

Holy Diocese of Adelaide Annual Pilgrimage to Mount Gambier 2024



With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, the Central Philoptochos of the Holy Diocese of Adelaide has held its annual pilgrimage to Mount Gambier. As in recent years, the pilgrimage was spread over three days (Friday 27th to Sunday 29th of September 2024) – the three-day event allowing the group to make the most of the 5-hour journey to-and-from Mt Gambier.

After leaving from the Cathedral at 10:20am on Friday the pilgrims arrived in Mt Gambier in the mid-afternoon. This included a brief stopover for lunch at Keith (the half-way point of the journey), with a mix of food from the local service station and from the Central Philoptochos who had come along on the trip. After arriving and settling in at their accommodation, the pilgrims made their way to the spectacular Umpherston Sinkhole in time to watch the sun set over the region and to see the local possums come out for a feed. They returned to the Hellenic Hall for dinner provided by the Central Philoptochos and spent time together in fellowship. The evening was wrapped up with the pilgrims participating in the service of Compline

together before retiring back to the hotel for the evening.

The next day had a full program of sightseeing, beginning with breakfast together at the hotel. The first event was a guided tour of the Blue Lake pumping station, which included a ride on a small, glass-walled elevator down a decommissioned bore shaft to descend close to the lake's surface. This was followed by lunch at Sorrentos restaurant, and a quick tour of the adjacent Cave Gardens in the centre of the city. The afternoon was rounded out by a trip to the Tantanoola Cave, in which the pilgrims were able to see the spectacular cave formations which are unique among caves in Australia and the world – uniqueness that has been recently recognised by the addition of the cave to the State Heritage register. The pilgrims then returned to the hotel mid-afternoon for rest, with some of the determined children attempting to go for a swim in the pool (a brave attempt indeed, given that it is still early Spring, and the region is known for its cooler weather).



On Saturday evening the pilgrims again gathered at the Hellenic Hall to celebrate Vespers together, led by Fr Jeremy Krieg of St Panteleimon and the Greek Welfare Centre. They were joined by a number of locals as well as another couple – enquirers who had journeyed independently from the Mallee region to be part of the trip. The service was followed by a light supper, during which His Grace Bishop Silouan of Adelaide arrived to join the pilgrims (having journeyed from another service that morning in Wallaroo).

On Sunday morning His Grace celebrated the liturgy at the Hellenic Hall assisted by Father Jeremy, with an impressive gathering of nearly 40 people comprised of both the pilgrims and locals. His Grace addressed the congregation (in Greek and English) about the Gospel reading for the day – highlighting the importance (and difficulty) of rising above our base instincts, so that we do not only love those who love us, but that we love everyone. He also touched on the life of Saint Kyriakos the Anchorite, whose memory we celebrated on that day, highlighting his spiritual zeal and dedication to God. As is customary the service was followed by morning tea and fellowship, again catered by the Central Philoptochos and assisted by the locals.

After morning tea, the pilgrims embarked on the return trip to Adelaide. Following the tradition of previous years, they were invited to visit Raidis Estate winery in the nearby town of Penola (50km North of Mt Gambier) belonging to the proprietor Mr Chris Raidis and his family. In spite of being busy with functions that weekend Mr Raīdis was able to meet the pilgrims for a goat-feeding demonstration (in which the children in particular were enthusiastic participants). This was followed by a private lunch hosted in their cellar rooms, where the pilgrims were joined by some of the Gambier and Penola locals. After lunch, it was time to bid a final farewell to the Mount Gambier and Penola locals to make the journey back home to Adelaide, finally arriving home (after a stopover in Tailem Bend for dinner) at around 9:00pm.

The pilgrimage was thoroughly enjoyed by all, and particularly by the children who described it as “the best Mt Gambier trip yet.” The locals in particular were uplifted and encouraged by the opportunity to share fellowship with fellow Orthodox Christians and look forward to increasing their participation in future years. All of this points to a solid and bright future for this event in the years to come.

vema.com.au