



Community meals prepare St Jude's for a bumper Christmas lunch

Parishioners at St Jude's Brighton are well prepared to serve the 70 people expected for their Christmas Day lunch this year. They have been practising for six months by offering free community lunches every Friday, which have become a popular fixture in the Brighton area.

Regular lunchtime visitors come for a variety of reasons.

"Some are in need but for others it is just a good opportunity to eat together with other people rather than alone," says parish Treasurer John Wenzel. "Everyone is welcome. We don't ask questions."



Maureen Skinner on table duty at St Jude's community lunch.

The lunches are held between 11:30am and 1:30pm with a simple but tasty menu that may include soup, toasted sandwiches, fish and chips, and a dessert. AnglicareSA provided a seed-capital grant to launch the project but the ongoing hospitality is very much an all-hands parish initiative. Table service is provided by cheerful, hard-working parish volunteers drawn from a pool of more than 40.

“When we first thought of it, we were worried we wouldn't have enough people to fill the roster and the burden would fall too heavily on the few,” says parish priest the Ven Sophie Relf-Christopher. “But it's quite the opposite. We have so many people willing to lend a hand that they can forget the training, it's so long between their shifts. It's a good problem to have though.”

Numbers have built to 50 to 70 attending across the two-hour window. During September meals served averaged well over 80 – and nearly 100 in one week.



Community Meal Coordinator Paul Miller with, left to right, Naomi Miller, Jan Roberts, and Maureen Skinner.

As well as fellowship, the community lunch addresses real need that many in the community suffer. Holdfast Bay council estimates that there are some 5,500 homeless people in its local government area.

The timing of establishing the lunches was not just serendipitous but the work of the Holy Spirit, says Community Meal Coordinator Paul Miller.

“I remember many years ago when I was studying at Tabor Theological College one lecturer repeatedly saying ‘mission must always be about God’s timing, not yours!’,” he reported to St Jude’s parish council recently.

“Well, here we are in 2022, three years after a worldwide pandemic and now a global financial slump. All I can say is someone at St Jude’s must have been listening to the Holy Spirit! The pantry was a Godsend, installed a month before the pandemic, and now the Community Meal up and running before the latest financial chaos took hold.”

It is also great timing for the now well-oiled machine to swing into action to welcome guests on Christmas Day, helped by what Sophie describes as the extraordinary generosity of local organisations and benefactors.

“We’ve been blown away by the support from the community,” she says. “The local churches are all

helping out, and we have received funds from the Lions and Rotary clubs and fundraisers at local retirement village Townsend Park, as well as great individual generosity.”

That has not just taken the form of money donations. People have donated goods such as homemade jam, individually crafted glass pendants and other treats that will fill a gift bag for everyone attending on Christmas Day.



Gift bags ready for St Jude’s Christmas lunch.

Once Christmas is over the parish will take stock of how to grow the regular Friday meal to reach more in the community.

“In 2023 St Jude’s will continue feeding people, to provide care and real community that demonstrate God’s love for all people through action,” says Sophie, a mission heartily endorsed by the driving force in the kitchen, Paul Miller.

“We can only do our bit to help, but each week we are increasingly reaching those who are most vulnerable food-wise and isolated and lonely,” he says.

“It delights me to see all the St Jude’s volunteers, with increased confidence, work and interact with our community each Friday lunchtime.”

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