efforts of many past parents who delivered a netball experience to hundreds of students from St Johns for at least the past 40 years.

We strive to bring our community together in sport and enable all our members to achieve their best and as an organisation we have grown in strength over recent years with support from the Parish and School through our now formal partnership.

Fr Mario has been an integral support enabled the registration of title as St John's Heidelberg Netball Club, enabling the club to gain bank accounts and supported the club through auspice for funding opportunities which has enabled the club to gain a strong financial position

We wish Fr Mario every success in his life's new chapter.

Trevor Robertson

President
St John's Netball Club

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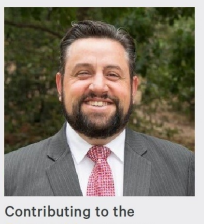

Contributing to the Communities we serve.

CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

With some sadness, I wish Fr Mario God's choicest *blessings as he takes leave of his ministry at St John's Heidelberg or in Mario's Maltese accent, "Heidillbegg".*

During, his time in "Heidillbegg", Fr Mario has been a great friend to the priests of the area. We all enjoy his company. He is a bit of a stirrer but if you were in a difficult situation, you would be comfortable that Fr Mario is in your corner. For two years, he well represented the North East priests on the Archbishop's Council of Priests and he has been a solid participant in the Yarra Deanery. He has sought to collaborate with local priests on a number of projects,

Fr Mario has been very entrepreneurial on behalf of St John's parish and he has wished to set the parish on firm financial footing for the future.

A fruit of Fr Mario's ministry at St John's, "Heidillbegg", has been the energetic adult formation programs that Fr Mario has regularly cultivated bringing in speakers and programs to enrich the faith life of the people of the parish and beyond.

There is no doubt that he has been a fantastic chaplain to the Austin Health Group. Nothing has ever been too much trouble for Fr Mario. The numbers of people who have been spiritually and sacramentally cared for by Fr Mario over these years would number in the thousands. Job well done!

At Marcellin College, Fr Mario has been an ever willing chaplain who has been one of the "go to" people for the assistant principal. She has told me of his reliability and generous availability.

Lastly, I would like to thank the people of St John's for your embrace of Fr Mario. His ministry in your community has been restorative and healing for him. Without your kindness to him, he could not leave you and return to his primary vocation which is to be a Missionary in the Society of St Paul. He leaves St John's blessed by being among you. "Heidillbegg" has contributed significantly to Fr Mario's present and has opened the way for his future in which, I am sure, he will be just as wonderful as he has been among you.

God bless you Mario!

Monsignor Tony Ireland

Episcopal Vicar for the Eastern Region

Episcopal Vicar for the Eastern Region
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Telephone: (03) 94128425 Email: anthony.ireland@cam.org.au

Maureen Stella

Principal

It is with pleasure that I write some words of gratitude and appreciation as Fr Mario leaves St John's community at the end of June.

I first met Fr Mario when I attended St John's Parish Mass prior to being appointed Principal in 2017. My first impression of Fr Mario was one of warmth and welcome. He was very inclusive of babies and young children during this Mass and his "hi-5s" with the children brought a smile to not only my face, but also those of the other parishioners.

The last four years have seen Fr Mario and I develop a positive and supportive relationship as we work in partnership with parish and school. We have met every Monday at 10am during school terms to discuss and review progress as well as support and at times, challenge each other's thinking. I have always felt very supported by Fr Mario in my role as Principal and the way he has been open to many suggestions, including the introduction of Class Masses and the venue changes for events like the Carols Night and Opening and Closing of the School Year Masses.

Fr Mario will be greatly missed by many in our St John's community and especially the students, who have loved seeing him at our weekly Monday morning assemblies.

Our staff have also warmly welcomed Fr Mario on his visits and shared some laughs with him over Morning Tea in the staffroom. Fr Mario has always been most generous with his time and genuine love of our school community. His homilies have been discerning and he has related the Scriptures to everyday life, especially for our students during whole school, year level and class masses.

I am sure you will join me in wishing Fr Mario much happiness in the years ahead with his ministry work in the Philippines. I hope that Fr Mario's memories of his time here at St John's will be very happy ones and that he will always remember how valued and appreciated he was by us all. It is with this Irish Blessing I wish Fr Mario all the best in the future, until we meet again.....

I will always remember your hi-5s. You always brought positivity to our school. I hope you enjoyed all of your time at St Johns. You are funny and you gave our school hope and spirit! You always cheered me up and made me laugh. We will always miss your bubbly attitude. I remember how he said real life examples for prayers. Goodbye and good luck Father Mario!

From the students of 4O

Father Mario is.....always friendly and welcoming, especially with his Monday morning hi-5s! He is kind and we like his warm smiles. We think he is the best priest in the world and we are so sad that he is leaving. We wish that he could stay longer.

From the students of 3J

Fr Mario is.....a very kind and thoughtful person and we love how you give us hi-5s when you walk past. We thank him for all of the amazing masses he has done for us at St John's. He is so kind to all of our families and we will miss him so much. We hope he has a great time in the Philippines.

From the students of 3LB

SCHOOL FAREWELL

Friendly

Active

Teaches us

Helpful

Extremely Happy

Respectful

Magnificent

Advice

Responsible

Informative

Outstanding

From the students of 1G

Father Mario is...

Friendly, our Parish Priest, happy, clever, special, funny, a good storyteller, prayerful, very kind to us, he visits us at school, he is always nice to us, he is leaving soon, we are going to miss him.

Students of Prep C

Fatherr Mario is...

amazing, friendly, the best, beautiful, funny, kind, really nice, helpful Happy, good at his job, being a priest Proud, grateful, helpful to the poor people, cool, fun to talk to, helps us learn about God, like a superhero!

Students of Prep WG

Father Mario, thank you for organising all our class and level masses over the years we have been at St John's. You are a nice, caring priest who thinks about others. Thank you so much for teaching us new things about God and Jesus. We love and will miss your high fives and smiles. All the best Father Mario, enjoy your time in the Philippines!

Students of 2C

Father Mario is....

Kind, nice and honest. He gives us hi-5s and comes into our classroom to say hello and celebrate our class Masses. We will miss you Father Mario!

Father Mario blesses us each day

Always helping where he can

The people around feel his love

He wears different colours to show the special events that happen throughout the year

Every Sunday he prays with the parish of St John's

Remembers so many things about God and Jesus

Mario is awesome

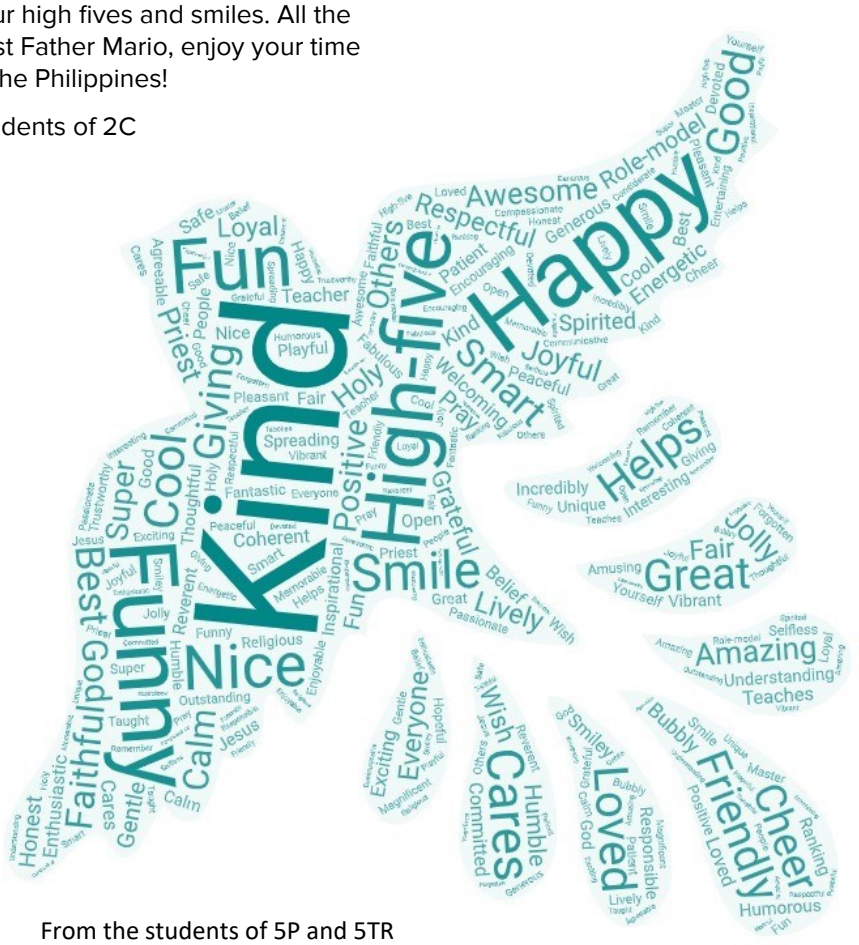
At Church he reads from the Bible

Remembers all the children at St John's Primary School

Is happy, kind and loving to all that know him

Of course he is also honest

Students of 1W



From the students of 5P and 5TR

SCHOOL FAREWELL

Father Mario is..... our favourite priest ever! He always cheers us up and is always kind and happy. Thank you for giving us the sacraments and teaching us about God. We will miss you and your friendly hi-5! God bless you Father Mario.

From the students of 4M

Fantastic
Amazing
Thankful
He gives fantastic hi-5s
Energetic
Respectful

Makes people happy
Adventurous
Religious
Inclusive
Organised

From the students of 2VB

Fantastic and kind to others
Amazing and caring priest
The most excellent hi-5s
Helpful to God and the Church
Easy to talk to
Remembers experiences with God

Marvellous support
Always there when we need him
Respects everyone at St John's
Incredible teacher
Outstanding personality

From the students of 2C

I don't really know what to say except for THANK YOU. Thank you for all the times you have given me a hi-5, thank you for teaching me to follow God, thank you for coming to St John's and thank you for being you!!!!!!
I know we will never get a priest like you. I also know you are going to have a great life in the Philippines after everything you have told us. Even when you go I will still remember everything about you, especially how you are the best priest our school community could ask for!! WE WILL MISS YOU SO MUCH!!!

Claire Garrone 3LB

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YOUNG PARISHIONER MESSAGES

Father Mario is the best priest I've ever known. He is such a kind, caring and funny man. He fills our hearts with warmth and compassion. On Mondays at school, I'd always be the first in line to get a hi-5 from Father Mario.

I took interest in the Parish community last year when my mum signed me up for Altar-Serving. I thought this would bring me closer to the Lord and make some new friends. And that is exactly what happened. Over the many times I did this, I paid more attention, listened to the Homily, and learned from the very best - Elizabeth Williamson, and Father Mario. When I forgot what to do, Father Mario would always whisper: "the cups," or "kneel down," or "bow,". He was a savior to me, and with encouragement from my family, I will be honoured to serve in Father Mario's final mass.

Father Mario was the priest of my Reconciliation and my First Eucharist. He forgave my sins and gave me the host for the first time. That was very monumental for me and I'm glad he was a part of it.

Father Mario is a respectful and holy man, who inspired so many people to follow the way of God. He certainly inspired me. Father Mario has a massive effect on our school and Parish Community, so it will be different without him. Father Mario is lovely to chat with and we've even had him over for dinner a few times. He's gracious and holy, and loves to crack a joke. Father always looks on the positive side and is seen watering his lush garden at school.

Father is going to inspire more minds in the Philippines and I do hope he will come back to see us again.

Thank you, Father Mario.

May the Lord be with you now and forever.

Amelia Bechelli

When I travelled to the Philippines I was privileged enough to encounter Fr Mario's ministry in a different context to what I am used to. I was able to see him in his element, and spend time with him, not just as a Priest but as a friend and mentor. I witnessed the joy that he shared interacting with the children of the orchestra, the young kids at the orphanage and the families of 13th street.

He has encouraged me in my faith, to be courageous and seek out more ways to be an active Christian. I've always enjoyed listening to his homilies and the way he unpacks the Gospel, and makes it relevant in my life. I will treasure my time with Fr Mario in the Philippines and at St Johns, and the influence his guidance has had on my life and will continue to have in the future.

Thanks so much Fr Mario.

Grace Lew Kee

Father Mario has been in the parish for a long time but to let him leave is very sad. Thank you Father Mario for teaching the ways of God respectfully. I hope you enjoy your trip to the Philippines. Thank you for your kindness and patience. Thank you for being able to go to the class masses. Thank you for being part of the community and being with God. Thank you for having a kind heart.

I will miss you because you always give me hi-5s when you come in and out of the church . And when you call me 'Super Mario', I am so happy. And when we play Uno together and someone puts down a Draw Four... "OOOHHHHHH!" I hope you enjoy the Philippines. May the Lord be with you now and forever.

James Bechelli 3LB

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FAREWELL MESSAGES

It's such a shame for us to lose such an amazing gracious kind person like you. We were blessed to meet you and share these last few years. I suppose Gods plan for you will be amazing and lead you to territory in need of your love and support. Blessings and protection over you always

Mary Dickson

When Mario arrived at St John's Parish he was full of energy and enthusiasm for the job ahead and I think I can truthfully say he hasn't changed. His hard work for us these past weeks in particular has been outstanding. We'll miss him but such enthusiasm will find rich rewards in his future endeavours. Thanks a million Fr Mario.

Regards, Maureen Howard

I am so grateful to Fr Mario for his commitment to our parish, and for all he has achieved. I have valued the genuine friendship that he has brought to us. He leaves a wonderful legacy and will be greatly missed as a much loved member of our parish family.

Many thanks, Karen.

Fr Mario has worked hard in maintaining a stable Parish during his time with us at St John's. We are privileged to have witnessed his dedication to his vocation and grateful for his friendship. On a personal note, he is one diligent and industrious student! We give you an A+ Father Mario!
We are sorry to see you go.... you will be missed!
Thank you for everything.

Charito and Leo Cosio

I thank you for your welcome of me into our Parish. For providing me with opportunities to engage in the life of the Parish. For developing opportunities for the deepening of spirituality. I am grateful for your sharing of wisdom and knowledge, for your sense of humour, for your love of chocolate and for the high fiving of children, another sign of welcome. I have very much appreciated your support and encouragement in my belief in the value of community and my work in the lead up to the Plenary Council.

Mario, you have supported and encouraged many as they travel their journeys in our Parish and in the broader community. Thank you for being the person you are.

Jan Mc Caffery

Dear Fr Mario, thank you for all your efforts and ministry during your time here at St John's. Your understanding and ability to adapt with technology during these trying times is greatly appreciated! All the best in your new missionary detail in the Philippines.

Pam and Petria Smith

Mario is highly intelligent, gifted and very caring. As priest and person he constantly and very generously shares his God-given qualities with all of us for the great benefit, richness and growth of our parish.
I wish him all the blessings and joy of God's love in his future undertakings.

Ronnie Maloney.

We will miss Fr Mario, always. I lived in Box Hill and attended Sunday mass at St John's Heidelberg because I want to listen to Fr Mario's preaching. I went that step further and moved to the next street so I can walk to church.

May God bless and protect Fr Mario.

Cleaon Ephraums

Fr Mario has a talent for telling stories with a straight face and it is difficult to know if he is joking or not.

Invariably he is joking and chuckling away to himself and then you see the beginning of a smile and a twinkle in his eye.

Blessings and best wishes,

Claire Newsome

Farewell and thank you

Our Lady of Mercy College, Heidelberg and Marcellin College, Bulleen

I arrived at OLMC in 2018 and one of my first introductions was to Fr Mario, before he was to lead my Commissioning as Principal. Our Lady of Mercy College has been blessed to count Fr Mario as one of our Chaplains. He has led our class and whole school Masses along with our Graduation and Welcome Liturgies. He has shared the wisdom of scripture and faith with students as they begin and end their time at OLMC. He was an enormous source of wisdom as we re-established our Chapel after it was refurbished. His gentle kindness, generosity and faith have been beacons of light to our staff and students over the years.

In 2019 because of the work of Fr Mario, we were blessed to host Jose De Piro Bataan Youth Orchestra from the Philippines. It was such a wonderful evening for all who attended. The evening was such a highlight for the students from OLMC who participated, in many ways they lived their faith in that experience. That evening we were all treated as Fr Mario accepted an invitation by the Orchestra to become the Conductor for one of their songs and an impressive Conductor he was.

At the end of the evening no one wanted to leave. Our community was privileged to share in a unique moment; a chance to see faith being lived out in the aspirations of young people for whom this opportunity was so great.

On a personal note, I will always be grateful for the ongoing support Fr Mario has provided me. He has always been available. He has listened and guided me when I was faced with multiple choices. He has shown me ways to think differently about what God might be asking of me and always with patience and kindness.

I know that he is leaving us to serve a greater need and to live his calling in a new way; we will lose a beacon of hope and a man with great integrity and faith. The staff and students of Our Lady Of Mercy College wish you, Fr Mario, all the very best in your new role and trust that God will keep you safe until we one day meet again.

Thank you and may God's blessings always be with you.

Judith Weir

Principal

Our Lady of Mercy College

Since his arrival at St John's, Fr Mario has been an enthusiastic supporter of Marcellin College and, while we are happy for him as he takes on his new position, we are very sad to see him go! We – students, staff, families and the broader Marist community – have all benefitted enormously from the faith leadership that Fr Mario has shared with us. Fr Mario has been very popular with our young men and staff alike, for the insight, honesty, humour and challenge that he has offered us.

Despite having a variety of communities to support, Fr Mario was always willing to celebrate as many of our weekly Thursday masses as we asked him to lead. At Marcellin, we ask our College Chaplains to nominate which Thursdays they are available to celebrate mass with us – Fr Mario always wrote back with a list of the dates that he was already engaged and encouraged us to add his name to the roster wherever else we needed him! This generosity both supported me in my role and was warmly welcomed by our boys. Each time Fr Mario arrived, he always brought with him a friendly smile, an open attitude and a carefully thought out Homily that the boys could relate to as he broke open the Word for them. Fr Mario's friendliness and willingness to spend time chatting with all members of our community also contribute to how much we will miss him.

As well as supporting our weekly masses, Fr Mario regularly supported our full school Eucharistic celebrations. Fr Mario turned our College masses in our gym into personal, faith-filled celebrations; Fr Mario would move out into the congregation from his place on the raised Sanctuary to offer his Homily, encouraging us to see that he wanted us to engage personally with the messages of the Gospel. This action reflects Fr Mario's genuine belief in the dignity and value of all people, irrespective of titles or roles. His personal approach to relationships, to journeying with us, was acknowledged on a number of occasions by Marist Schools Australia as its representatives invited Fr Mario to lead masses celebrated with Marist Brothers, lay leaders, principals and senior leadership team members from Marist schools around the country.

Again, Fr Mario's generosity always meant that he supported our broader Marist family whenever he could; not just with his presence, but also with the thoughtful

attention he paid to the reasons for the events and to his planning of what words of wisdom he would share with us as he invited us into the sharing of the Eucharistic meal.

Personally I have always appreciated Fr Mario's friendship – his genuine care, his willingness to listen, to support and challenge, and his honest sharing will be deeply missed. I am a better faith leader and person for the time that I have had the pleasure to work with Fr Mario and I will forever be grateful for that gift. On behalf of Marcellin College and for myself personally – thank you, Fr Mario. Travel safely and know that you will be in our prayers.

Carolyn Young

Assistant Principal (Mission)

Marcellin College, Bulleen

SILVER
JUBILEE

Celebrating
a Proud
Tradition
165 YEARS

Calling me to follow close,
lest I leave myself behind!
Calling me to walk into
evening shadows one more time!

Celebrating
a Proud
Tradition
165 YEARS

You will be missed by us all!

Fr Mario

Parish Priest, St John's Heidelberg

Dear Parishioners

It is me again closing this issue of the Eyrie. This is my last *Final Word*.

As I conclude my ministry with you on the 28th June I would love to list all of you who have journeyed with me, supported me and befriended me. I cannot name all my friends here, because I would have to reproduce a list of all the members of the parish. In one way or another you have all been my friends. Sure enough, at times there have been some bumps and hiccups along the road, after all we still live here on earth, and nothing is ever perfect! At times my personality came in the way of a good trip!

I have enjoyed every single moment of my stay with you and would not have it any other way. I am not moving away because I am tired of the parish, I could have easily stayed on for another eight years, as was the original plan. Fortunately for me I have been given the opportunity to spend time in our mission in the Philippines and those who accompanied me on the two trips we did in 2019 and 2020, would understand why I could not resist this invitation.

It is not easy for me to leave this beautiful family of friends; I will carry you all with me wherever I go. I have many good and happy memories to pack in my suitcase. You are welcome to visit any time you like. I promise you will be well looked after - just set aside enough time to spend stuck in traffic!

A very special shout out to my many young friends. Thank you for your many hi-5s. I will miss you lovely smiles and the beautiful time I spent with you.

Thank you to all of you parishioners and friends. Many of you have sent me beautiful congratulatory cards, emails and letters. They are much appreciated. I do leave with a heavy heart, but at the same time I am greatly excited about my new mission. I do ask you to please keep me in your prayers as I keep you all in mine.

Thank you and go gently.

May God continue to bless you all as you continue growing in your faith and discipleship.

Fr Mario

The Eyrie

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The views, thoughts and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors and should not be interpreted as theology or moral and ethical teaching.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please refer to parish website for updates on all current events and *St John's Parish—Heidelberg VIC* Facebook page for live mass streaming.

www.pol.org.au/Heidelberg/Home.aspx