

Reflections • Friday 11 January 2019 • By Bishop John Roundhill

Pub Choir



Bishop John at Pub Choir, Brisbane City Hall, December 2018

YouTube.

As the pub choir website puts it: there is "No audition, no solos, no commitments, no sheet music, NO WORRIES."

There were a number of remarkable things about this Pub Choir, not least being the extraordinary team leading it and the \$100,000 raised for Love Your Sister and cancer research; but in some way the most extraordinary thing about it was so many people simply turning up to sing.

There is something quite ironic about slipping out from work to go singing. In my experience we struggle to get people singing even in a fantastic setting like St John's Cathedral. It is almost as if Pub Choir has 'stolen our clothes'!

But, well done, Pub Choir. You have shown us again that it is a lie that Aussies don't like singing in public – we do! Pub Choir also exposes the myth that singing is only something for those with fine voices, as everyone is welcome. It also shows that people will stand up for a 90-minute singing practice and clearly enjoy it.

Gathering to sing is a deep part of our worship heritage. In Psalm 95: 1-2, we are encouraged to:

"O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!"

It is easy to see Pub Choir as a secular land grab of our Christian tradition. However, standing there on that pre-Christmas Thursday singing *How to Make Gravy* with 2,800 strangers, that view is not so easily held. There is much we can share with Pub Choir and indeed much we can learn from, too.

St Gabriel's Church and Belmont State School partner to mentor kids



The 'Kids Hope Australia' team from St Gabriel's Church (L-R) Gill, Cecily, Kathy, Glenys, Natasha and Georgia, with Belmont State School's Guidance Officer Ros Green

During Term 2 of 2018, I launched a KHA (Kids Hope Australia) initiative, which involved building a bridge with the local Belmont State School. KHA is a mentoring program for school kids from underprivileged backgrounds that requests one church to partner with one school for one year, during which time one mentor meets with one mentee for one hour each week.

In response to the financial, physical and emotional struggle of one particular mentee's family, St Gabriel's developed a Parish Pantry with donated goods from the parishioners, the local bakery and the local butcher. This compassionate outreach provided the family with not only sufficient food, but emotional food too! This is the final text message that the

struggling mum of three kids sent before she bravely fled interstate from a violent relationship:

"Just wanted to check in and let you know we are all well and safe. I didn't really share my story. In two years, the only time I left the house apart from shopping and kids, was to go to your Church. You radiate warmth and energy and reminded me of who I was, not the shell that was left. The generosity and kindness of everyone reminded me of the beauty in this world and the people in it. Please thank all the lovely ladies for me and let them know their kindness awoke my mind from darkness and gave me courage. Forever grateful. The only regret I have is leaving behind the beautiful souls that saved us! Xx"

Being able to assist in ways we weren't fully aware has been such a privilege and honour. God goes before us. He sees what we can't. It's simply our job to follow His plan and be a part of the healing and reconciliation this world needs. We can all make a difference together.

Subsequently, Belmont State School chose to donate their annual Christmas tree gifts to St Gabriel's rather than to the usual Salvation Army Charity, based on the KHA work the six mentors had done for the previous six months. School families kindly wrapped and labelled 200 presents for kids from one- to 14-years of age and presented them to us at their last school assembly. This is a fantastic church and school partnership and we are currently developing ideas of running a playgroup in 2019. 20 of these gifts were then delivered to Zig Zag – a local shelter that houses females who are survivors of sexual assault or homeless and aged between 12 and 25. They have 20 kids under five that gladly received these presents for their young ones. We don't have direct access to the survivors due to confidentiality reasons, but they gratefully receive annual Christmas gift packs and Easter hot cross buns donated from our Church, which is always acknowledged by an appreciation certificate. The remaining 180 gifts, plus food hampers donated from St Gabriel's, were distributed via Anglicare through Fundraising and Events Officer Tiffany Berg, who ensured that the various needs were met within the Diocese.

This Christmas initiative only happened because everyone involved decided to think beyond themselves. From the school parents who bought and wrapped the gifts, to the mentors who freely gave one hour per week every week for six months, and to the Zig Zag and Anglicare staff that display commitment to help those at a disadvantage, I thank you!

When each person decides to do one thing, the world changes. Let's keep changing the world, one person at a time! May our God bring His best for your 2019.