

Chapel Service Lunch Keynote Speaker



Elizabeth Adnams OAM (Elsternwick 1947 – 1957; Kew 1958)

I expect some of you would have been Girl Guides in your youth; or your daughter or granddaughter may have had the opportunity.

I was an enthusiastic Girl Guide from age of 8 – 16. As an only child at an all-girls' school, this exposed me to meeting other types of girls as well learning lots of different skills. I became a leader when my daughter joined after we returned from living in New York – where those additional skills had come in very handy. For example, cooking on a camp stove over foil trays for a family of 5 for 5 months in our Manhattan hotel room.

But times have changed, and I would like to introduce you to some of our newer initiatives

In Australia we remain as an all-female organisation. It is well documented that girls think and learn differently to boys, so we can offer programs to suit their needs, and which still include adventurous activities. Our youth members are from 5 – 18. Yes, we had competition from the Scouts after they took in younger girls. However, we found that our more targeted program and the quality of leadership we provide, has ensured our survival. The flexibility of being able to move girls into the age group which best reflects their development level also makes a real difference.

Our older Guides can join the Olave Section to further extend their networks and interests

All members make a Promise which traditionally has always included 'doing my best to do my duty to God, Queen and Country and keeping the Guide Laws. More recently this has been changed to be more inclusive but retains the original intent.

This new Promise is to 'be true to myself and develop my beliefs; to serve my community and Australia and live by the Guide law'. This better reflects the world we live in.

The wording of the Laws is also more relevant to the girl of today.

The Promise Badge has changed a number of times - the current one is modern and stylish - and cleans itself!

Once a girl promises 'to do her best' she steps into a values-based leadership journey that nurtures and celebrates who she is and what she brings to the world around her.

So what can our girls do at Guides today?

Most importantly our girls actively decide what **they** want to do, they plan and implement their activities and evaluate the results. There is a vast range of options and all in a safe environment with trained leaders. We actively adhere to the Child Safe Child Friendly Framework.

Outdoor skills and camping are still a focus, but we no longer travel to camp in a furniture van or bathe in a tin bath under the stars – unless the girls ask for this.

Instead, they can experience high and low ropes courses, flying fox, abseiling, paddleboarding, caving or skiing.

They can camp in houses, tents, tree houses or go expedition hiking with packs.

The guides can learn to fly drones; they can build and use robots; or develop creative interests or sing around the Campfire

They can contact girls in other countries by internet (or ham radio).

The girls can choose to earn badges- alone or in teams. The old-style badges were round navy blue circles but now there are many more attractive options.

They are peer assessed. Girls take this responsibility very seriously.

Guides can aim for higher Awards including Queens Guide and Duke of Edinburgh or can choose to not participate in that area of the Program.

During COVID most units continued to meet on Zoom with leaders distributing prepared materials each week to enhance the girls' program. This was very demanding for the Leaders but they were able to keep units viable - of course the girls were used to this method of communicating – and it was more interesting than school work!

We try to expose our girls to many different interests and experiences.

You may have heard of Gang Show where Scouts and Guides produce excellent professional performances.

In addition to that, many suburbs and towns have Showtime performances - from Mildura to Morwell. These groups welcome girls and boys of all standards and everyone gets a task – from solos to chorus, orchestra, making props or perhaps doing makeup. The aim is to give each person a positive experience of a stage performance - even if they are disabled or in a wheelchair.

Our older girls can have other experiences such as being members of Youth Parliament, jumping into the Yarra at the Birdman Rally, overseas visits and attending international conferences - almost anything is possible!

A group of successful women some time ago formed a coterie group called Women of Note. They conducted Mentor Breakfasts where mostly non-Guides in Year 11, were invited to share a formal breakfast with these women in a large hotel ballroom. Many long-term mentoring connections were formed and some of these women still meet informally.

I have led in every age group but I am still stimulated by the difference in girls' development and interests, and watching them grow up.

Guiding is an international organisation and this opens up many opportunities for our members. There are 126 international member countries of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. They come from all over the world.

Each country manages their own organisation in ways to suit their area. Some are school based with teachers as their leaders, many are led by trained volunteers as here in Oz. A great number are all female - especially the large number of newer members from Asian, African and Arabic countries. In Europe there are some countries which include boys in their Units.

But there is an overarching Leadership Framework which all countries in the world follows.

Taking part enables girls to build a foundation of leadership practice, confidence and life to become bold and confident women in every aspect of their lives.

They use 6 Leadership Mindsets as tools to draw meaning from our experiences.

Leading Yourself (reflective)
Relationships (collaborative)
For Innovation (creative and critical thinking)
For Impact (responsible action)
For girls empowerment (gender equality)
And Leading In context (worldly)

There are five World Centers where any guide can visit, reside or volunteer as a staff member. These are In London, India, Mexico, Africa and Switzerland. International Conferences are held regularly both for youth and adult groups. Recently a group of 100 youth members from many counties visited the United Nations, one was chosen to present results of a discussion seminar to the Conference.

There is an old saying “once a Guide, always a Guide.”

There are groups of ex-Guides who form groups called Trefoil Guilds across the country. Their National Conference is in Geelong in September and has several international participants.

Each Guild agrees to their own focus for the particular group of women. I belong to two - one concentrates on service opportunities and the other on learning outings visiting interesting venues or country Guilds.

On reading my Bio, you may wonder how I have had so many interesting roles.

Simply put - when something different was offered to me I usually accepted because I knew that there would be someone to mentor me if I needed it. My personal growth has been amazing.

I hope I have enthused you, or someone you know, that becoming connected to the Girl Guiding movement at any age can be a valuable and stimulating experience.