



Grandparents' Day in the COVID World 2021

I love being a grandmother. I am a widow and living on my own, as well as three plus hours from my eight grandchildren in Melbourne and Geelong, so I really value the times I can spend with them. Last year and this year have been very difficult as seeing my family has been even more limited. It is nice to know that there is to be a special day for grandparents. St Anne is still a popular Confirmation name but Joachim doesn't get mentioned too often and I don't think I pushed his cause when I was a teacher of Confirmation classes.

School holidays, Face Time and phone calls via Messenger have taken on a new meaning, but nowhere as effective as face to face or on grandma's knee, while ZOOM Mass has become a normal occurrence in my country parish town of Birchip. Before COVID-19 made ZOOM a new access method, I really didn't know who else attended Mass in other towns in the area, so it was very refreshing to know we were not alone and we all met and chatted to many new and older faces. There were the couple in the beginning still in their dressing gowns who were caught out, but we soon got used to it. Grandparents, sick and elderly or those with new babies were all able to participate, such a good thing.



As times have moved along, there have been less and less young families involved in Mass in the years before COVID-19, but we are actually lucky to still have quite a few involved on a regular basis and also have celebrated "special occasion" Masses from time to time. COVID-19 has been very unhelpful though and our numbers are a few less since coming back to church again. It seems we are back in Sunday lockdown again but we are used to finding ways around difficulties in our parish.

When my family come to stay, a parent usually asks what time Mass is? It isn't to actually go themselves, it is just to make sure that my car is able to get out so I can go. I am one of the rostered people involved with setting up, reading, Minister of the Eucharist, Lay-led leader so I am a regular attender and if in town, I will be there anyway, rostered on or not.

My granddaughters, three of whom are seven and eight years old now, like to come with me and for some unknown reason, always bring a "Mass dress", so they can dress up for the occasion. The real draw card though is to help set up and pack up after Mass. They loved helping while Fr Eugene was here and he was great at finding a few extra tasks and making them feel that their contribution was valuable as well as having a chat with them about school, football and their other interests. They were upset to hear he had moved and were keen to find out who dared to move him. However, they thought Fr Gerry looked pretty good on ZOOM and were keen to meet him, but the two who were here for a few days this recent holidays were most disappointed to find that Mass was by Zoom and they would not be needed for jobs. They were interested to watch all the same, but disappeared on and off from the room and thought I was lucky I didn't have to give away my spending money for the collection. They were most disappointed that the good dresses weren't needed and that there was no accustomed trip to the café afterwards (good behaviour pending). Two of my grandkids have a second grandmother in town here too so Mass is doubly exciting.

It is rare for the grandkids to go to Mass in their own parishes although some attend local Catholic schools with occasional school Masses. This seems strange to me, but the casualness of religious observation and Mass attendance seems to have become the norm and with the revelations from the recent Royal Commission, I sometimes wonder

why I am still one of the attendees myself. My family are quite outspoken and state they are Catholics when asked or challenged, but just don't seem to see the need to attend. Mind you there is sport every Sunday for kids so that puts a lot of extra pressure on parents that I never had. I'm sure my kids were most reluctant Mass goers at the same age....there just wasn't the choice for them.

On the occasions when we talk about our observances with other grandparents, I think we all wonder if we are at fault somehow, but there seem to be no real answers. We talk about all sorts of things like this every second Wednesday when we have Mass or a small prayer service that a few of us organise ourselves, to help keep our faith life alive and to have a welcome coffee and a catch up at a local café afterwards. One grandmother is having cancer treatment and really enjoys these sessions as she often misses the Sunday Masses. Most of our readers, musicians, special ministers and lay leaders are grandparents these days as our congregations in our East Wimmera Parish are on the senior side or as some fellow called us 'the water boys and orange girls'.

During the holidays I played a couple of board games with quiz questions and was most surprised when the youngest granddaughter playing, knew immediately who Moses was when there was a question about the baby hidden in the bull rushes. I commended her for listening to her religion teacher, but she quickly shot back that she had watched the movie "Prince of Egypt" at school and knew "heaps of religious stuff". Another granddaughter was quite cross with her own lack of knowledge and blamed her "old fashioned teacher who only does books and prayers and isn't at all kind". Incidentally the same Moses expert had never heard of where the Pope lived or even



heard of the Pope. There must not be any movies about him yet. The conversation was interesting when one told me that her First Communion was going to be on the same day as her brother's Grand Final so hoped she would "win" the crowd, but was annoyed when the brother told her that her ceremony may be changed and she would probably have to go to another Reconciliation ceremony as she had 'so much trouble coming up with a sin last time". The seven year old Moses expert said she was glad she still had months to "do a sin in," while sneakily observing the cards in the hands of her cousin. As a former Catholic school teacher, I remember the weeks and months of Sacramental preparation was daunting, and Confirmation took years. My grandkids are more confused about sacraments but not worried about it. Should I be concerned? I will let God sort it out I think. I still have three of the littlest to be baptised and none will fit the family Christening robe worn by three of their parents. At least I don't have to watch them as altar boys, hoping they don't miss a cue. I did enjoy attending the grandparents' Mass in years before COVID-19 and meeting teachers and parents who thought I was worthy of sainthood for travelling so far. It was lovely to be introduced proudly by my grandchildren to their classmates too. I will always treasure the decorated, laminated poem I was given which says it all.....

A GRANDCHILD'S HAND

The promise of tomorrow and the hope of dreams come true...

A reminder of the childhood that's still a part of you

The wonder of a miracle from which this love began...

There is so much found in the touch of holding a grandchild's hand.

Maureen Donnellon – Birchip

Photo 1: With five of my eight grandchildren

Photo 2: With baby Winnie, my youngest grandchild

Photo 3: This is one of the card playing, "non sinners" at the cafe having hot chocolate with the adult group who meet after Mass or prayers