

CHRISTMAS 2020 – MEDIA STATEMENT

CHRISTMAS – THE VACCINE OF HOPE

Christmas is all about hope. I have experienced some wonderful examples of hopeful living over this eventful year.

Here are some “snapshots”.

There were the bushfires on the South Coast. The trauma is ongoing for those affected.

I witnessed hope in hearing of the generosity of heart shown by the frightened gathered at the Moruya Showgrounds.

There was the raw courage shown by the two women who saved our Cobargo Church and belltower.

I witnessed Fr Luke Verrell and others offering hope to the people at the Bega Emergency Centre.

The three families I visited who had lost their homes along the Eurobodalla Rd impressed me deeply by their Christian faith and hopeful determination to build again. Sadly, this rebuilding still remains a dream.

There was hope and excitement from some who pointed out to me small green shoots starting to come from charred trees.

South Coast families expressed much hope and thanks from the incredible generosity of Canberra people who sent immediate financial help to those most in need.

Social welfare agencies continue to provide hope for the homeless, hungry and mentally ill.

There is also the hope that the long and devastating drought is finally breaking.

The rains have come. The canola fields near Harden are healthy and brilliant in gold. The vision exudes hope. Travellers are stopping to take photos and breathe in the clean air.

It is a total change from smoky and hail damaged Canberra in January.

Even the farmers themselves seem rather upbeat and hopeful for the immediate future. The despair surrounding suicides and mental health issues remain a threat to hope.

The Covid-19 global catastrophe has really worn us out.

We are tired. Schoolteachers have exhausted themselves by offering so much hope to their students and parents. They have kept our schools open as much as possible during the threatening weeks.

Whole families studying and working from homes has not been easy.

People are turning to prayer and silence in greater numbers.

The sick, aged and vulnerable appreciate the extra on-line services to help our reflections in these times.

The youth, as always, have shown us an example of on-line networking.

Compassionate people talk of the hope that a phone call or visit gives the house bound.

Grandparents delight to see their children and grandchildren on FaceTime, Viber or whatever is electronically available.

In so many ways, the underlining pandemic of loneliness and isolation is conquered by all these "little miracles" of practical hope and closeness, as Pope Francis would phrase it.

In 2021, we await in hope a vaccine. Will it ever come? We hope it does.

In the meantime, we continue to offer others the "new normal" of a kindly smile and generous word and help. It is all part now of the vaccine of hope we offer. This is especially shared at Christmas.

Over the centuries, Christians have knelt in awe before the Holy Family at the Bethlehem stable. They have done so in greater fervour in times of war, pestilence and catastrophe.

They have done so not simply to draw personal hope for life after death.

They have prayed too for the communitarian hope in the here and now arising from the humility of the Bethlehem stable.

This is our hope. This is our Christmas prayer. *Emmanuel* – God is with us! Do not be afraid!

A prayerful and Happy Christmas and New Year to all!

**Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn**