

Making Room for One Another: Holy Spirit Parish, St Clair Celebrates its Multicultural Community

Holy Spirit Parish, St Clair, marked Migrant and Refugee Sunday on 27 September 2026 with its annual Multicultural Mass, bringing together parishioners from the many cultural backgrounds represented in the community.

The celebration included a procession of children carrying flags representing different countries, parishioners wearing traditional and national dress, Prayers of the Faithful offered in different languages, and a multicultural fellowship after Mass.

For many parishioners, however, the day was about more than what could be seen and heard. It was an opportunity to recognise one another's cultures, hear one another's stories and experience more deeply what it means to belong to one parish community.

That was also the invitation offered by Parish Priest **Fr Percival Severe OSA** in his homily.

"We become a community when we begin to make room for one another," he said, encouraging parishioners to learn each other's names, become interested in each other's stories and speak with someone they might recognise but had never spoken to.

"Every person here has a story worth hearing."

Those stories emerged in the reflections parishioners shared after the celebration.

Siblings **Nethin and Mineth Perera** said "it felt really nice to see all of the cultures within our parish coming together," particularly through the multilingual Prayers of the Faithful, traditional clothing and food shared afterwards.

For **Frank Perera**, the occasion was made especially meaningful by the presence of his sister from Melbourne. Originally from Sri Lanka, he found himself noticing similarities between Sri Lankan and Filipino clothing. He was particularly touched by children carrying flags from cultures other than their own, describing it as a sign of "unity, acceptance and friendship."

His sister, he said, "was genuinely amazed by the experience. She couldn't believe how united everyone was despite coming from so many different cultures and backgrounds. She kept commenting on how remarkable it was that people knew one another so well and welcomed each other so warmly. It was something she had never experienced before, and she left with a deep appreciation for what makes our parish so special."

For Frank, her experience highlighted something he himself had come to appreciate about the parish.

"The diversity in our community is not something that divides us. Rather, it is one of our greatest blessings. Seeing people from so many nations, cultures and backgrounds worshipping, celebrating and sharing together was both inspiring and uplifting."

That same sense of diversity held together by faith was reflected in the words of **Joan Pereira and Jeanette Antao**, who compared the parish to Joseph's coat of many colours, describing a

community “woven together by God into one vibrant fabric.” For them, the centre of everything remained the Eucharist, where people of different backgrounds gathered as one Body of Christ.

With gratitude, they added: “We give thanks for the joy of this day and for the warm, inclusive spirit that continues to flourish within our Holy Spirit Parish family.”

For young parishioner and SRE catechist **Tahlia Mitchell**, the celebration also showed the difference between simply recognising someone and genuinely getting to know them. She saw parishioners accepting Fr Percival’s invitation after Mass “to join in fellowship and connect with someone we recognise but may not yet know.”

“As Holy Spirit’s Parish always does, we embraced this challenge and spent time learning the unfamiliar stories behind familiar faces. Each and every person has a story to be told, today we recounted and shared the stories that make us who we are. Together, each person’s story played a role in reminding everyone what it truly means to be part of a community that embraces diversity and is united through one faith.”

Dawn Timmins, meanwhile, was struck by the way parishioners were “proudly representing their countries of origin while embracing their Australian home.”

For **Selwyn and Sonia Oliveira**, the children’s flag procession, multilingual prayers and sharing of food created “a strong sense of belonging and community.” They saw the celebration as an expression of “unity in diversity.”

For others, the celebration stirred memories of the places from which their own journeys had begun.

For **Carmen Marcelo**, wearing Filipino traditional dress opened a door to personal memories. It made her “proud to be known as a representative of my homeland” and brought back memories of growing up in Manila, her schooldays, working life and years as a young mother before migrating to Sydney in 1980.

Carmen also acted on the invitation to meet someone new. She found herself talking with an elderly parishioner named Doris, who had migrated from Malta at only 16.

“The happy faces that gathered around after the Mass says it all,” Carmen reflected.

Bhoy Sanosa was moved by hearing familiar prayers and music carried by different languages and voices. He left with a personal challenge: “**to see my own culture as a gift to offer, and every other culture as a gift to receive.**”

The experience of migration itself was also present in many of the reflections.

For **Tracy Manzanares**, who came to Australia from the Philippines as a child, the celebration touched on the experience of living between two cultures. She knows what it means “to grow up between cultures while learning to call Australia home.”

Jeshamin Silerio also reflected from the experience of migration. Being away from home, she said, makes “a parish community that feels like home” especially important, providing friendship, support and belonging.

“The celebration beautifully reminds us that despite our different backgrounds, we are united by one faith and that we can support and walk alongside one another as one community.”

Esther Rose connected that welcome particularly with migrants and refugees who experience difficulties and long to belong, describing the parish as “one family, one heart on the way to Jesus our Lord.”

For **Danny and Olga Esquerra**, the different nationalities gathered in the church resembled “a bouquet of flowers,” each with its own colour, size, texture and beauty, but bound together as one offering.

After Mass, they witnessed a simple gesture that gave practical expression to that sense of community. An elderly parishioner was waiting at a bus stop in the cold wind and light rain when someone leaving the church turned their car around and came back to offer him a lift.

Other parishioners found their own images and words to describe what they had experienced.

Naomi Weston saw the parish’s many cultures as “a wave of cultures that culminate in one united ocean of diversity.”

Catherine Reyes expressed how “thankful” she was to belong to a community where people could share “our traditions, food, and stories.”

For Catherine, such occasions also offer an opportunity to appreciate what each culture brings to the life of the community.

“Moments like these remind us of the beauty of unity, the joy of learning from one another, and the blessings of our unique cultures.”

For **Margareth Moriarty**, the day carried the perspective of history. A parishioner throughout the first 45 years of Holy Spirit Parish, she chose to wear Aboriginal colours “to celebrate the original people of this country.”

“My children have grown up knowing only a multicultural Parish and the rich blessings it brings,” she reflected, “and their children of course are the same.”

John and Dianne Mira similarly valued the opportunity to appreciate different cultural practices, clothing and food while recognising what holds the community together: “even though we are of different ethnic backgrounds, we all share the same faith, and serve the same God.”

For **Sarah Canete**, multiculturalism was experienced through service. Helping with the fellowship gave her the opportunity to “serve my fellow parishioners, share our blessings, and help feed a multitude with love and joy.”

Corinne Brooker was especially struck by the involvement of different generations. Seeing parishioners represented through the procession, music, cultural dress and prayers, she said, gave “a real sense that everyone had a place and belonged.” The participation of children was particularly meaningful on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees and its focus on vulnerable children and young people.

Taken together, the reflections reveal a celebration that went beyond recognising the cultural diversity already present at Holy Spirit Parish. Through worship, conversation, food, service and the sharing of personal stories, parishioners were given an opportunity to know one another a little better and to turn welcome into something personal and practical.

As Fr Percival reminded the congregation, “Belonging and welcome cannot remain simply beautiful ideas or words that we say. They have to become something we actually do.”

“Welcome is something we give.”

A multicultural parish becomes a parish family, he reflected, when people “begin to know one another, listen to one another, and make room in our lives for one another.”

On Migrant and Refugee Sunday, Holy Spirit Parish was given another opportunity to do just that.