



Reflection

A Christmas Reflection

by Michael Hardie SVD

Is it because of the Covid pandemic that Christmas seems somehow different? In 2019, we had a bushfire Christmas; last year because of Covid, Christmas was cancelled – no parties, no barbeques and no Church celebrations either. Christmas was ‘on hold.’ But this year, with the arrival of summer, the season of Advent and Australia’s double vaccination percentage into the high seventies, there comes the hope that we can once again celebrate the birth of Christ in a familiar way.

Shopkeepers and the financial sector will be delighted of course, anticipating high sales and furious gift-buying, but Christmas – at least for Christians – is much more than this. For us, Christmas is more about our faith than our purchases, although buying gifts for friends and family is also a part of the tradition. Everyone loves a party and the surprise of receiving a brightly wrapped gift in an atmosphere of celebration and friendship.

But there’s something about the gifts of the commercial world: they don’t last very long. They’re not designed to! By next year, this year’s gifts will have probably been used, worn out, consumed or forgotten as new products and ideas emerge.

However, at ELSPM we have a different view of gifts. All students who come to ELSPM receive a gift – the gift of the English language. ELSPM teachers are a gifted lot, and they want to share what they have with their students. The gift of language doesn’t arrive on Christmas morning, though. It is a gift which takes time and effort to wrap up and deliver. Yet, nothing gives teachers more pleasure than to see the gift of language unfolding in the life of the student, as they progress in their learning. Such a gift, it is said, is ‘the gift that goes on giving.’

Over the years since ELSPM first opened its doors in Box Hill, Melbourne, the school has been gifted with both overseas and local students, eager to learn English and improve their existing skills. Our lives have been uplifted by the contributions our students have made to the school, as they have brought their own languages and cultures, hopes and dreams to the table of learning. Even when doors were closed because of Covid, our students were able to ‘Zoom in’ via online learning. Surely, the wonder of ELSPM’s continued presence speaks of God’s love for both young and old, and the value of the English language for pastoral service and mission. May the Lord continue to bless ELSPM and all those who pass through her doors; and may everyone enjoy a blessed, Covid-safe Christmas.



The seminary in Phu Cuong,
end of term 2019



ELSPM and me

In 2016 whilst still working for Opera Australia but considering retirement, I travelled to Vietnam at the invitation of a Melbourne, Vietnamese born, parish priest to offer my services as an English teacher to the various diocesan seminaries there. When I was talking to the Rector of the Nha Trang Seminary I was telling him about my vision for teaching English to those wanting to pursue academic English for the purpose of Theological studies. I summed it up as a sort of IELTS concentrating on religious themes. He surprised me by pointing out that that already existed in Australia. He then pulled out all the brochures he had for ELSPM which was then in Adelaide.

In 2017 I returned to teach at various seminaries and institutions in Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong Province. Unfortunately, my very full and happy life there was cut short by the pandemic. I was forced to return to Australia at the beginning of 2020. I had had some contact with Sister Margaret Bentley when I was organising a student visa for Trieu who had received an offer to study at ELSPM in preparation for his theological studies with the MSCs. So very soon after I arrived in Sydney early 2020, I contacted her to offer my services as a teacher if required. Fortunately for me she was interested, so I flew to Melbourne to begin my association with ELSPM. My initial tenure was short lived because Covid-19 took hold, and the subsequent lockdown curtailed my teaching. A few months later Sr. Margaret asked me if I would do some volunteer tutoring of the Elementary and EAP classes. I readily accepted and I have to say it saved my life making the severe lockdown more bearable. Getting to know the students and learning more about the spirit and pastoral care of ELSPM inspired me to want to be more involved. Fortunately, from January this year I was offered a co-teaching role with Jackie in the Intermediate Class as well as the volunteer work with EAP. The year has flown as we have worked with two wonderful groups of students.

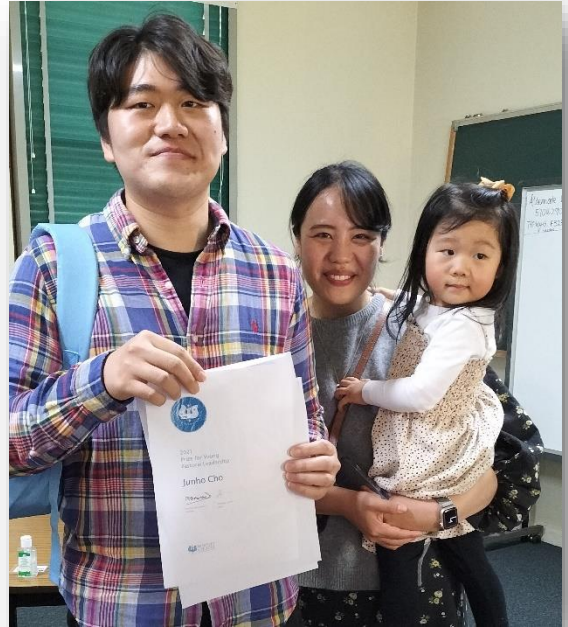
I have taught with other English language schools both in Sydney and Ho Chi Minh City. The standout difference between them and ELSPM is the nth degree of care that is taken with each student both academically and pastorally. This is not a one size fits all environment. Every student is treated as unique, and every effort is made to assist their studies. It is a delight to know that everyone from the top down and sideways has the welfare of all involved at heart and there is no limit to discussion about how things can be improved. In my experience that is unusual but, in this context, I believe very necessary. I hope I can continue as part of the wonderful team here at ELSPM.

Jeff

Congratulations to past ELSPM student, Junho, who received an award for Youth Pastoral Leadership from Whitley College.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCYoikGa16U>

Praise Song for the Pandemic



The Board of Directors, Staff and students of ELSPM wish you all the blessings of this special time.

May the gifts of peace, hope, joy and service be with you, your communities and families as you celebrate Christmas.

Let us stay united in working towards a safer and better world.

