



Together

The Newsletter of St Michael's Meals
Issue 2
2020

Welcome to the second issue of Together and it is hard to believe that half a year has already passed since the publication of the first issue. In that time, Australia, the world and our brothers and sisters in Lebanon have endured and continue to endure change, challenges, suffering and tragedy, on a scale that is almost incomprehensible. Despite these exceptionally difficult times, we witness our community and our supporters come together, time and again, to show love to the suffering, the sick, the homeless, the vulnerable and our seniors. And it is our seniors that is the focus of this issue. We will be looking at our social responsibility and our initiative as a community. You will also find an interview with our own Abouna Gerges, a chat with a member of our Seniors and Friends Group, and another one of our members will be sharing her thoughts around the Lord's Prayer and other reflections. We welcome Mounira and her favourite recipe. We also remember our sister in Christ, Mary Rose Orlando. Finally, we include a report on the results of our fundraising activities and the amazing response St Michael's Meals got from some donors.

The Editors

Our Mission Statement

Members of St Michael's Meals treat others with unconditional positive regard, listen to them with care and empathy, and are genuine in offering their services.

Our Vision

- Feed the Hungry with God's love.
- Keep offering the homeless weekly meals and genuine friendship.
- Increase the number of the days the meals will be provided.
- Reach out to the elderly, the sick and those with special needs.
- Aim to open a centre to feed, house and clothe people on a regular basis.
- Create a mobile team to reach out and help the less fortunate.

Our Story

St Michael's Meals is a core group of dedicated parishioners, led by Fr Gerges, Parish Priest and Dean of St Michael's Melkite Catholic Cathedral. This group splits on Wednesday nights at 7.00 pm to feed the homeless at Central Station, Woolloomooloo and Martin Place. Our aim is to build a trusting relationship with our friends the needy, so that we not only feed their bodies, but also their souls. The relief, gratitude and friendship of the people we reach is our reward. No-one chooses to be on the street, we look into their eyes and see the person inside. Each has a story, we know the

regulars by name and even know their likes and dislikes. So many have an intellectual disability, who are we to judge the circumstances that pushed them onto the street? The church asks us to imitate the life of the saints: so let's listen to their words: St Mother Teresa cautions us "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." Our own Australian St Mary Mackillop encourages us to "Never see a need without doing something about it". It is so true that when we give, we receive so much more. Not only do we feel that we have made a difference to the lives of the people

we feed, it has created a real affection and camaraderie between the people who show up every week to serve our fellow Sydneysiders. Our motivation is simple and can be found in the Gospel: Matthew 25: 35-40 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. The righteous will ask: Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?... The King will reply: Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

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How you can be a part of St. Michael's Meals

- Pray for us.
- Become a member
- Prepare meals
- Join the team in distributing food and clothing
- Donate money (donations of \$2 and above are tax deductible).

SENIORS AND FRIENDS: HOW IT ALL STARTED...

Launched in 1993 by Fr Hassan Nouseir and run since by Roda Kanawati and a team of committed volunteers, "Seniors and Friends" is an activity of St Michael's Parish in Darlington, NSW, aimed at bringing together the golden-aged and younger parishioners in a religious, social and

friendly atmosphere. We have already celebrated our silver jubilee and look forward to many more years to come.

On the first Friday of each month, we meet for three hours, during which the Holy Liturgy is held, followed by a BYO-lunch. On a few occasions, and for a change, "Seniors and Friends"

holds its gathering in one of the local clubs. The same group also takes an active role in the activities of St Michael's Meals, which cares for the Homeless. A beautiful and effective partnership has developed between the two organisations.



GREAT COMEBACK OF SENIORS AND FRIENDS IN AUGUST 2020.

One-to-one friendship

In addition to the monthly event, enthusiastic volunteers from our Association have been mobilised to communicate with more isolated seniors on a one-to-one basis. Such contacts are at least for one hour every week. The nature of such contacts between

the volunteer and the senior varies according to the needs on a case-by-case basis. The contacts could therefore take place in the form of a visit, an outing, a phone call, assistance in cooking, or involving the chaplain to give a Sacrament.

During the pandemic

The current lockdown unfortunately had a negative effect on the work of "Seniors and Friends". Visits were not allowed, especially to the elderly, being the most vulnerable group of our society with regard to this most serious virus. Even our chaplain was denied access to certain nursing

homes, where some of our seniors reside.

Nevertheless, the dedicated volunteers of our Association did not stop trying to reach our seniors, even if only to offer them some moral support through phone calls.

Light at the end of the tunnel

The reduction in the numbers of new cases of infection with the Coronavirus is comforting, and the gradual

relaxation of the lockdown raises our hopes for the future. We can now see the light at the end of the tunnel!



GREAT FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN TWO BUDDIES.

A prayer in this time of uncertainty

In these difficult times of uncertainty and distress, we should all turn to God and implore Him to support the fearful and anxious, the lonely and isolated, the sick and elderly, knowing that nothing can separate us from His love. We pray for God's mercy and truth to show us how to face up to the challenges posed by the Coronavirus in our lives: "I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed" Psalm 57:1

THE ELDERLY AND OUR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



GREAT BUNCH OF BUDDIES AT ST GEORGES RIVER SAILING CLUB.

When people do us a good deed, we thank them and occasionally add "may God give you long life", but how long is long life? This varies historically and culturally. In 1900 the world average life expectancy was 31 years, in 1950 it became 48 years, and in 2020 it reached 72.6 years. Yet this average varies from one country to another, and Australia is among the countries with the longest life expectancy, thus in 1950 it was 68.7 years, currently being 83.9 years and expected to reach 92.8 years in 2100. We are an aging society, and gradually many changes will take place. For example, while the age pension was at 65 it will rise to 67 by 2023.

With the increase in the number of older people there will be a greater need for special types of accommodation

to enable independent seniors to continue living with a community of their peers. But gradually, they will need more and more help and nursing facilities and ultimately nursing homes. Old age is also a relative matter; a child thinks a 50 years old person is very old, but a 50 years old thinks he/she is in the prime of life, and the same for 60 and 70, and so on. Late in his life, the French winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 1952, François Mauriac, was asked about the 'secret of old age'. His answer was 'the secret of old age is that it does not exist'.

But old age is not in the number of years we spend on earth, it is a stage in the human life cycle, when an individual has finished his working life, lost many or most of his/her friends, suffers from many medical conditions and is more

susceptible to sickness. It is a stage when we gradually depend on others, in transport, in access to health and social care, even in bathing, eating, etc, when we have high needs and suffer loneliness.

Very frequently there is also a difference between the ageing of the body and that of the mind and spirit. A 90+ years old man or woman may need a walker or a wheelchair for movement, but his/her mind may not be much different from the time he/she was a youth. He or she probably still enjoys good company, an outing, a delicious home cooked meal, a good cup of coffee, or even a joke. Whether we call this stage in life old people, elderly, or senior citizens, it is a stage which needs and deserves our help, support, and protection.

THE POWER OF A PHONE CALL: HI, HOW'S IT GOING?

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues the Seniors and Friends Team are connecting with the elderly and disadvantaged people, who are isolated and feeling vulnerable. It is something we might have done in the past and it matters now more than ever.

Sometimes a phone call is the only contact people who are self-isolating have with the outside world. It can be a one-minute conversation – sometimes it is a 10-minute conversation, because they are desperate to talk to somebody. It is a case of being personal and

asking how things are, with their health or their family. They are so grateful someone is talking to them and saying: Hi, how's it going?

I am sure we all care very much about the Seniors in our community, so please keep the phone ringing!



HELPING EACH OTHER IN TIMES OF NEED



AND BETTER: A WARM HUG!

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

A heart to heart talk with Fr Gerges, Dean of St Michael's Cathedral since 2016 and Chaplain of St Michael's Meals, a charity that helps the disadvantaged people in our Society

- **When did you decide to become a priest and where?**

My parents sent me to the monastery of St Paul in Harissa, Lebanon in 1973, where I finished my high school studies. Then I took the decision to consecrate myself to the Lord through attending to the needs of my fellow humans. In September 1997, I was ordained priest and appointed as parish priest in one of the villages of the Melkite Eparchy of Bosra-Hauran.

- **Tell us about your previous services before arriving at St Michael.**

I was the parish priest of Tebne, a village of Hauran, for 5 years. In 2003, I arrived in Auckland, where I was appointed to the parish of St Elias in Manurewa. There I spent 13 years serving the Melkite community and helping the Syriac, Chaldean and Assyrian communities. In 2011, I graduated as

counsellor and started volunteering in a few agencies. In 2012, I became a counsellor at Refugees as Survivors New Zealand (RASNZ), where I spent 4 years before my appointment at St Michael.

- **What is your vision for St Michael's community and particularly for the elderly and sick?**

Like the homeless, the elderly and the sick are among the categories in our community that require our special attention, care and love. I wish to succeed in finding enough volunteers to offer them a friend, a close "buddy", who will keep contact with them and lend them a caring hand when needed.

- **We know that you put so much effort in St Michael's Meals. Tell us what does it represent for you?**

Since my early years at the Institute

of St Paul, where I studied philosophy and theology, I was fond of liberation theology that emphasises "social concern for the poor and political liberation for the oppressed people". And as the vision of St Michael's Meals was very much similar to my theological ambitions, I fell in love with this great organisation and decided to be part of it.

- **Any final message to our community?**

There is a great one that comes directly from our Lord and Saviour: I am sick, I am lonely, I am homeless, I am hungry, I am marginalised, I am deprived from my rights, I am oppressed, I am in great need of your love and care. Let us all put our hands and hearts together to practice true Christianity.

A candid chat with Yvonne Gregoire



SHOWING STRONG BOND AND FRIENDSHIP.

- **Tell me something about your family and life in Egypt.**

I am Yvonne Gregoire, a senior member of the Founders Group at St Michael's Cathedral. I was living in Cairo, Egypt, when at the age of seventeen I married my mother's cousin and was blessed with 3 children, 1 girl and 2 boys. I loved my husband dearly and during our 25 years together we were completely devoted to one another. He was a family man, with a big heart and great generosity. We lived close to my mother and brothers and shared with them many happy moments and strong and binding love.

- **Now, What about your new life in Australia?**

The first to emigrate to Australia from our family was my younger brother, followed by the two other brothers, then my mother, and we remained in Egypt far from the rest of the family. We applied to join them through the family reunion scheme, but with no success. My daughter came to Australia for a visit and was able to settle here and apply to bring us over, but we were rejected once more. The pain was too much for my husband now that his only daughter was also far away. He started losing weight and suffered kidney problems. His condition deteriorated and finally passed away in 1977 at the young age of 44 years. In 1979, we were finally allowed to come to Australia. This was our fate; we realised our dream, but not before losing someone so dear! To start with, we lived for a while with my mother and 2 brothers. With my 2 sons working as toll collectors on the Harbour Bridge and I working with my daughter Mimi as machinists in a factory, we were able to rent a flat then later moved into a house close to my family's home. My daughter got married, followed by my 2 boys, and soon after I became a grandmother. Sadly, we lost my granddaughter

Jessica, at the tender age of 17; and you can imagine the suffering we went through, but with prayers we learned to accept it and move on. I ask the Lord to protect my family, whom I love dearly and consider them my real treasure in life.

- **How do you spend your time and keep busy in this lockdown?**

I look after my home. I keep myself busy in cooking, cleaning, talking to my family and friends on the phone, watching TV. I also help as much as I can people around me, being family or friends. I never say No as long as I am able to and God keeps me in good health...

- **With your experience in life, what advice would you like to give to the younger generation?**

I ask God to protect the young. I want them to always think of others, to be thoughtful and compassionate to those who are less fortunate and to always remember God and be close to their Church in all what they do.

- **What do the activities of the Seniors and Friends Group mean to you?**

Before I answer this question, I want to say a few words about Fr Gerges, or as I affectionately call him "myAbouna". He

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

is a kind, caring, compassionate man, always willing to help. As it is difficult for me to regularly go to church, he often brings me communion at home, and through him I made many friends. The once a month Friday gathering

at church for the Seniors and Friends Group is an important occasion that we all look forward to, and Abouna has put so much joy in our hearts. He helps everyone in need, and what he does every week through St Michael's Meals

in feeding the homeless is remarkable. Abouna Gerges is a gift from heaven and whatever I say about him, he deserves so much more. I pray God to protect him and keep him healthy for his congregation.

VALE MARY ROSE ORLANDO

Mary was a very kind and thoughtful person with a warm and loving heart. She talked to everyone with simple words and a great sense of optimism. She brought so much joy to our gatherings at church. The once-a-month Friday mass at St Michael's won't be the same without her. I remember how she loved singing at Communion time: "Receive me O Lord today...", and then shared lunch with all her Senior friends. She particularly enjoyed eating the "moagenat" that Abouna used to get for all of us. We will always remember you, dear Mary. You will live in our hearts forever because:

Love lives on

*Those we love are never really lost to us
We feel them in so many special ways
Through friends they always cared about*



*And dreams they left behind
In beauty that they added to our days
In words of wisdom that never will be gone*

*Those we love are never really lost to us
For everywhere their special love lives on.*

SPIRITUAL CORNER

GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD

In the Lord's prayer, our Father has invited us to go to Him and ask Him for our daily bread. He will not fail to provide it. The first and most obvious meaning of this request is that God would sustain us physically. When we ask God for our daily bread, we are humbly acknowledging Him as the sole giver of all we need.

It is interesting that we ask for "our" daily bread and not "my" bread. Jesus teaches us that even when we pray in private, we do not pray alone (Mt 6: 6). We pray in solidarity with all the children of God, the Church of the living and all the Saints in heaven. We pray for the whole church, that all may have the bread they need today. This prayer is intimate yet shared.

In our present times, when so many people are hurting and experiencing physical and psychological wounds, we should pray that God instils in them the real desire for His bread. Yes Lord Jesus, give bread to all those who are hungry, but also give bread to those who have the earthly bread but are still looking for the real bread of life, the bread that gives eternal life.

A Prayer from the Heart

*My past, O Lord, I trust in your kind Mercy, my present in your eternal
Love and my future in your divine Providence. AMEN.*



Prayer of Love

*Dear God,
Please help me to release
That most precious gift
You have given me of love,
That gift of Love
That is connected to my soul.
AMEN*

This is a prayer asking God to help us to realise the most precious gift He has given us. The gift of Love, and how pure we are because of who we are in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are His children. This love can never be diminished. It is an abundance. Love is the most overwhelming force in the world. It comes from heaven. We love because Christ first loved us.

It is love that brings happiness and joy into our lives and always steers us in the right direction. It is love that makes living worthwhile. Love brings peace, harmony and good will to us all.

KITCHEN CORNER

Mounira Sadek

Mounira came to Australia in 1973 with her husband Edmund and 3 children, and she had 2 more children in Australia. She worked very hard alongside her husband to establish themselves and to raise their 5 children. In 1991 she joined the St Michael's Our Lady of the Annunciation Fraternity and has been a very active member since then. Her time in the Fraternity involved her in many activities including functions, fundraising and most importantly maintaining the church every month with a group of dedicated ladies. She has also served on the Parish Council and there her contribution was invaluable. She is a member of the Seniors and Friends

Group, always willing to participate at every event, preparing and serving lunch. With the establishment of St Michael's Meals, she was one of the first to put her hand up to help in any way. She cooks meals every Wednesday and arrives early to join in preparing the food hampers.

Mounira is a most talented cook and can serve every dish in the Lebanese Cuisine. When asked what her favourite dish and that of her family, she answered without hesitation "Chicken and Rice". Whenever she has her family or invited guests she cooks this dish to the delight of everyone. Thank You Mounira for your invaluable contribution to our community.



MOUNIRA ALWAYS WILLING TO GIVE A HAND.

Here is Mounira's recipe for **Chicken and Rice**

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken
- 1 kilo of mince meat
- 4 cups of rice
- salt, cinnamon and 1 cinnamon stick, mix of 7 spices, small onion,
- ½ cup of pine nuts, half cup of blanched almonds

Method:

- Wash the rice and soak until ready to use.
- Wash and clean the chicken, place it into a large saucepan and brown it all over, add salt, cinnamon, spices and onion. Cover with water, bring to boil and allow to simmer until cooked (reserve the broth to use later). Remove all the skin and bones, saving the skin from the breast. Break up the chicken into small pieces and put aside.
- In a frypan place one kilo of mincemeat, salt and spices to taste and cook until the meat sweats. Remove from heat and place into a colander to drain from the broth and impurities.
- In a large saucepan add 1 tablespoon of butter, chop up the saved chicken skin into small pieces and cook well. Add the mincemeat and cook until brown. Wash and drain the rice and add it to the meat, keep turning the rice and meat until dry. Add the kept broth, (approx. 2 cups of broth to each cup of rice). You may use plain water if you are short of stock, and add salt to taste. Cook on low heat until the broth is absorbed and the rice is ready.
- While the rice is cooking add some oil into a frypan approx. ¼ cup, and cook the pine nuts and almonds.
- To assemble place the rice into a large serving dish, put the chicken pieces on top and then the nuts. Bon Appétit!

ACTIVITIES

Seniors:

Our Seniors monthly gatherings were put on hold for most of this year because of the Coronavirus. We had so many activities planned but were unable to do any of them.

On Friday 7 August 2020 we had our first gathering for this year, a Mass followed by a lunch in the hall, everyone was excited to be back and thoroughly enjoyed the day.



SHARED LUNCH AFTER THE HOLY LITURGY

ACTIVITIES

Snapshots of our activities with the homeless:



BUSY PREPARING THE FOOD HAMPERS DURING THE PANDEMIC



GREETING EVERYONE WITH A SMILE

Since the beginning of the restrictions due to the Coronavirus, we have not stopped our food distribution. Instead of taking the food down and serving on tables, we are now filling up a bag of food and distributing the bags. This is a much safer option with less chances of contamination.

Before the pandemic, we used to fill our vans with hot meals, fruit, water and items of clothing and sleeping

bags and head to our points of distribution. There we would set tables and display our offerings. Our friends, those in need, would in an orderly manner, pick what they like and shower us with blessings and compliments as they leave.

During the pandemic, we decided to pre-pack everything in food hampers and practice social distancing with the homeless, thus protecting them and



OUR YOUNG TEAM DOING A GREAT JOB

us from any harm. It is worth noting that not once did we miss our food run and we are still going, stronger than ever, thanks to all those volunteers, with big hearts, who donate their time and money to St. Michael's Meals. We are truly blessed with the support of everyone.



REACHING OUT TO MANY MORE, THANKS TO OUR NEW VAN.

ACTIVITIES

Fundraising:



FOOD ITEMS AND CLOTHING READY TO BE SHIPPED

Our fundraising was limited this year, Bunnings cancelled the BBQ we had booked but we still managed to have an Easter raffle, fundraising on Facebook. We are moved by the generosity of our members and the St Michael's community who regularly contribute financially, and for this we are truly grateful. More people have

signed up to offer their services in cooking and distribution of the meals and we are very appreciative of their assistance.

We were overwhelmed by the donation of a seated van from Mrs Maude Gazal and her family, this has enabled us to go to other sites in the city to further our mission and reach out to more people on

the streets. We were also given another van without seats from a friend of Elias Habelrih. This van is very important to us to transport food from the Foodbank.

We were also able to help 5 children in our Community, whose families are struggling financially, with school fees etc.

The Directors of St Michael's Meals were deeply saddened by the tragic news of the recent explosion in Beirut, which accounted for so many deceased and made over 300,000 people homeless. An appeal was conducted to help out and our whole community reacted promptly and positively, showing great care and generosity by donating in addition to around \$50,000, non-perishable food and items of clothing. These funds will be distributed directly to most needy families by one of our members presently in Lebanon

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