



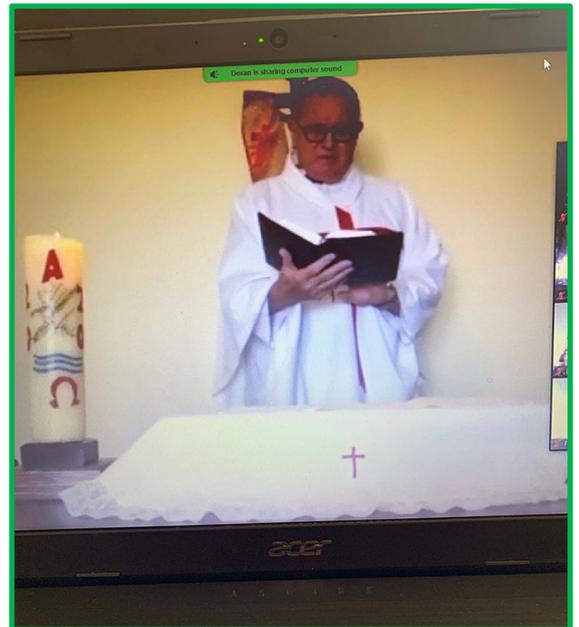
COVID-19 STRATEGIES IN EAST WIMMERA PARISH

Reflections from the East Wimmera Parish:

Since the isolation and restrictions were put in place, we have been celebrating liturgies in the East Wimmera Parish via the Zoom App from my presbytery office which has been converted into a temporary place of prayer. Knowing that parishioners are sharing in their faith is rewarding, as Zoom allows interaction with the congregation before and after the Mass. It is uplifting to hear people from different parts of the parish greet one another.

Tough times call for an acceptance of change and Noeline Hogan has done a great job as our co-ordinator in helping people connect. The determination of parishioners to overcome their fear of technology and embrace the new normal has been outstanding. A downside is that some elderly parishioners are not able to join because they do not have any IT mastery.

Personally, the absence of travel to at least two Mass centres each weekend has also been a bonus for me. So many people are supportive and grateful for what we are sharing.



Fr Eugene McKinnon, Parish Priest



Since our tentative and somewhat scratchy beginnings, we have quickly adapted to tuning in for Sunday Mass through Zoom. Approximately one hundred parishioners are joining in the Zoom Mass each Sunday with Fr Eugene McKinnon and the word is spreading! Zoom reaches people in all the towns and districts of our parish and beyond. It has been a true silver-lining for former parishioners and even for overseas friends to join in our Masses. As well as allowing this technology to bring us together, it is saving Fr Eugene from many kilometres and exhausting hours of travelling.

Not all parishioners are able to access this new technology however, and for them the easing of restrictions will be a blessing, but for the moment we are doing the best we can. No-one is game enough to predict precisely what our future will look like but we genuinely hope that this new growth, this new life will be seen as yet another glorious chance for us to share the gospel of our Risen Lord.

Annette Gilmour (Donald)

I think the online forum for Mass is an excellent idea. For me it ticks three boxes. It is the only option for spiritual nourishment in this time of crisis. It has introduced the use of Zoom which has extended communication within the East Wimmera Parish; and it produces a wonderful sense of community that we have never been able to share as a parish before. Thanks to Father Eugene and Noeline Hogan.

Margaret McRae (St Arnaud)

Zoom Masses have been a steep learning curve for many - the first week was Fr Eugene and one participant with him to voice the replies but we have graduated to readers from the different communities plus some beautiful music organised by Brenda Doran from Birchip. In Charlton, we advertise the Masses on the community newsletter, plus we had Fr Eugene send an Easter message which we placed on the Charlton Neighbourhood Facebook page. St Joseph's now has an email contact list of approximately half our parishioners and we keep in contact with monthly church newsletters. People have made comments such as "it is nice to have Fr Eugene saying Mass at this time" and "I really feel like I belong to East Wimmera Parish not just Charlton." Thank you to Fr Eugene, Noeline Hogan (Parish Administrator) and others who enable us to celebrate the Easter Liturgies and Sunday Masses.

Anne Kenny (Charlton)



Left: Fran Bryne-Lee (Charlton) and right: parishioners from East Wimmera Parish join Zoom