



LOOKING AT CHRISTMAS DIFFERENTLY

Christmas celebrations took an unusual turn at St Joseph's Parish in Warrnambool. By learning the different ways in which Christmas is celebrated we acknowledged the many cultures who are part of our community. Our welcome sign and table had Christmas wishes in seven languages. The Vietnamese way to represent the Nativity scene was one tradition explored. First, we needed a cave, a large cave. After some thought and planning we surrounded a sun shade with paper rocks and the building began.

On Saturday, December 21, in preparation for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the team arrived - fifty willing hands (photo below right) each with a special skill as determined by Vietnamese tradition. Soon the silver-lining filled the space and out came the spray to add the look of solid rock to the sacred space. The children helped to arrange the figures ready to settle in their cave home.

Quite suddenly all work stopped. We moved outside to see a tree being unloaded. It was unlike any we knew. The sparse branches were covered with 'snow', cotton wool snow. Well, of course, it is winter season for Christmas in Vietnam but I don't know that it snows? Regardless, this tree was fixed into place and decorated with tinsel and shining balls. At this stage, everything looked on course until the next step. What about Santa and clothing? I held my breath and shared this with 'those that matter' AND it got the nod to proceed. (See photo right)

This was a great sharing moment for our Vietnamese people, a joy for all in our community and a treasure of memories for all the children. Add to this we feasted together - a beautiful communion - at the 10.30am Mass the following day, with a sumptuous spread of Vietnamese food afterwards.

It was my great pleasure to work with all these people including Hank and Daisy, their children Doris and Nancy and Hank's mum, Merran Koren who knew we could do it (pictured below left with Fr John Corrigan) and Fr John Fitzgerald and so many others. Thank you.

Marie Morgan

