

[★ Christmas at work]



A photograph of a church interior. In the foreground, there is a large, vibrant floral arrangement with white lilies, yellow chrysanthemums, and pink flowers. Behind it, a wooden altar is visible with a small framed portrait on top. The background features several stained glass windows with intricate designs, including a central shield-shaped window and two larger windows on either side. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a serene atmosphere.

When duty calls

When the time comes to unwrap presents and tuck into the turkey, spare a thought for those working on Christmas Day. **Fleur Mealing** meets three women for whom December 25 is “business as usual”.

PHOTOGRAPHY ● MIKE ROOKE HAIR AND MAKE-UP ● CLAUDIA RODRIGUES



“Staff dress up and give out presents to the children.”

THE STARSHIP NURSE

Accidents happen, even on Christmas Day, which is something the staff at Starship hospital know all too well.

People like Kathryn Johnson put their Christmas Day on hold to be there to help other families in need, whether it be for a broken arm or something far more serious.

For Kathryn, a paediatric emergency nurse practitioner at Starship Hospital, it is not a chore but something she likes to do.

“There are a lot of [medical] places that don’t open on Christmas Day so I think it’s important for the community to know there is a place that they can go... in some ways that takes the stress out of what some may envisage as being a fantastic day, and then one of their kids falls off their brand new bike,” she says.

Combining her love of children and emergency nursing, Kathryn has been at Starship for 12 years. “I guess part of the allure for emergency nursing is you just don’t know what is going to walk through that

door. It might be one of those days where all you see is fevers and coughs and runny noses but then there are other days where it is broken arms, broken legs, and lacerations.”

Children’s Christmas gifts such as bikes, scooters and trampolines all seem to lend themselves to more broken bones than normal on Christmas Day.

“It would be fair to say orthopaedics is generally busier that day,” says Kathryn.

Christmas in the Starship emergency department is about making the best of a bad situation. Staff dress up, decorate the departments and give out presents to the children, all while working to fix what brought them to the hospital in the first place. And for the doctors, nurses and other staff there is a shared lunch to celebrate the big day.

“You get a great sense of teamwork and camaraderie. You’re here with your second family in some ways,” says Kathryn. “It is not a sacrifice at all, you just have to make the best of it.”



THE VICAR

When Clare Barrie leaves for work on Christmas morning, her daughters think nothing of it.

As the vicar of St Luke's Anglican Church in Mt Albert, Auckland, Clare is responsible for leading the Christmas services for her community.

"I think that for our girls they don't know any different, it is just part of what Christmas is for them," she says. "It doesn't feel like work to me because the celebration is so significant – I guess it is part of who I am."

Weeks of planning go into preparing the church, in particular for the two services on Christmas Eve and one the next morning on Christmas Day.

At Christmas, as well as for Easter, baptisms and funerals, Clare dons her white and gold robes to mark the occasion. For her they are special – the colours represent resurrection and new life.

At 5pm on Christmas Eve, local children and their families come to the church for a short, fun service full of Christmas carols and stories. Dressing up is encouraged and Clare says the kids come as whatever they like. A few Batmans and Supermans have filled the pews over the years.

Following the early evening service, they set up for the more traditional midnight mass at 11.30pm.

"At about 1am we tidy up the church and set up for Christmas morning. By the time that is done all I want to do is lie on the sofa... I'm probably in bed by about 2am and then up again at 7am."

For Christmas Day, one of the biggest days in the church's calendar, Clare says the service is simple, with a much smaller congregation. It is all over by 11am and Clare – the first female vicar of St Lukes – can return home to lots of food and wrapping paper all over the floor, a standard with young children, she says.

Although she is exhausted from work, there is no place she would rather be than with her family.

"Time with my family, kids, you just can't go past that and the sense of joy and fun they have." »



THE ZOOKEEPER

For one day every year, the hustle and bustle of Auckland Zoo is replaced with complete calm.

On Christmas Day, the gates are closed and zookeepers are able to spend some one-on-one time with their beloved animals. For Pridelands keeper Jessie Hill, this will be her second year working at the zoo on Christmas Day.

And while her mum back home in Australia might prefer she fly back there for Christmas, Jessie says working on a day when everyone else is unwrapping presents and enjoying festive fare is far from a chore for her.

“I choose to work Christmas Day because my family is back in Australia... and other staff probably want to go spend it with theirs.”

At lunch time, the zoo staff share a meal together, one of the only times in the year when they get the opportunity to be all together.

The animals don't miss out on the celebrations either - they are treated to presents, in the form of fruit and vegetables in boxes, and are able to roam as they please without the pressure of being on display.

Jessie says it is nice to give the animals a day to do what they want.

“I think my favourite part [of Christmas Day] would have to be how different it feels - it's kind of eerie and surreal that there is no public around.”

She admits, though, that the animals do find the lack of crowds strange. “I think the animals definitely pick up on the fact there is no public around. The giraffes and zebras get a bit confused as to why it is so quiet, as they are in an area where there are always people going past, but the cats are a lot more relaxed and just snooze everywhere.”

However it is only a mere 24 hours before it is business as usual for Jessie and her curious giraffes. **AWW**



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