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M A G A Z I N E

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA

Advent & Christmas | Summer 2025



Bishop Vincent's Christmas Message | The Anticipation and Joy of Advent |
Migrant Jubilee Cross Pilgrimage | A New Direction for CYP
Parish Profile: Luddenham-Warragamba | Christmas Mass Times

Catholic Outlook

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Unless specified, all images taken by
Alphonsus Fok for the Diocese of Parramatta

Printing:
IVE Group Australia Pty Ltd



DIOCESE of
PARRAMATTA

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Catholic Outlook is a member of the
Australasian Catholic Press Association.

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The Diocese of Parramatta reaffirms the wise axiom attributed to Saint Augustine of Hippo, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, freedom; in all things, charity." In this spirit, *Catholic Outlook* publishes a variety of Catholic viewpoints. They are not necessarily the official views of the Diocese of Parramatta.



Cover image:

"True meaning of Christmas" by Samantha Pan Winner of our Christmas Cover Art Competition

Samantha says: "My picture depicts the true meaning of the Christmas/Jubilee Year of Hope which is the birth of our Saviour, Jesus. This Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the gifts God gives us. Some of the gifts God gives us are justice, hope, happiness, peace, harmony and Christian belief. My picture also depicts how cheerful Christmas is with the angels singing Alleluia. God in this picture is the light of the world. The ornaments on the tree are religious events that happen during Christmas like the world should praise God and his son, the 3 gifts that the 3 kings gave to Jesus, and the sheep which represents us around Jesus as one holy family. Christ is the Saviour."

Acknowledgement of Country

Here in the Diocese of Parramatta, we gather on Country on which members and Elders of the Darug and Gundungurra communities and their forebears have been custodians for many centuries and on which Aboriginal people have performed age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We acknowledge their living culture and their unique role in the life of the region.

An artwork by Bundjalung Elder Aunty Rhonda, an Aboriginal Services volunteer at Catholic Care Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, in Emerton.

A message from the Editor

As the year draws to a close and Advent candles flicker in our churches and homes, we are reminded that even in our weary and darkest days, Christ's light never fades. Amidst all the busyness of end of year celebrations and plans, December invites us to pause – to look back with gratitude, and to look forward with hope.

As the Jubilee Year of Hope comes to a close this January, we look back with gratitude on a time of grace, renewal, and rediscovery. Throughout 2025, the Church invited us to rekindle the light of hope – trusting in God's promises even amid life's uncertainties.

Inspired by Pope Francis' call and continued through the early works and writings of Pope Leo XIV, we learned that hope is not mere optimism, but a deep confidence that Christ continues to work in our world and in our hearts. Our parishes, schools, ministries, and communities came together in prayer, service, and celebration, finding new strength in faith and unity. As we look towards a new year, the spirit of the Jubilee endures – reminding us that God's mercy has no end, and that His love continues to make all things new.

In this issue, we rejoice in the hope that sustains our communities. From celebrating marriage milestones (page 28) to journeying with our young people to a national youth conference (page 38), to giving warmth to those in need (page 33), to reflections on the meaning of Christmas in today's world (pages 50-55), each story echoes the message of Emmanuel – *God with us*.

As you prepare your heart for Christmas, may you find moments of peace amid the busyness, joy in simple blessings, and a renewed sense of wonder at the mystery of God's love made flesh.

From all of us at *Catholic Outlook*, thank you for journeying with us this year. May Christ's light guide you and your loved ones into a grace-filled New Year.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas and a hopeful 2026. ✝

Anita Sulentic

Diocesan Head of Communications and Engagement

(The Editor of *Catholic Outlook*, Br Mark O'Connor, is on leave)



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Our Bishop of Parramatta, Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, met Pope Leo XIV at the Holy Father's General Audience on 1 October! While they have met before, this was Bishop Vincent's first encounter with the new Pope. They exchanged greetings and a warm handshake before thousands of the faithful.

Keep up with more stories of faith and community on social media. Follow us at @parracatholic



The Pilgrimage of the Migrant Jubilee Cross is an initiative of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office. Marking the Jubilee of Migrants, held in October 2025, the Cross celebrates the faith, gifts, contributions, and resilience that migrant communities bring to our local Church. The Diocese will be hosting the Cross, which contains sacred relics of the Holy Family and St Mary MacKillop, between 5 to 11 January 2026 across four parishes.

See pages 20-21 to join the pilgrimage and welcome the Cross when it arrives at a parish near you.



This year's *Bishop Vincent Presents* series featured three distinguished voices from around the global Church. Mauricio López opened the series with reflections on the Amazon Synod, ecology, Indigenous rights, and practising synodality in today's Church. Dr Nora Kofognotera Nonterah shared an African perspective in *Listening to the Wisdom of Women*, highlighting themes of discipleship, leadership, and renewal. The series concluded with Cardinal Stephen Chow SJ, who offered insights on bridge-building, dialogue, and the life of the Church in Asia. Together, their talks provided a rich exploration of faith, culture, and the Church's mission across diverse contexts.

Stay tuned for next year's speakers by subscribing to *Catholic Outlook* online. Read more about Cardinal Chow's visit to the Diocese on pages 30-31.

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PARRAMATTA STREET FEAST TURNS 5

The fifth annual Parramatta Street Feast was held on 19 November at St Patrick's Cathedral Hall, Parramatta. It was a wonderful gathering that welcomed people from all walks of life to come together in a spirit of community, solidarity and friendship – especially those experiencing homelessness, refugees and people seeking asylum, or others facing hardship. With delicious food, support services, creative activities and workshops, and great music and entertainment, the event was enjoyed by all!

🔍 Turn to **page 33** for more on the event. Read the full story on *Catholic Outlook* online.

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MASS TIMES IN THE DIOCESE OVER CHRISTMAS

We come together in joy to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Prepare to welcome Christ the child into your families and faith communities by celebrating Mass at your local parish.

Turn to **pages 64-65** for a full list of parish Mass times across the Diocese.



COMMEMORATING OUR DECEASED CLERGY

On November 12, our annual Mass for deceased clergy was held at Holy Name of Mary Parish, Rydalmere, followed by prayers at the gravesites of clergy buried in Rookwood Cemetery. On this day we honoured those who have dedicated their lives to bring us closer to Christ. The Mass was concelebrated by Bishop Vincent, especially remembering Fr Tim Hogan and Deacon Rudy Rupac who passed away earlier this year.

🔍 Read about the Mass on *Catholic Outlook* online.



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SUPPORTING THOSE EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND LOSS

In Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, Catholic Care's counsellors walk alongside people in need, providing care, compassion and hope. With rising pressures today, their support is needed more than ever. Christmas is drawing near, and with it the promise that God is with us. For many, that promise is needed right now. Your generosity is the way to open the doors of hope for the broken-hearted ensuring that no one in our community grieves alone.

Turn to **pages 42-43** to learn how you can support Catholic Care's counsellors in their ministry this Christmas.

MASS FOR THE WORLD DAY OF THE SICK 2026

Join us for the annual Mass for the World Day of the Sick on Wednesday 11 February 2026 at 11am at St Patrick's Church, Mary Queen of the Family Parish, Blacktown. Held on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, all are welcome to attend, especially those who are sick, those who care for the sick and dying, and health care professionals. The Mass will include the Anointing of the Sick, followed by a light lunch.

🔍 For more information, visit parracatholic.org/events



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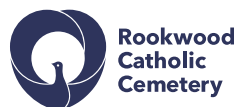
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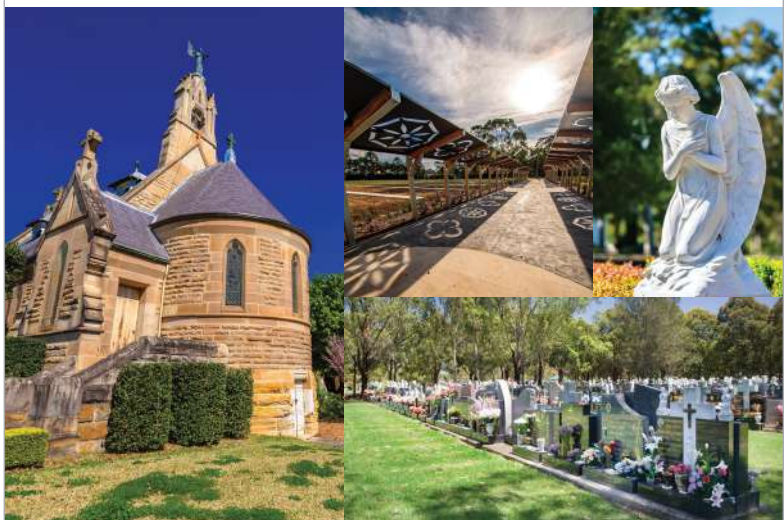
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WHAT'S ON

in the Diocese?

7 DECEMBER

Second Sunday of Advent

8 DECEMBER

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

14 DECEMBER

Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday)

19 DECEMBER

Catholic Schools Parramatta Term 4 ends

21 DECEMBER

Fourth Sunday of Advent

27 DECEMBER

Feast of St John the Evangelist

28 DECEMBER

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

1 JANUARY

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

5 JANUARY

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

5 TO 11 JANUARY

Migrant Jubilee Cross in the Diocese

12 JANUARY

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

27 JANUARY

Catholic Schools Parramatta Term 1 begins

3 FEBRUARY

Red Mass, St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta

5 FEBRUARY

Music for Lent workshop, Bishop Bede Heather Centre, Blacktown

16 FEBRUARY

Liturgical Ministry Formation courses commence

18 FEBRUARY

Ash Wednesday

22 FEBRUARY

Rite of Election, St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta

7 MARCH

Celebrating Holy Week Seminar, Bishop Bede Heather Centre, Blacktown

10 MARCH

Music Workshop for the Easter Triduum, Bishop Bede Heather Centre, Blacktown

30 MARCH

Office of Tenebrae, St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta

1 APRIL

Diocesan Chrism Mass, St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta

3 APRIL

Good Friday

Catholic Youth Parramatta annual Good Friday Night Walk

4 APRIL

Easter Saturday

5 APRIL

Easter Sunday

6 APRIL

Easter Monday

20 APRIL

Catholic Schools Parramatta Term 2 begins

Q For more events in the Diocese of Parramatta in 2025, please go to parracatholic.org/events



POPE'S PRAYER INTENTIONS

Each month, Pope Leo XIV asks us to pray as a global community for his great concerns for humanity and for the mission of the Church.

DECEMBER 2025

For Christians in areas of conflict

Let us pray that Christians living in areas of war or conflict, especially in the Middle East, might be seeds of peace, reconciliation, and hope.

JANUARY 2026

For prayer with the Word of God

Let us pray that praying with the Word of God be nourishment for our lives and a source of hope in our communities, helping us to build a more fraternal and missionary Church.

FEBRUARY 2026

For children with incurable diseases

Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.

*“Christ came into my
room and stood there....”*

I had work to do....
I didn't ask him to sit down;
He'd have stayed all day.
... So I said to him after a while,
Well, what's up? What do you want?
And he laughed ...
Said he was just passing by
And thought he'd say hello.
Great, I said. Hello.
So he left.
And I was so mad
I couldn't even listen to the radio. I went
And got some coffee.
The trouble with Christ is
He always comes at the wrong time!”

*John L'Heureux
“The Trouble with Epiphanies”
used with permission.*



BISHOP VINCENT'S

Christmas Message

2 0 2 5

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Peace be with you this Christmas 2025!

Christmas is about birth, new beginnings and regeneration and the wonder of newborn life. Mary, the Mother of God, yet also a young pregnant woman, was probably afraid, suffering, in a strange place. The no-doubt-anxious Joseph, hovering around, maybe running off to get clean cloths as the birth approached. The baby boy, born in blood and tears and happiness as all babies are, time without end.

And then the explosion of joy at this beginning – angels in the sky, a beacon star, kneeling shepherds and later, grave Magi bringing royal gifts.

Christmas is all this – the joy, the pain, the fear, the expectation, the utter humanity of birth – the everyday miracle and an even greater miracle. God has become one of us and now dwells amongst us forever!

However, Christmas does not just console us with the proclamation of the Emmanuel – God-dwelling-among-us. It also challenges us to act to transform our world. God comes among us not in a parade of power and glory. Rather, he chooses to immerse himself fully with our human condition, embracing the trials and tribulations of life. Therefore, reclaiming the Christmas spirit means none other than to imitate God's radical solidarity even at the risk of jeopardising our own status and privilege.



Let's never forget that our God, the maker of all things visible and invisible, was reduced to the most vulnerable of creatures; another little Middle Eastern boy caught up in homelessness, poverty and a cruel cycle of violence.

Christmas then, above all, is the special time when we remember our God-given duty to transform the world and our grave responsibility to become peacemakers.

The very first words of our new Holy Father Pope Leo XIV, as Pope, are worth recalling:

"Peace be with all of you! Dearest brothers and sisters, this is the first greeting of the Risen Christ, the good shepherd who gave his life for God's flock. I, too, would like this greeting of peace to enter your hearts, to reach your families, and all people, wherever they are, all of the people, all over the earth... This is the peace of the Risen Christ, an unarmed peace and a disarming peace, humble and persevering. It comes from God, God who loves us all unconditionally."

Yes, our violent chaotic planet desperately needs this peace of Christ!

Daily, our hearts continue to break, when we see the violence: especially to children, in places like Gaza, Ukraine and Myanmar.

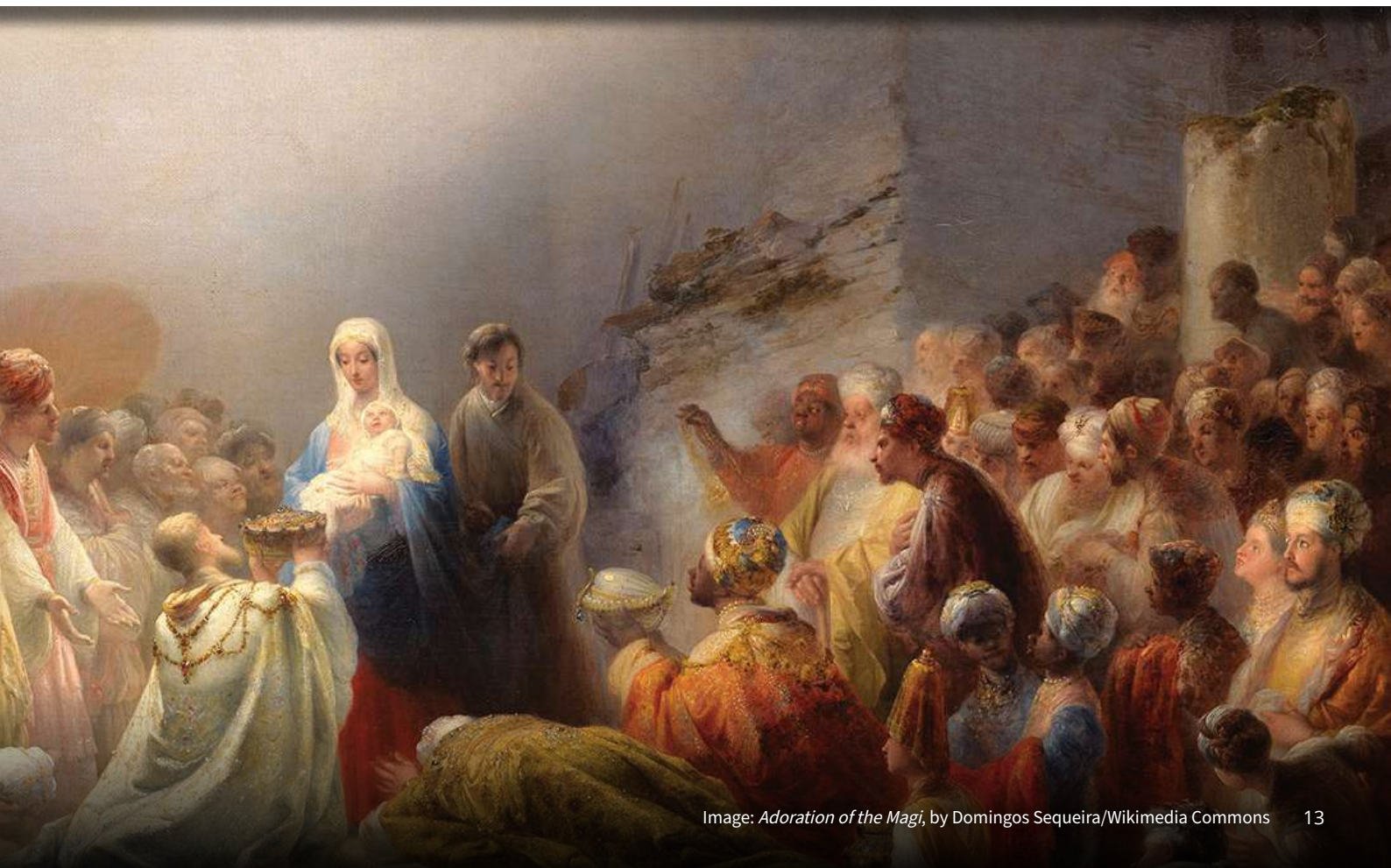
We cannot just watch all this suffering in front of our eyes passively. We must act then as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, to bring about real change. Together as the Body of Christ, we can make a difference.

My prayer, therefore, is that each of you will feel God's closeness and become instruments of peace in the New Year ahead.

With Pope Leo and St Francis of Assisi, in this holy season of goodwill and peace, we pray: *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.* ✝

+ *Vincent Long*

**Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv
Bishop of Parramatta**





The Season of Advent:

A TIME TO DEEPEN OUR DESIRE FOR THE WELLBEING OF OUR WORLD

BY SR PATTY ANDREW OSU

The beautiful four-week, liturgical season of Advent is framed within some of the most hope-filled and poetic passages from the Scriptures. Themes of anticipation and joy are threaded through all the readings which nourish and renew our spirits. It is a time to celebrate the wonder of generativity and the continual renewal of life as we await the birth of the one our hearts long for, Christ the light and life of the World – our planet earth, our common home.

Throughout this past year, which marked the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, we have reflected on and celebrated in a range of ways, the sacredness of all creation, embedded in our Christian story. From the genesis of our world, the biblical narrative is imprinted with divine affirmation. God saw everything that was made, "beholding it as very good" (Genesis 1:31).

To increase our understanding of this, theologians and scholars through the centuries have reflected on our relationship with all of creation. St Francis of Assisi has left us a timeless legacy where he personifies the pivotal aspects of the created world in his *Canticle of Creation* (1225), also known as the *Canticle of the Creatures*.

Almost a century after St Francis, the Franciscan theologian St Bonaventure was captivated by the beauty of the natural world. Experiencing a deep, intimate relationship between creation and our Trinitarian God, Bonaventure described creation as "a mirror of God". Hence, divine love and goodness are central to his theology which confirms that everything begins and ends in God who is the cause, the centre and end of all creation. Thus, all creation flows from love, is sustained by love and returns to love.



In feminine imagery, Bonaventure depicted the nativity of creation as emerging from the “womb God”. Creation is birthed by God. It is God’s child and, therefore, is intimately connected to the Divine. He portrays the harmony and interconnectedness of all creation as being like a beautiful song, a cosmic symphony that flows freely into the vast spaces of the universe.

Echoing this, the Catholic Bishops of Japan in their conference document “Reverence for Life” say that: “To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope” (*Laudato Si’*: 85). Such doctrine, which supports a God-centred universe, provides hope because as Ilia Delio OSF notes, despite the uncertainty and complexity of life, God is hidden in the world, and the world is grounded in a communion of love.

Advent is the season when we express in a heightened and more focussed way, our longing for this hiddenness of God to be revealed. The theme of desire expressed in the liturgical prayers and scripture readings, threads itself through the four weeks preceding the Feast of Christmas. It is captured beautifully in the verses known as the “O Antiphons”, which precede the Gospel and the Magnificat of the Evening Prayer of the Church, from the 17 – 24 December.

In the first of these Antiphons, God our creator is addressed as Wisdom; described as the

breath of the power of God – a pure outpouring of God’s glory (Wisdom 7:25). She is portrayed as the feminine personification of the divine, given to humanity to connect us with God. In the Book of Wisdom, we are assured that in every generation she passes into holy people making them “friends of God and of the prophets” (Wisdom 7:25). Bonaventure, described as the “mystic of the goodness of God”, is one such person. He embraced wisdom as the path to holiness or human wholeness.

Wisdom can be seen as the heartbeat of God’s relational presence in our world. Both the books of Proverbs and Wisdom tell us that wisdom is found in the heart of the marketplace: “sitting by the city gates, crying out at the busiest corners, at play and delighting in creation”.

So, as we embrace the spirit of joy and reverence for all of life which permeate the seasons of Advent and Christmas, let us deepen our commitment to being Pilgrims of Hope. May this be evident as we continue to strive to realise the presence of our hidden God, revealed in our communion of love with each other and our kinship with all of creation. ✝

Sr Patty Andrew OSU is the Vicar for Consecrated Life of the Diocese of Parramatta.



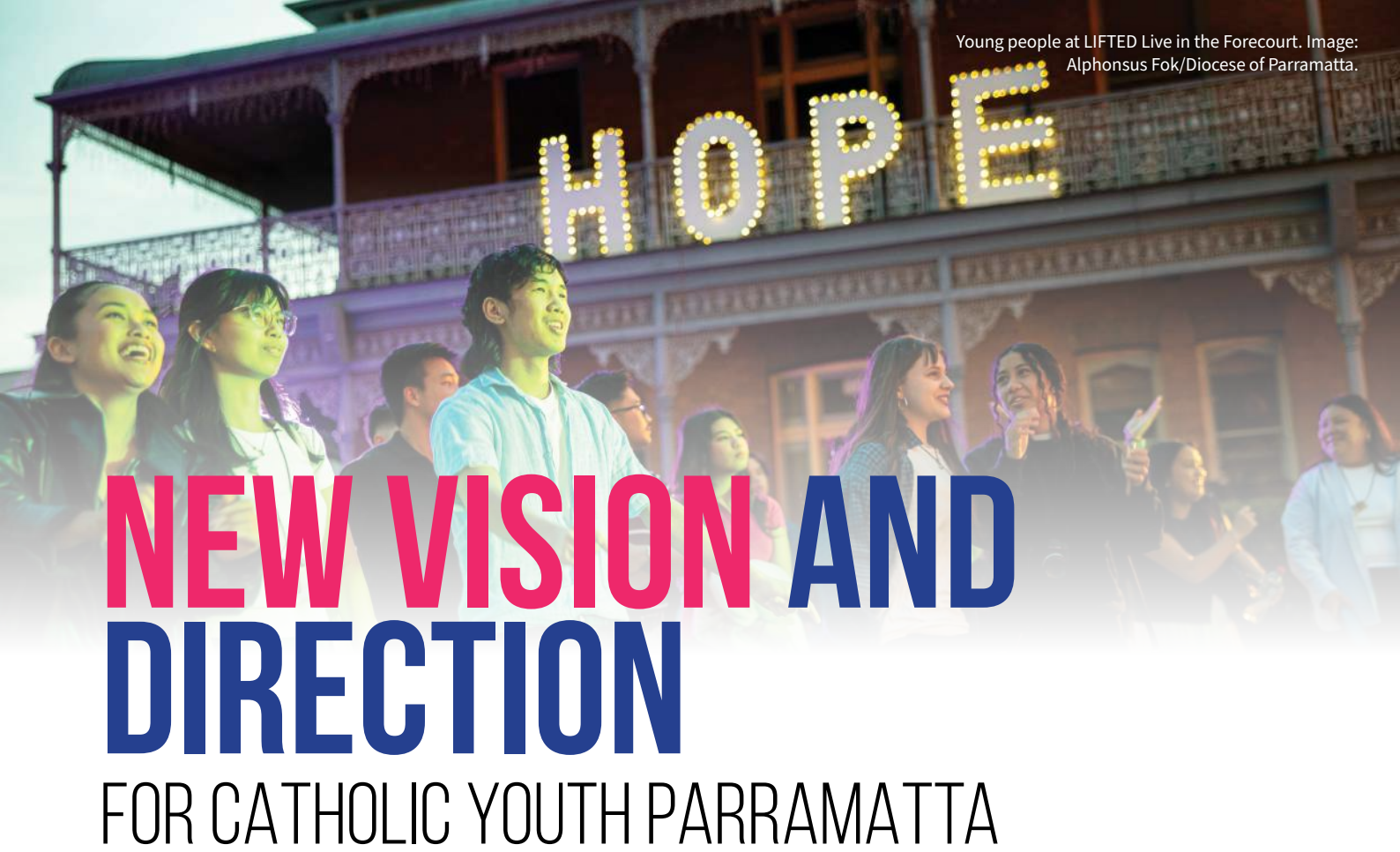
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NEW VISION AND DIRECTION

FOR CATHOLIC YOUTH PARRAMATTA

BY **MARY BRAZELL**

Catholic Youth Parramatta (CYP) has reprioritised its mission for 2026 and beyond in response to the needs of the community.

Informed by the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, the continued listening and sharing of young people in parishes and schools and an acknowledgement of where the Holy Spirit is guiding our Church, CYP's new Mission Plan aims to form and awaken "a community of disciples among young people in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, where leadership is nurtured, accompaniment is intentional and encounters with the living presence of Jesus Christ are at the heart of our work and service."

CYP's outgoing manager Qwayne Guevara said the new plan had "been a fruit of the way in which we've strived to do youth ministry in the Diocese".

"It's our attempt at articulating a vision that aligns with the Pastoral Plan, but also honours our communities, the experiences of our young people and looks forward to what is going to be some significant moments of grace in our Church."

Through discussion and consultation, the CYP team has designated three mission priorities in their service to young people: leadership and formation, accompaniment and listening, and encounter and community.

"It's clear that across the Diocese, when asked about what CYP is, the answer is different to different people depending on their community and their experience of youth ministry and of the Church," CYP Facilitator Sebastian Duhau said.

"These consultations have been an opportunity to enable our youth ministry leaders and young people across the Diocese to contribute to what the vision and mission of CYP is in acknowledgement that we exist for them."

Accompaniment core to ministry

Working within the deanery model, the parish youth ministry teams each have a member of CYP that they can reach out to for support, guidance and strength.

"We've always looked to accompany at a local, grassroots level, and that looks different for communities and in different levels of leadership," CYP's new Manager Eleanor Bonwick said.

Sebastian added: "Outside of providing resources and practical tips, a big part of our accompaniment is helping our young people to navigate all the highs and lows of ministry and support them through that."

Qwayne said parishes are often so inundated with their own priorities that they don't have the resources to accompany youth leaders in ministry.

“The intention from us is that we provide mentoring and accompaniment, but we also bring them into a network at a Diocesan level, so they see themselves as agents of their own accountability for each other’s spiritual lives, not just their ministerial lives.”

Reflecting on 2025

In a year that has included the 10th anniversary of LIFTED Live in the Forecourt, a Good Friday Night Walk that had the biggest turn-out ever, and a Jubilee youth pilgrimage to Greece and Rome, the team is grateful for the community they have been witness to in 2025.

For Facilitator Hannah Portelli, who has been part of the team for 12 months, it’s been a year of growth, getting to know the young people in the Diocese. “We’ve got incredible people who give so much of themselves and really love God. Seeing their witness has been really inspiring,” she said.

Joys of the future

In 2026, CYP is still aiming to host its regular events that invite young people to encounter Christ and build community.

However, they are also called to adapt to where the Church is moving and what its young people need.

“We are called to discern a way of being Church, a way of being disciples, leaders, missionaries that is much more authentic to where the Holy Spirit is moving us,” Qwayne said.

Sebastian said one of the best things about youth ministry was that it relied on the gifts of the people who were doing it. “But as people change, the ministry changes. It might be scary, but it’s a gift,” he said. ✝



Farewell

QWAYNE

In mid-November, the Diocese farewelled Qwayne Guevara as Manager of Catholic Youth Parramatta.

Having worked for the Diocese for over eight years, Qwayne has joined the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference’s National Centre for Evangelisation, leading two national priorities of formation and youth ministry.

“Qwayne has poured her heart and soul into the young people of Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains,” CYP said in a Facebook post announcing her departure.

“She has created spaces where youth feel seen, heard and empowered to lead with faith and confidence.

“Qwayne’s way of accompanying others, walking alongside them with compassion, wisdom and joy has shaped our community in ways that will be felt for generations to come.”

CYP has appointed Eleanor Bonwick to replace Qwayne as Manager, Catholic Youth Parramatta! She started on 18 November.

Youth leaders contributed to the CYP Mission Plan.
Image: Catholic Youth Parramatta.





Buddies

CREATE CONFIDENT LEARNERS

BY ZOE CARTWRIGHT

One of the unique strengths of Ambrose Early Learning services is their close integration with Catholic school communities. Each service is located within the grounds of a Catholic school, creating a natural link between early learning, primary and even secondary education. This proximity offers children a sense of continuity, familiarity, and belonging, long before they take their first steps into kindergarten.

At Ambrose Early Learning Santa Sophia, this connection is brought to life through a valued partnership with Santa Sophia Catholic College, Gables. Together, they've created a nurturing and collaborative environment that supports children at every stage of their educational journey.

The Year 2 Buddy Program

A standout example of this partnership is the Year 2 Buddy Program, which runs throughout the school year. In a series of short afternoon sessions held a few times each term, Year 2 students from Santa Sophia visit the children at Ambrose Early Learning and vice versa.

These sessions are carefully designed by Year 2 teachers to align with classroom learning while easing the transition into school life. Activities such as storytelling, drawing, games and colouring help older students develop leadership and communication skills. At the same time, younger children gain confidence and become familiar with the school environment and their future peers.

"The aim of involving Year 2 students is to ensure that when the children begin their learning journey, they already have familiar faces in the older grades to act as mentors and provide support," said Melissa Huntington, Year 2 Teacher and Stage 1 Leader of Wellbeing and Learning.

Each session concludes with a prayer circle, reinforcing the shared faith and values that underpin both communities, creating a sense of unity and belonging.

The connections fostered through the Buddy Program are evident. "It's a joy to see the children connect so naturally. The program builds confidence, empathy, and a sense of belonging, for both the young children and the school students," said Rachael Heylbut, Director of Ambrose Early Learning Santa Sophia.



Ambrose and Year 2 students buddy up at Santa Sophia Catholic College, Gables. Images: Ambrose

The benefits of the program extend well beyond the current year. When Year 2 students move into Year 3, they become buddies for the incoming Kindergarten class, many of whom they already know from their time at Ambrose. This sense of continuity not only strengthens relationships but also helps create a more cohesive and supportive school community.

Ashleigh Tabone, Kindergarten Teacher and Early Stage 1 Leader of Wellbeing and Learning, emphasises the importance of this continuity: "The purpose of the Peer Support Program is to help our preschool children transition smoothly into Kindergarten by building confidence and connections with our older students."

Year 10 Students step into Early Learning

In a wonderful example of education coming full circle, the college's Year 10 students, currently studying Child Studies, recently visited Ambrose Early Learning Santa Sophia. This hands-on experience gave students a valuable opportunity to step into the world of early childhood education and see its inner workings up close.

The visit offered insights into the physical layout of an early learning environment, the importance of staff-to-child ratios, and the variety of resources and learning tools available to support young children's development. It was a chance to move beyond the classroom and engage with the real-world application of their studies.

"Students gained first-hand insight into the roles and responsibilities required of early childcare workers," said Year 10 Teacher Kate Company. "They thoroughly enjoyed the experience, especially engaging in play with the children in both the indoor and outdoor settings."

Ambrose Early Learning strongly supports future educators by welcoming both trainees and school-based trainees. During the visit, a CathWest school-based trainee shared their experience, offering practical advice and answering questions, providing valuable insight into early childhood career pathways through peer-to-peer learning.

"We'd love to offer this experience again next year," said Rachael. "It's mutually beneficial, the young children loved sharing time with the older students, and the experience helps those Year 10 students feel more confident about pursuing careers in early learning."



This ongoing collaboration between Santa Sophia Catholic College and Ambrose Early Learning Santa Sophia is a testament to the strength of integrated Catholic education. By fostering connections across all stages of learning, from early childhood through to secondary school, they are nurturing confident learners, compassionate leaders, and possible future educators, all grounded in the values of faith, service, and belonging. ✝

🔍 For more information about Ambrose visit www.ambrose.org.au

Zoe Cartwright is the Marketing and Communications Coordinator for Community Ventures.

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MIGRANT JUBILEE CROSS TO BE HOSTED BY WESTERN SYDNEY COMMUNITIES

BY BELINDA GADD

Catholics across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains are invited to make a special pilgrimage this summer as the Vatican's Migrant Jubilee Cross visits the Diocese of Parramatta.

The Migrant Jubilee Cross is a powerful symbol of faith, hope and welcome that is unique to this Year of Jubilee.

From 5-11 January 2026, the Cross will journey through Western Sydney as part of a national pilgrimage visiting 28 dioceses around Australia. For one week, the Diocese of Parramatta will come alive with celebrations that recognise the faith, gifts and resilience of migrant communities who have enriched our parishes, schools and communities.

Commissioned by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), the Cross marks the Jubilee Year 2025 and invites all people – from all backgrounds – to honour the contributions of migrants, past and present.

"This is a special moment to come together as one community of faith – to honour the stories of migration that have shaped our Church and our country," said Fr Gayan Thamel, Episcopal Vicar for Migrant Chaplaincies and Parish Priest of St Luke's Parish, Marsden Park.

"The Jubilee Cross invites us to walk with one another, to see Christ in others, and to celebrate the diversity that enriches our Diocese – one of the most multicultural in Australia."



Pieces of the past

The wooden Cross itself is a sacred symbol of Catholicism, containing significant relics of the Holy Family and St Mary of the Cross MacKillop – patron of the Diocese of Parramatta and Australia.

Relics of the Holy Family, gifted by the Order of the Discalced Augustinians, include:

- Fragments from the Holy Crib of our Lord
- Veil of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Cloak of St Joseph

A relic from the 1914 original cedar coffin of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop was gifted by the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

"It reminds us of our shared human journey to seek belonging, safety and faith," Fr Gayan said.

Four stops, one united journey

In the summer of 2026, the Cross will be hosted by four parishes across the Diocese. Our African, Filipino, Tongan and Cantonese migrant chaplaincies will lead preparations and celebrations, showcasing the richness of faith expressed through many cultures, languages and musical traditions:

St Nicholas of Myra, Penrith – Tuesday, 6 January

St Patrick's, Blacktown – Wednesday, 7 January

St Luke's, Marsden Park – Friday, 9 January

St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta – Saturday 10 - Sunday 11 January

"It's an opportunity for families to pray together, give thanks for their journey, and reflect on what it means to be a Pilgrims of Hope," Fr Gayan said.

"We warmly invite parishioners, friends and neighbours to join us and share in this moment of grace."

Be part of the journey

The pilgrimage of the Migrant Jubilee Cross is part of the Church's worldwide Jubilee celebrations, calling the faithful to renewal, mercy and unity. As the late Pope Francis reminded us: "The Church is not a home for some, it's a home for all".

Bring your friends and family to experience the Migrant Jubilee Cross Pilgrimage at a parish near you. Join in prayer, music and cultural celebrations, and share in the joy of coming together as one Church.

This initiative reflects Diocesan Pastoral Plan priorities of Community, Listening, Prayer and Worship, and living out our commitment to be a Church that walks together, is inclusive and welcoming, and reaches to the margins. †

Q Learn more: www.parracatholic.org



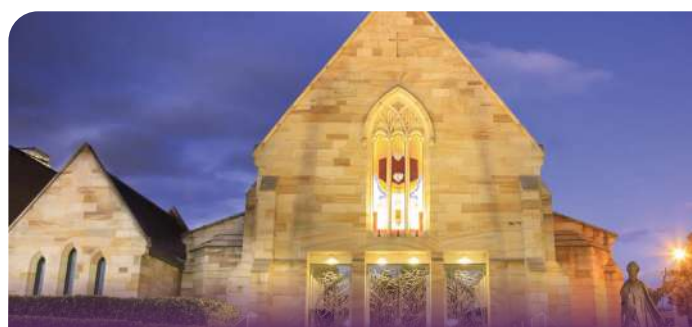
ST NICHOLAS OF MYRA, PENRITH
TUESDAY, 6 JANUARY



ST PATRICK'S, BLACKTOWN
WEDNESDAY, 7 JANUARY



ST LUKE'S, MARSDEN PARK
FRIDAY, 9 JANUARY



ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, PARRAMATTA
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, 10-11 JANUARY



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Fr Roger Purcell MSC Director



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Our Christmas Cover

ART COMPETITION



Alicia Buttigieg, 17
The light in the darkness



Mary Sleiman, 17
The True Meaning of Christmas



Ellen MacMahon, 61
Adoration



Eva Brown, 11
Our Path to Jesus' Hope

Thank you to everyone who entered our art competition to design the cover of our Christmas issue of the magazine.

We had 24 entries from schools, Ambrose centres and parishes all over the Diocese – from Harris Park to the Blue Mountains and up to the Hills and beyond.

The artists, who ranged from children to older people, all depicted what Christmas meant to them and how it made them feel. It was difficult choosing a winner from such a strong field, but the one we all agreed best displayed the “true meaning of Christmas” was the entry from **Samantha Pan** called “The birth of our Saviour”, which is on our cover. There were four others we felt were worthy runners up.

Samantha, 10, from Mother Teresa Primary School, Westmead, said in the description of her entry that at Christmas we “celebrate the birth of Jesus and the gifts God gives us”, such as justice, hope, happiness, peace, harmony and Christian belief. All these gifts she depicted as presents at the bottom of the Christmas tree.

“My picture also depicts how cheerful Christmas is with the angels singing Alleluia,” she said.

“God in this picture is the light of the world. The ornaments on the tree are religious events that happen during Christmas – like the world should praise God and his son, the three gifts that the three kings gave to Jesus, and the sheep which represents us around Jesus as one holy family.”

The four runners up, were:

Alicia Buttigieg, 17, from Padre Pio Parish, Glenmore Park, with her entry “The light in the darkness” (see her artwork on page 3)

Ellen MacMahon, 61, from St Bernadette’s Parish, Castle Hill, with her entry “Adoration”

Mary Sleiman, 17, from Catherine McAuley College Westmead, with her entry “The True Meaning of Christmas”

Eva Brown, 11, from Ambrose Christ the King, North Rocks, with her entry “Our Path to Jesus’ Hope”

Congratulations to Samantha and all our entrants! ✝

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PARRAMATTA DIOCESE HONOURS PRINCIPALS FOR THEIR SERVICE

BY **OLIVIA O'CONNOR**

As the 2025 school year ends, Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD) farewells some exceptional leaders who have shaped many lives, and wishes them every blessing in retirement.



LESLEY STUDANS

St Joseph's Primary Schofields

A faith-filled and dedicated teacher and leader, Lesley Studans has served Catholic education for more than 40 years. Her calm and patient approach has been of great support to the students and teachers within each of the school communities she has served.

Beginning her career at Christian Brothers Burwood Junior School in 1983, Lesley moved to St Bernadette's Primary Lalor Park in 1984, before the Diocese of Parramatta was formed.

She also worked at St Michael's Primary Baulkham Hills, St Mary's Primary Rydalmere, Marist Brothers Parramatta Junior School, St Monica's Primary North Parramatta and Our Lady of Lourdes Primary Seven Hills. Lesley was Principal of St Joseph's Primary Schofields from 2016.



MICHAEL SICILIANO

Our Lady of the Rosary Primary St Marys

Michael Siciliano is a compassionate and approachable leader who has always seen his work as a ministry, and Catholic education as an act of love. Guided by his strong Catholic values, Michael has led with dignity and respect for all, committed to championing the needs of all learners to ensure every student is valued and supported.

Michael started his teaching career in 1983 at St Michael's Primary School in Nowra. His journey in the Diocese of Parramatta began as Religious Education Coordinator at Bethany Catholic Primary Glenmore Park in 1996, before he moved into leadership as Assistant Principal at Sacred Heart Primary Mount Druitt in 1997. Further leadership roles followed, including as Assistant Principal at St Michael's Primary Blacktown South, Acting Principal at Our Lady of the Way Primary Emu Plains and Principal of St Mary MacKillop Primary South Penrith. He commenced a nine-year leadership role at Our Lady of the Rosary Primary St Marys in 2017.



CAMERON LIEVORE

St John Vianney's Primary Doonside

Leading by example with respect, trust, care and compassion, Cameron Lievore is a respected and approachable leader committed to learning and inspiring others to always strive for excellence. Known for fostering deep connections within his school communities, Cameron's visibility and engagement with families, along with his warm and welcoming nature, contributed to a strong sense of belonging at the schools he served.

Cameron commenced his teaching career in 1985 as a teacher at O'Connor Catholic High School, Armidale. He moved to the Diocese of Parramatta in 1987 as a teacher at St Joseph's Primary Kingswood, later serving as Coordinator at St Joseph's and St Thomas Aquinas Primary Springwood, before progressing to Assistant Principal at St Aidan's Primary Rooty Hill. He has held Principal positions at Our Lady of the Nativity Primary Lawson, St Monica's Primary Richmond, and most recently, St John Vianney's Primary Doonside.



TIM VANE-TEMPEST

St Nicholas of Myra Primary Penrith

Tim Vane-Tempest is a highly respected leader who embodies compassion, humility, and quiet strength. One of his greatest gifts as a school leader has been his ability to build school communities where everyone feels they truly belong, where purpose thrives and people genuinely care for one another.

Tim's 40-year journey in Catholic education began in 1985 at St Joseph's Convent School Wauchope. In 1986, he moved to Patrician Brothers' Granville, now Delany College Granville. Over the years, he has served in numerous CSPD schools as a teacher, coordinator, assistant principal and principal: Good Shepherd Primary Plumpton, Our Lady of the Way Primary Emu Plains, St Canice's Primary Katoomba, Mary Immaculate Primary Quakers Hill, St Joseph's Primary Schofields, Holy Family Primary Luddenham, St Matthew's Primary Windsor and St Nicholas of Myra Primary Penrith.



GLENN PATCHELL

We also extend our gratitude to Glenn Patchell as he departs Sacred Heart Primary Mount Druitt. Glenn will take a period of long service leave and will then return to CSPD in another capacity.

Glenn has held several teaching and leadership roles throughout his career and was Principal at St John Vianney's Doonside from 2008 to 2016, before commencing as Principal of Sacred Heart Primary Mount Druitt in 2016. †

Olivia O'Connor is the Communications Manager at Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese.

HOW THE JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE HAS ENRICHED OUR DIOCESE

BY GELINA MONTIERRO

Every 25 years, the Church enters a Jubilee, a sacred time of prayer, pilgrimage and conversion. For the Diocese of Parramatta, this Jubilee Year of Hope became an invitation to walk together as synodal people and a call to experience God's mercy through sacramental repentance and spiritual renewal.

Throughout the year, the Diocese gathered across several events: the Consecrated Life Mass, two international pilgrimages to Rome and Greece following the footsteps of St Paul, local parish pilgrimages to our three diocesan pilgrimage sites, and three Diocesan retreats.

Hope emerging in everyday ministry

For Alison Ryan, who works closely with parish pastoral councils across the Diocese, the Jubilee reaffirmed that hope is often experienced most vividly in small, transformative encounters.

"As I travelled around the Diocese throughout the year, I realised again that hope appears in the little moments," she said. "When someone connects deeply during a faith formation session, or when I see the spark of possibility in a Pastoral Council member's idea – that's when cynicism gives way to possibility. That's when I feel hope come alive in a room, and in me."

The Adult Diocesan pilgrimage to Greece, Türkiye and Rome. Image: Supplied.



A pilgrim people walking together

Rachael Kama, who accompanied adult pilgrims on the diocesan pilgrimage to Rome, Türkiye and Greece, described how the Jubilee shaped her ministry.

"This Jubilee Year showed me that hope is found in the simple, yet profound act of walking together," she reflected. "From the sacred silence at the 'Cave of Revelation' to the parish experiences at home, I felt our call to become a synodal and missional Church come alive."

For Rachael, the Jubilee reaffirmed her vocation as a "bridge for encounter and dialogue," helping communities grow in listening, collaboration and shared discernment.

"We keep hope alive," she said, "by deepening these pathways of accompaniment."

Hope in the lives of young people

A renewed sense of hope was also witnessed among young people of the Diocese.

Eleanor Bonwick, the newly appointed Manager of Catholic Youth Parramatta, who travelled to Rome with young adult pilgrims, reflected on how the Jubilee Year allowed her to see hope flourishing in the lives and choices of young people.

"My sense of hope was renewed through witnessing young people share in the joy of encountering Christ," she said.

"I saw young people from different parishes praying during the Good Friday Night Walk, young adults showing concrete love and care for one another while on pilgrimage, and youth leaders forming a combined choir at LIFTED Live in the Forecourt."

Hope witnessed through consecrated life

For Sr Patty Andrew OSU, the Jubilee revealed hope through the Consecrated Life Mass, where handmade candles symbolised Christ's enduring light carried by religious women and men.

"On this day, Christ was acknowledged as the light of the world, a light which cannot be extinguished," she said. "Our role may not always be a 'light on the hill', but rather 'leaven in the dough', helping the whole People of God rise into the fullness of life."

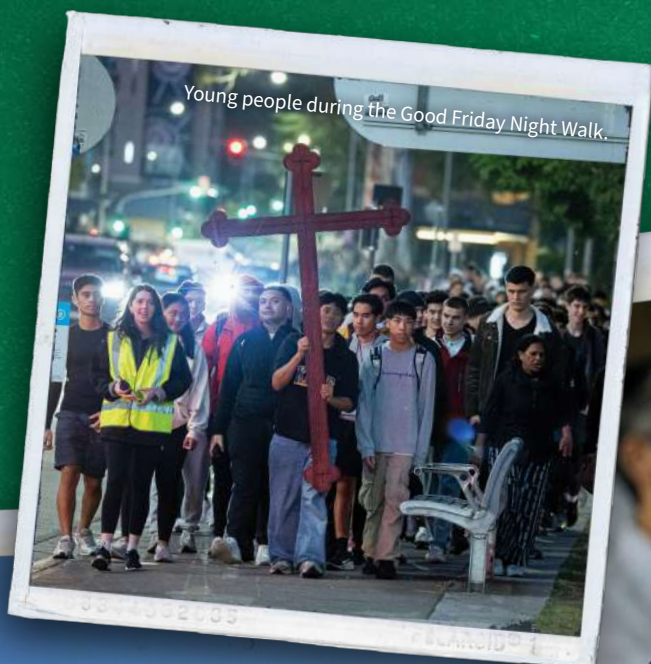
Looking ahead, she believes the Diocese must continue nurturing unity through shared listening. "Although we are many, we need to experience the joy and reality of: 'In the One we are ONE'," she said.

Carrying the Jubilee forward

As this Jubilee Year draws to a close, its message remains: hope grows wherever the People of God walk together, listen deeply and recognise Christ in one another.

Through pilgrimage, prayer and the witness of countless small encounters, we have witnessed a rediscovery that hope is not an abstract theme, it's a way of being Church.

The Jubilee Year of Hope officially concludes on 6 January 2026, on the Feast of the Epiphany, with the closing of the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. ✝



‘My heart went bang!’

MASS CELEBRATES ENDURING LOVE AND COMMITMENT

BY ISABELL PETRINIC

From newlyweds to diamond jubilarians, 100 faith-filled couples from across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains gathered in Parramatta’s St Patrick’s Cathedral with their loved ones for the annual Wedding Anniversary Mass – a joyful celebration of enduring love, commitment, and God’s grace.

Presiding over the Solemn Mass on Sunday 26 October, Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv offered heartfelt words of gratitude and admiration for the couples before him who had “modelled their love of God through their commitment to each other.”

He extended special congratulations to Deacon David Dowling and his wife Deirdre as they celebrate 25 years of marriage.

In his homily, Bishop Vincent reflected on the Genesis passage, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” noting that while Adam was incomplete without Eve, there are many ways of finding enrichment and companionship.

He spoke tenderly of his late mother, who spent her final decade surrounded by her children, and acknowledged those who “forgo marriage” yet live lives filled with love through service and community.

Throughout the Mass, hands were clasped, arms draped gently around shoulders, and smiles were exchanged between husbands and wives – some newly married, others lifelong companions. Together, they listened, prayed, and reflected on the covenant that continues to sustain them through every season of life.

Together, the couples renewed their matrimonial vows, saying:

“Blessed are you, Lord God; you have stood faithfully by our side in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. We ask your continued grace; keep us constant in our love for each other and let us bear loyal witness to the covenant you promised to all your people.”

Secrets from a couple married 65 years

This year’s longest-married couple were familiar faces: Polish-born Elaine Stanislawa, 87, and Lech “Les” Gade, 95. Next April, they’ll celebrate their 66th wedding anniversary.

Regular attendees of the annual Wedding Anniversary Mass, their laughter and easy banter are a gentle reminder that love, even after six decades, still knows how to play.



They first met at a Catholic youth social in Ashfield. "They were showing a movie," Elaine recalled. "At interval, a blonde boy with a crewcut walked past – my heart went bang, bang!" She paused between each "bang" for effect, her eyes sparkling.

"It took him three months to invite me out. After that, he called every day."

His eyes gleaming with mischief, Les chimed in, "I was working for the Australian Telecommunications Commission, the old Telecom, so it didn't cost me anything!"

Three years later, the couple were married. It was the beginning of a partnership that would carry them through six and a half decades of faith, friendship, and laughter.

When asked what has kept them together all these years, Elaine answered simply: "We've really been two buddies, to be honest."

The couple share a love of dancing and a strong spirit of service. Elaine has long volunteered in her parish, while Les remains active in ex-servicemen and military history circles and, for the past 17 years, has volunteered at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney – catching public transport across the city each week.

"If it wasn't for his knees, he'd run a marathon," Elaine quipped.

Still driving and living independently, the couple raised two children and now delight in their one grandchild.

Elaine listed five keys to a lasting relationship: love, perseverance, forgiveness, supporting one another, and a love of God. "My God means everything to me," she said, adding:

"I think it's a wonderful support to go to Mass together and to pray together."

For a great marriage: 'Work together'

St Bernadette's Castle Hill parishioners, Katrina and Brian Fitzalan, say the key to their 60-year marriage is "always working together" – literally.

They ran a Golden Fleece depot and later a supermarket side by side, building both a business and a life together. The couple also share a lifelong passion for golf, once competing at championship level.

Though Katrina no longer plays due to health reasons, Brian is still swinging strong with a handicap of 22 – a little higher than his former handicap of 5, but, as Katrina proudly noted, "he still beats our son and grandson."

They have two sons, six grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

For newlyweds: 'Put everything on the table'

Honeymooners Amy-Lea and Aaron Gatt first met at her local, the Harp Hotel, Wollongong. She was out celebrating a friend's birthday, and he had dropped in after an Offspring concert.

"It was love at first sight," Amy-Lea said. "We talked until the pub closed."

The couple were engaged a year and ten months later on Amy-Lea's 34th birthday, marrying in September 2024 in Gozo – an island in the Maltese archipelago – in the same church where Aaron's grandparents had exchanged their vows.

The secret to a strong marriage? "Putting everything on the table," said Amy-Lea. †





BRIDGE-BUILDING CARDINAL INSPIRES WESTERN SYDNEY

Western Sydney had a unique opportunity to connect with the global Church when Cardinal Stephen Chow SJ, Bishop of Hong Kong, visited Parramatta for the *Bishop Vincent Presents* lecture series in September.

On Sunday 14 September, Cardinal Chow joined the local community at St Monica's Parish, North Parramatta, for Mass with Parish Priest Fr Ephraim Lam, Vicar-General Fr Fernando Montano VG EV, and Fr Vince To IVE, Assistant Parish Priest at Our Lady of the Angels Parish, Rouse Hill, who ministers to the Mandarin Chinese community there.

"Cardinal Chow talks about walking together in the Church. In reality, we have different perspective and pace. It is not easy to achieve. But if we communicate with respect and empathy, we will have more chance to get the heart and mind of others to move forward together. Although the step may be small, we are still moving ahead together," said a member of the congregation in Cantonese.

On Monday 15 September, Cardinal Chow spoke to hundreds at St Patrick's Cathedral Hall, with many more joining online, including large numbers





from Chinese-Australian communities. His message was clear: dialogue, empathy, and bridge-building are essential to both Church and society, emphasising patience in walking together as one Church.

In conversation with fellow Jesuit, author, and academic Fr Richard Leonard SJ, Cardinal Chow drew on his Jesuit formation and experience at the heart of the Church to discuss bridge-building. His reflections were deeply relevant to local parishes, agencies, ministries, and anyone navigating faith, culture, and youth engagement today.

Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv thanked Cardinal Chow for his insights, saying he afforded a “unique role and status as a bridge builder.”

“We know that it’s like walking on a tightrope at times, but Stephen has proved himself, I think, a real force for dialogue, for positive engagement and for patient, but ultimately fruitful negotiation in a complex religious and social landscape,” Bishop Vincent said.

“That strength... comes not from being a dominating power, a dominant role, as the Church in the West enjoys... but from a position of vulnerability, from the position of even powerlessness, you know, being a minority in society,” he said. †



Scan the QR code to watch Cardinal Chow's presentation on YouTube.



Above photos, from the Mass at St Monica's, by KC Wong, Diocese of Hong Kong. Top left, Cardinal Chow after at the talk at St Patrick's hall.

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TESTED BY FIRE



BOOK CAPTURES ESSENTIAL HISTORY OF CATHEDRAL FIRE

BY ANTONY LAWES

Twelve hours after smoke first began billowing from the roof of St Patrick’s Cathedral in 1996, the dean of the cathedral found himself sitting in the gutter outside the charred ruins with an architect planning how the new building would look.

Nearly 30 years on from those traumatic events, that priest, Monsignor John Boyle, has written a book detailing the history surrounding the fire and its aftermath.

Called *Tested By Fire*, the book was officially launched by Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, at the Cathedral’s Cloister Hall on Friday 31 October, in front of more than 200 people, many of whom witnessed the fire or were involved in the rescue and rebuilding afterwards.

In his speech, Monsignor Boyle paid tribute to those people who rallied around on that day helping in any way they could.

“I want to say how grateful we are for all those who were involved on that disastrous afternoon of 19 February 1996,” he said. “My memoir is really your story, I’ve just filled in the details.”

Among those he thanked included Paul Vella, the policeman who arrested the arsonist only a few hours after he had lit the fire; the late fire inspector Peter Casey, who was the first on the scene and who directed the other firefighters as they put out the flames.

Then there was the generosity of the Parramatta Mercy sisters who allowed their chapel across the

road to be used by the congregation during the rebuilding; the Anglican Bishop Brian King who offered the use of his churches for weddings and more; and the architect John King who arrived on the evening of the fire with plans of the building so that firefighters could know whether it would be safe to enter. And it was John King who sat with Monsignor Boyle in the gutter that evening watching the fire burn.

“The spire was not able to be put out, but the water from the fire hoses had dropped in with the dust of the place, making mud,” Monsignor Boyle said. “John King used that mud as a drawing plan, and there at 4am in the morning we drew the cathedral that we have today.”

But he said his “greatest thanks” were due to the parishioners and parish staff from that time, who were “terrific” in how they handled those terrible events and the many months and years of disruption that followed. †

Q If you would like to purchase a copy of the book, *Tested By Fire*, go to stpauls.com.au

Monsignor Boyle with Bishop Vincent and other speakers at the launch of his book.



5 YEARS OF BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

BY **BELINDA GADD**

More than 400 people gathered at St Patrick's Cathedral precinct on 19 November to enjoy free meals, live entertainment and compassionate support at this year's fifth annual Parramatta Street Feast.

Each year, the event welcomes people of all ages and backgrounds, offering free shared meals, creative activities and music from the Sydney Street Choir, celebrating community spirit in a lively and inclusive atmosphere.

Held under the theme 'A Festival of Welcome', this year's feast featured the traditional community lunch and service stalls, as well as a special twist – an afternoon activities fair offering a range of creative and fun workshops.

Why it matters

Pope Leo XIV's first Apostolic Exhortation, *Dilexi te*, and the Australian Catholic Bishops' *Social Justice Statement 2025–2026*, call on Catholics to show particular care for those on the margins of society. This mission is echoed by Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, who encourages the faithful to "Go into the Deep" (Luke 5:4) and assist those in need. It is also reflected in the objectives of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan for a Synodal Church, as we strive to be a listening Church, one that is welcoming, walks together, and reaches to the margins.

We extend a special thanks to the Diocese's Mission Enhancement Team, PAYCE Foundation, Paynter Dixon and growing supporters: St Patrick's Cathedral Parramatta, St Merkorious Charity, Catholic Care Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, Community Migrant Resource Centre, Heaven on Earth Ministry, House of Welcome, Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, Parramatta Mission, The Salvation Army Parramatta, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, Street Level Christian Community, Thread Together, and Wesley Mission. ✝





‘Made me who I am

YEAR 12 GRADUATES REFLECT ON THEIR SCHOOL JOURNEY BY **SABRINA DE LA MOTTE**

This year’s Year 12 students have celebrated the end of their school journey, marking a significant milestone as they prepare to step into the next chapter of their lives.

After 13 years of dedicated learning and growth within Catholic education, these graduates leave behind a legacy shaped by the values and spiritual beliefs that have guided them throughout their schooling. Their time at school has offered more than just academic achievement, fostering leadership, resilience and a commitment to making positive change within their communities.

Amongst these graduates were the recipients of the 2025 Bishop of Parramatta Award for Student Excellence, an award that honours students who demonstrate strong leadership, a spirit of service and a desire to create meaningful change within their school communities.

Recipients were invited to reflect on their time in Catholic education and share what they are most grateful for from their school journey. Many spoke of the friendships, experiences and opportunities that have left a lasting impact on their personal, academic and spiritual growth.

For Meghan Lynch, a graduate of CathWest Innovation College Mount Drutt, the experiences that nurtured her leadership skills and deepened her cultural

connection were especially meaningful, particularly her involvement with the Jarara Cultural Centre.

“I’m most grateful for the opportunities my school has given me to grow in my faith and learning, to grow as a leader and to connect with Jarara, which has strengthened my cultural identity,” she said.

Zackary Armitage, a graduate of Patrician Brothers’ College Blacktown, said: “Throughout my schooling journey, I am most grateful for the opportunities that I received by being part of the Patrician Brothers’ Blacktown community, as well as the Diocese of Parramatta.

“I’m grateful that I was able to grow not only in skills through sports and various academic enrichment opportunities, but also to grow in my faith and as a person due to leadership and LIFT-ED events.”

For Sophie Giannini, from St Clare’s Catholic High Hassall Grove, it was the support from her teachers and friends that left a lasting impression.

“They have supported me in every challenge I have faced, and it is them who have made me the person I am today,” she said.

John Apolinar, from St John Paul II Catholic College Schofields, said: “I am most grateful for the fact that

‘They have supported me in every challenge I have faced, and it is them who have made me the person I am today’

– Sophie Giannini



n today,

I have been blessed with a community and school that has fostered my Catholic faith, who have taught me to live a purposeful life and to go out into the world with confidence and humility, striving to be a better person and make a positive difference.

“That’s been made possible by the teachers and peers who’ve helped me through the ups and downs, and who’ve made me who I am today and supported me in everything I do.”

The experiences shared by these students highlight the profound impact of Catholic education in shaping lifelong learners while nurturing faith, character and a commitment to creating meaningful change.

With 80 schools across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese is dedicated to nurturing faith-filled, service-minded students. By fostering a supportive environment that encourages academic excellence and personal growth, their schools empower students to thrive.✝

Q To learn more about their dedication to enriching students’ lives through education grounded in excellence, inclusivity and Catholic tradition, visit: parra.catholic.edu.au

Sabrina De La Motte is the Social Media Officer at Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese.



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HERALDS OF THE GOOD NEWS RECOGNISED AT ANNUAL MASS

BY MARY BRAZELL

Dedicated, humble and passionate educators across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains have been honoured for their role in bringing the Catholic faith to public school students.

Special Religious Education (SRE) Catechists, helpers and student catechists were acknowledged at the annual Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) Mass and Awards presentation on Friday 31 October at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta.

Catechists model Christ the humble servant

In his homily, Bishop Vincent explained that given the increasing secularisation of society, the CCD ministry "is like an oasis in the desert".

"Making Christ known and loved to the young people in government schools is not an insignificant endeavour," Bishop Vincent said.

"It is often the only avenue by which the young and impressionable in these secular environments experience the precious treasure of our Catholic faith – a faith that is not just taught with words, but caught, as it were, by a living example.

"I am indebted to each of you for the way in which you go about sharing your love of Christ and the generosity you demonstrate in the daily fulfilment of your sacred duty.

"The whole Church is indebted to you, for the way you model the Humble Servant who came to serve others and not to seek public acclaim or recognition."

"I will not let it go"

Following Mass, Bishop Vincent presented awards to dozens of catechists for their many years of commitment.

Maryse Angseesing from Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Seven Hills, was one of eight women recognised for 30 years of service.

Starting off as a helper, Maryse is proud that she has served the Church in this way.

"I have so many good experiences from the kids, and I'm so proud of these children," she said.

"The children look forward to what I have to teach them every week, and when they're learning something new, they are excited to share the news with their families.

"I've just turned 80. I don't know how many more years I have, but this is something that I will not let go."

Annie Cutajar from St Matthew's Parish, Windsor, is grateful for being able to share her faith with her grandchildren in her 25th year as a catechist.

"I've always been a woman of faith, but teaching the children inspires me to keep going.

"I'm very creative in my lessons, so I think the way that you bring a story across really sticks with them."



30 Year award recipient Maryse Angseesing.
Image: Mary Brazell

Annie was also humbled by the fact that students that she taught in primary school are now serving as student catechists at Bede Polding College, South Windsor.

"I must've done something right," she said.

Student catechists following in Christ's footsteps

Alongside the parish volunteers, students from 18 systemic and independent schools across the Diocese were acknowledged for their dedication to sharing their faith with younger students.

After a few years away, 2025 is the second year back teaching for students at St Dominic's College, Kingswood.

Ben Godsell, Director of Identity, said that upon speaking with a retired teacher who was passionate about SRE, it was important that the boys honoured her legacy and returned to the tradition of sharing Jesus' message in the community.

"As the world becomes more secularised, to see young boys sharing their faith, it's inspiring for me as a teacher," Ben said.

For the student catechists, they enjoy seeing how the kids engage with them during the lesson.

"I love that I get the ability to spread the Word of God in my life," Year 11 student Thomas said.

Year 10 student Hayden added: "I learn something new each time I teach - even though I'm the one teaching them." †

2025 CCD AWARD RECIPIENTS

The Diocese congratulates the following SRE catechists for their dedicated service:

40 YEARS OF SERVICE

Clare Brcar – Penrith Parish
Merri-Lyn Burton – Merrylands Parish
Gladys Hitchen – Upper Blue Mountains Parish
The late Maria O'Brien – Blacktown Parish
Elizabeth Mizzi – Merrylands Parish

35 YEARS OF SERVICE

Connie and Sam Cassar – Marayong Parish

30 YEARS OF SERVICE

Maryse Angseesing – Seven Hills Parish
Annette Aquilina – Richmond Parish
Jane Cauchi – Blacktown and Marayong Parishes
Carmel Fenton – Luddenham-Warragamba Parish
Antonia Formosa – Blacktown and Doonside Parishes
Margaret Portelli – Marayong Parish
Carol Vella – St Clair-Erskine Park Parish
Mary Wehbe – Greystanes and Parramatta Parishes

25 YEARS OF SERVICE

Pamela Bain – Parramatta Cathedral Parish
Mary Barakat – Merrylands Parish
Josephine Calangi – Rouse Hill Parish
Annie Cutajar – Windsor Parish
Wilhelmina de Raadt – Springwood Parish
Veronica Duffy – Baulkham Hills Parish
Kim Ellis – Springwood Parish
Caroline Ugarte – Baulkham Hills Parish and Kellyville Parish
Dolores Vella – Windsor Parish

20 YEARS OF SERVICE

Therese Chahine – Castle Hill Parish
Elizabeth Culliver – Glenbrook Parish

Susan Farrar – Rydalmere Parish
Samira Francis – Merrylands Parish
Pierre Le Grande – Baulkham Hills Parish
Rosemarie Macey – Baulkham Hills Parish
Magda Marconato – Baulkham Hills Parish
Jacinta Sullivan – Riverstone Parish
Mary Testa – Rooty Hill Parish
Helen Zammit – Glenwood-Stanhope Gardens Parish

15 YEARS OF SERVICE

Fiona Clarke – Luddenham-Warragamba Parish
Carmina Cruz – Glenwood-Stanhope Gardens Parish
Marie Dawson – Cranebrook Parish
Jennifer Di Marzo – Winston Hills Parish
Batista Emmanuel – Seven Hills and Toongabbie Parishes
Dolores Estabaya – Kellyville Parish
Marilou Gatchalian – Marayong Parish
Melissa McDonald – Glenbrook Parish
Julita Nunez – Marayong Parish
John Tanti – Blacktown Parish

LEVEL 3 TRAINING COURSE GRADUATES

Julie Dowe – Greystanes Parish
Victor Harrison – Baulkham Hills Parish
Maria Luz Katipunan – Rouse Hill Parish
Maria Luz Pangillnan – Greystanes Parish
Maria Maciou – Toongabbie Parish
Leila Nelson – Kellyville Parish
Evelyn Sangalang – Kellyville Parish
Nurwansaw Tjandra – Plumpton Parish

WE ALSO RECOGNISE THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE WHO ARE RETIRING AS PARISH SRE COORDINATORS:

Christine Jenneke – Castle Hill Parish
Erick Opena – Toongabbie Parish

DIOCESAN PILGRIMS JOIN THOUSANDS AT AUSTRALIAN YOUTH FESTIVAL

BY HANNAH PORTELLI

After a six-year hiatus, the Australian Catholic Youth Festival (ACYF) has returned! Pilgrims from Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains prepared their hearts, minds and souls to journey down to Melbourne from 30 November to 2 December 2025.

This year, the Diocese was represented by 49 youth and young adult pilgrims travelling with CYP and about 80 Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese student and staff pilgrims. CYP also offered support and accompaniment to other pilgrims who made their own way to the festival.

Young pilgrims seeking renewal of faith

At the core of this three-day event is an opportunity for the young people around Australia to deepen their relationship with Jesus and experience the community of our Catholic Church on a national level.

Burt Tukala, a youth leader from Holy Family Parish, Mount Druitt, heard about ACYF from previous pilgrims and wanted to experience it for himself.

"I hope to find what I need to help me take that next step forward in my faith," he said before heading off to Melbourne.

"I hope to witness the multitude of God's people standing together in praise and worship.



ACYF pilgrims in formation. Image: CYP.

"I hope to create unwavering bonds between new and existing friends.

"I hope to create memories that will be deemed unforgettable.

"I hope to feel renewed and closer to God at ACYF 2025."

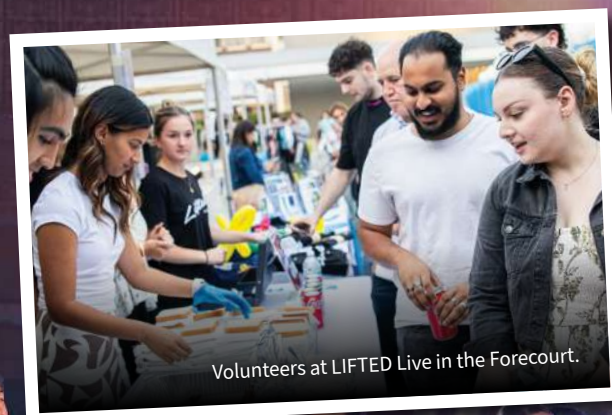
For Rachel Touche, parishioner at St Patrick's Cathedral Parish, Parramatta, and one of the Jubilee of Youth (JOY) pilgrims, ACYF in 2017 changed her faith journey from social- and community-focused to God-centred and striving for holiness.

"Before leaving for the JOY pilgrimage, I prayed a prayer that I will continue to pray to prepare me for the journey and for what God wants to show me and what paths He wants me to take:

"Soften my heart Lord, so that whatever you want to show me and whatever path you want me to take I listen, trust and follow you."

Having attended the LIFTED Retreat earlier this year, meeting young people and hearing their stories of faith, pilgrim Sabrina Tomas from St Andrew the Apostle Parish, Marayong, hoped to re-live the same experience at a larger scale in Melbourne.

"From ACYF, I hope to build a deeper relationship with God and to strengthen my friendships with other young adults within my community," she said.



Volunteers at LIFTED Live in the Forecourt.

Supporting pilgrims through donations and prayers

The CYP team became creative with multiple streams of fundraising and sponsorship to ensure that the festival was accessible to the young people of our diocese.

We were supported with generous donations from the Diocesan Development Fund and Community Ventures and thank them for their commitment to supporting young people.

Outgoing manager of CYP, Qwayne Guevara, committed to a personal Fundraiser of running 100 kilometres in 30 days and shared her journey online through her social media.

At LIFTED Live in the Forecourt, a team of volunteers ran a BBQ, donating all profits to support the pilgrims, as well as Barber Gerry from Carrington Cut donating his proceeds too.

Together more than \$5000 was raised to reduce the overall costs for all the pilgrims.

In addition to the fundraising, 10 pilgrims were provided the opportunity to attend ACYF through a substantial sponsorship grant awarded by the Collier Charitable Fund. These young people would not have been able to experience ACYF due to hardship or being from disadvantaged communities. However, through the efforts of the Diocese and the support of sponsors, they were able to have this special experience.

What is ACYF?

ACYF was initiated by the Australian Catholic Youth Council and approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in 2011. The first ACYF was held in 2013 in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Since the first ACYF, festivals have been held in Adelaide (2015), Sydney (2017) and most recently, Perth (2019). These festivals have seen up to 18,000 young people from Australia in attendance. Catholic Youth Parramatta (CYP) has successfully led pilgrimages to every iteration.

Included amongst the variety of workshops offered at ACYF was our very own Donnie Velasco and Rachel Kama.

They provided the ACYF pilgrims with a taster of The FaithFeed Echo. Echoes of Praise blends practical vocal training with creative exploration and spiritual reflection, helping participants deepen their confidence, clarity, and connection



Pilgrims at ACYF in Perth in 2019. Image: Mary Brazell

to the heart of worship. Through music, they explored how to lead others into meaningful praise.

“Whether you're a seasoned singer or just beginning your journey, this is a space to be renewed, equipped, and inspired to echo something greater than yourself,” they said.

“Your voice matters, and your echo carries grace.”

Keep our young people in your prayers as they continue this journey and encounter this new experience of the Church. ✝

Want to re-live ACYF? Check out the CYP social media channels for photos and videos.

Hannah Portelli is Facilitator – Catholic Youth Parramatta as part of the Diocese’s Mission Enhancement Team.



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Students lead with compassion to bring joy this Christmas

BY **STUART MATTERS**

As Christmas approaches, Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD) communities are once again coming together to support those doing it tough. For many across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, this time of year brings not only joy and celebration, but also hardship and struggle.

Guided by a deep commitment to service, CSPD schools are demonstrating the true spirit of Christmas through outreach, advocacy and practical support for those in need.

Throughout the year, students and staff across CSPD's 80 schools actively support social justice initiatives that make a difference in their communities. Partnering with organisations such as the St Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Jesuit Social Services (JSS), Caritas Australia, House of Welcome and Foodbank Australia, these efforts encourage compassion, generosity and faith in action.

CSPD's formal partnership with Vinnies NSW – the first of its kind for a school-based education provider in the state – has further strengthened this mission. Students participate in Mini Vinnies, Vinnies Van volunteering, winter sleepouts, and the annual Christmas and Winter appeals, putting their faith into practice by supporting those in need.

St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park is proudly living out this mission through its active Vinnies 7–12 group, which makes and donates sandwiches and supports events like the Winter Sleepout and Pyjama Day. Alongside students, staff have joined the effort by volunteering with the Vinnies Van to help people experiencing homelessness. This Christmas, St Luke's students are once again contributing to the Vinnies

Christmas Appeal, donating gifts and essential items for families in need.

CSPD schools also work closely with JRS, through its Schools Engagement Program – giving students the chance to hear directly from people with lived experience of seeking asylum. Through fundraising, food drives and awareness events, schools have helped restock the JRS Food Bank and hosted workshops and "Table Talk" discussions promoting understanding and solidarity.

The House of Welcome, Caritas and JSS are similarly supported through donations, immersion activities and student-led initiatives. At Holy Spirit Primary St Clair, students recently collected more than 650 items for House of Welcome's centre in Granville.

Faith in Action Teams (FIAT) play a key role in driving these efforts, with dedicated teachers guiding student leaders to plan and lead activities that bring faith to life in their school communities.

At Gilroy Catholic College Castle Hill, Year 10 students recently joined a volunteer mission day at Foodbank, packing 780 Christmas hampers including more than 18,000 meals for families in need, an experience they described as "incredibly rewarding".

Across the Diocese, students continue to volunteer, raise funds and advocate for justice throughout the year. CSPD schools continue to nurture not only academic excellence, but also a living faith, one that inspires students to make a positive difference in the world around them. †

Stuart Matters is a Communications & Media Specialist at Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese.

MEET OUR

newest Saints

BY BELINDA GADD

This Jubilee Year, the Church celebrates new saints whose lives of faith, service, and holiness inspire reflection, prayer, and hope. Discover their stories and find a saint to guide, comfort, or inspire you on your spiritual journey.



ST CARLO ACUTIS

"The Eucharist is my highway to heaven"

Canonised 7 September 2025, Carlo (1991–2006) was an Italian teenager known as the "saint in sneakers". He used the internet to catalogue Eucharistic miracles, evangelising online and inspiring young Catholics worldwide. He died aged 15 from leukemia but remains a relatable role model for faith in the digital age.

Feast day: 12 October

Pray for: Youth and sharing the Gospel



ST PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI

*"Verso l'alto!"
("To the heights!")"*

Italian student, athlete and social activist (1901–1925), Pier Giorgio dedicated his life to helping the poor and promoting Catholic values. His energy and dedication to justice made him a model for young adults.

Feast day: 4 July

Pray for: Courage, charity and joy



ST PETER TO ROT

Papua New Guinea's first saint (1912–1945), a layman, husband and father, who defended Christian marriage during Japanese occupation. As a catechist, he taught Christianity, visited the sick and administered Communion before being executed in a prisoner-of-war camp.

Feast day: 7 July

Pray for: Families, faith education, and resilience



ST IGNATIUS MALOYAN

Armenian bishop and martyr (1869–1915), Ignatius Maloyan gave his life during the Armenian Genocide, showing courage, compassion, and forgiveness. He endured beatings for refusing to abandon his faith, exemplifying steadfast devotion amid persecution.

Feast day: 11 June

Pray for: Faithfulness and perseverance



ST VINCENZA MARIA POLONI

Founder of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary (1792–1855), Vincenza devoted her life to educating and serving the poor. Her devotion inspired generations of religious women.

Feast day: 12 February

Pray for: Faith and love for others



ST MARÍA CARMEN RENDILES MARTÍNEZ

Venezuela's first saint (1903–1977), María Carmen lived a life of prayer and service, founding the Servants of Jesus in Caracas. Born without an arm, she inspired others through courage and compassion.

Feast day: 9 May

Pray for: Courage, inclusion, and kindness



ST MARIA TRONCATTI

Italian Salesian Sister and missionary (1883–1969), Maria served the Shuar people in Ecuador's Amazon, combining medical care with evangelisation.

Feast day: 25 August

Pray for: Healing, compassion, and faith education



ST JOSÉ GREGORIO HERNÁNDEZ CISNEROS

Venezuelan doctor and scientist (1864–1919), José dedicated his life to serving the sick, uniting science and faith. Known as the "Doctor of the Poor."

Feast day: 26 October

Pray for: Healing, hope, and care for the sick



ST BARTOLO LONGO

Italian lawyer (1841–1926) who returned to the Catholic faith after practising Satanism. He founded charitable works and promoted the Rosary, earning the title "Apostle of the Rosary".

Feast day: 5 October

Pray for: Our Lady's intercession

You're Not Alone"

THE COUNSELLING MINISTRY YOUR CHRISTMAS GIFT MAKES POSSIBLE

BY **ISABELL PETRINIC**

Every day across the Diocese of Parramatta, counsellors with Catholic Care Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains walk beside people carrying the weight of grief and loss, helping them find hope, strength and healing through life's most difficult moments.

For Harrison Porter, that means meeting people where they are: a young man paralysed by the loss of his father, a mother mourning a fractured relationship, or a child feeling guilty for the pain her illness causes her parents.

Much of Harrison's role, he said, is simply "sitting with someone's pain."

This is the life-changing support Catholic Care's counsellors provide to people in our community, made possible through your kind and compassionate help.

By donating to the Bishop's Christmas Appeal 2025 you will help support counsellors like Harrison to continue their ministry of healing with wisdom, compassion, and a heart for Christian service.

Grief beyond loss

A grief and loss counsellor, Harrison joined Catholic Care two years ago, walking alongside people carrying many forms of grief.

A typical day involves travelling between Catholic Care's offices in Springwood, Parramatta, Blacktown or Emerton, seeing up to four clients.

Each encounter, he says, is a reminder that healing rarely follows a straight line, but it can begin by having someone to carry the burden with them.

He recalled a young man in his mid-twenties, referred to him by his mother after the sudden death of his father in a motor vehicle accident in rural northern NSW.



Harrison Porter helps clients deal with grief and loss.

"He was just totally frozen with grief, caught between mourning his father and having enough in the tank to look after his younger siblings."

Over eight sessions, their work moved from gentle conversation to structured grief exercises, including creating a memento box filled with memories of his dad, which he later buried near the crash site.

The young man later reflected that without counselling, he might have quit his job and become "incredibly moody and overwhelmed," leaving his family without support. "That's not someone he wanted to be," Harrison remembered him saying.

Another client, a young mother, sought counselling for "anticipatory grief" before her mother passed away.

Although their relationship had been strained, she recognised her mother's death would leave "a huge hole" in hers and her daughter's lives.

Her grief was complicated, marked by sadness, guilt and even anger at her mother for dying sooner than expected.

Over six months, Harrison helped her understand there is no single "right" way to grieve.

"A lot of people aren't really sure if they're grieving correctly. So just normalising whatever they're going through is half the battle."

He also spoke of a terminally ill young girl: "She felt an incredible amount of guilt that she was making her mum and dad upset."

Harrison helped her understand that she had done nothing wrong and encouraged communication within the family.

More than mourning

Grief today, Harrison said, often stretches far beyond bereavement.

"It's not just people passing away, but it's the grief and loss that a career is no longer going to eventuate, or a life that people thought they were going to lead – whether it was home ownership, or something else."

As the cost of living continues to bite, many of his clients are under immense stress, struggling to put food on the table or find steady work. Most come from low-income backgrounds and are turning to services for food relief, Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers, and other practical support to get through the week.

When asked how hope can be found in his line of work – especially during this Jubilee Year, when the Church is called to be "Pilgrims of Hope" – Harrison said:

"People often feel they're the only ones going through something. But once they realise it's part of being human, they see they're not alone or broken. This is just where I am right now."

For Harrison, that realisation is where hope begins to take root.

The path to forgiveness

Forgiveness is a recurring theme in his work, though how it's framed depends on the person. "If someone's religious, I might use the word 'forgiveness'. If not, I might say 'acceptance'."

Much of that work comes back to values. "We ask, 'Who's the person you want to be? What qualities does that person have? Does forgiving or not forgiving bring you closer to the person you want to be?'"

"Nine times out of 10, people will realise that their life would be better and they would feel better if they forgave." †



You can bring hope

Your gift to the Bishop's Christmas Appeal 2025 can help Catholic Care's counsellors bring comfort, hope, and peace to more grieving hearts in our community.

Together, we can be Pilgrims of Hope for those who need it most, reminding every person they are not alone and that love, even in sorrow, endures.

- **\$75** can fund wellbeing calls to support people facing their first Christmas after losing a loved one.
- **\$100** can help fund a counselling session to support someone through their grief and trauma.
- **\$500** can support the ongoing training of a Catholic Care counsellor so they can help people when they need it most.



Q To donate, visit:
parracatholic.org/appeal



A new chapter

FOR ST LUKE'S PARISH, MARSDEN PARK

BY **BELINDA GADD**

The Catholic community of Marsden Park marked a momentous milestone in October with the official opening of St Luke's Parish's new church building.

Celebrated on the annual Feast of St Luke, the parish's patron, the day was one to remember; it drew more than 600 people from many backgrounds, many of whom wore their traditional dress.

Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, celebrated Mass alongside Parish Priest Fr Gayan Thamel. Also concelebrating was Fr Chris de Souza, General Secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and former vicar general of the Diocese of Parramatta.

"I used to think that Parramatta was where the action was... This is where the action is," Bishop Vincent said.

Fr Gayan expressed gratitude for the new space, which provides parishioners with a dedicated place to worship, seating up to 200 people, with the opportunity for an additional Saturday morning Mass service.

"As we open these doors, may this new parish home be a place of welcome, worship and witness here in Marsden Park," Fr Gayan said.

Blacktown City Councillor Talia Amituanai congratulated the community on behalf of Mayor Brad Bunting, saying the new building reflected "the strength, generosity, and unity of this growing Catholic community."

Kelly Bauer, Principal of St Luke's Catholic College, said: "I'm very grateful for the fact that the faith community has used the school spaces for so long. It's really created a wonderful connection between the school and the parish."

Founding Pastoral Director Deacon Tony Hoban, his wife Annette, Deacon Brian Myers and Deacon Tony's father Barry joined in the celebrations, linking the parish's past foundations with its bright future.

A 'community of communities'

St Luke's Catholic Parish in Marsden Park is Australia's newest parish in one of Western Sydney's fastest-growing and multicultural areas, with more than 14,000 people, including nearly 4000 families.

Marsden Park residents are primarily from Australia, India, the Philippines, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

The parish community began in 2018, when Deacon Tony was appointed Pastoral Director of the Parochial District. With the support of his wife, Annette, and a dedicated advisory group, they shaped a community focused on faith in partnership with St Luke's Catholic College. In 2025, Fr Gayan Thamel became the parish's first priest, guiding its growth as a welcoming and supportive faith community.

Masses were once held at St Luke's College, but with the parish community's dedication and support from the Diocese of Parramatta and the NSW Government, a new place of worship has been made possible.

The parish has about 900 parishioners, with many involved in 21 ministries such as youth groups, music ensembles, prayer and hospitality teams.

On the horizon

The parish continues to raise funds for Stage 2 of its building project – the final stage towards a permanent consecrated church on the corner of Northbourne Drive and Frontier Avenue. Stage 2 planning is yet to begin. Ongoing activities, including weekend food stalls and Christmas carols, aim to support future planning of the Stage 2 project as well as the parish's operational costs.

With the new parish building now open and a clear vision for the future, Fr Gayan thanks the community for its support.

"May St Luke continue to guide and inspire us as we grow together in faith, hope, and love," he said. 🙏



Bishop Vincent Long unveils the opening plaque for the new building.





Pope

HIS FIRST SIX MONTHS

BY ANTONY LAWES

Ever since Pope Leo XIV was elected to be the successor of St Peter a little more than six months ago, people have been trying to work out what sort of pontiff he will be.

Will he continue in the vein of his predecessor Pope Francis, or will he revert to being a more 'traditional' pope?

From what he has said and done so far, the answer seems to be both, and neither; he is beginning to chart a course that is distinctly his own through his formation as the first Augustinian and first US-born pope.

Charting his own course

Right from his first speech in St Peter's Square after his election, Pope Leo has often spoken of the need for peace through bridge building and dialogue. This has ranged from his vocal opposition to wars, especially in Gaza and Ukraine, to combatting the increasing polarisation and hatred within societies, and the need to find common ground between fellow Christians and between Christians and other religions.

His first overseas trip highlighted some of these themes.

Where Pope Francis chose the Italian island of Lampedusa to visit refugee camps on his first overseas trip, Pope Leo went to Türkiye and Lebanon from November 27 to December 2.

Leo

In explaining the reasons for visiting these countries, he said going to Türkiye was primarily to join with other Christian denominations in celebrating the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.

This would be "a truly important moment...a moment of genuine unity in faith", he said. The choice of Lebanon was to "proclaim the message of peace in the Middle East, in a country that has suffered so much".

Both these countries were where Pope Francis had also wanted to visit, he said – one of several links Pope Leo has made between his papacy and his predecessor's.

Another was his first apostolic exhortation, *Dilexite*, or "I have loved you".



Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv greets Pope Leo during a General Audience in St Peter's Square in October. Image: Diocese of Parramatta

This was begun by Francis before he died but which Leo made his own. In it he calls all Christians to love the poor and the marginalised as a “preferential choice”.

“Wanting to inaugurate a kingdom of justice, fraternity and solidarity, God has a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and oppressed, and he asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and radical choice in favour of the weakest,” Pope Leo wrote (16).

So far, he has canonised nine saints – Carlo Acutis, Pier Giorgio Frassati, Ignatius Maloyan, Peter To Rot, Vincenza Maria Poloni, Maria del Monte Carmelo Rendiles Martinez, Maria Troncatti, Jose Gregorio Hernandez Cisneros and Bartolo Longo – all of whom received approval for sainthood while Pope Francis was still alive.

He has also pledged to continue his predecessor’s commitment to environmental restoration, as well as to synodality, which he described in a recent interview as a way “we can come together and be a community and seek communion as a church” not focused on “institutional hierarchy but on a sense of ‘we together’, ‘our church’”.

In that interview, he said synodality was the “antidote” to polarisation, where people could come together to listen to each other and reflect on what God is telling us through the Gospel. “I think this is a way of addressing some of the greatest challenges that we have in the world today.”

But Pope Leo hasn’t followed everything his predecessor has done. This began from his first appearance on the balcony of St Peter’s where he wore a red mozzetta, a traditional papal robe that Francis refused to wear.

He has moved the papal residence back to the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican and has already been seen at Castel Gandolfo, where past popes have often chosen to holiday in the summer, but where Francis rarely visited.

Also, Leo allowed, in a kindly pastoral gesture, the Tridentine version of the Latin Mass to be celebrated, as an exception, in St Peter’s Basilica in October. At the same time, he has insisted that the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council will continue to remain the Church’s central guiding liturgical principle.

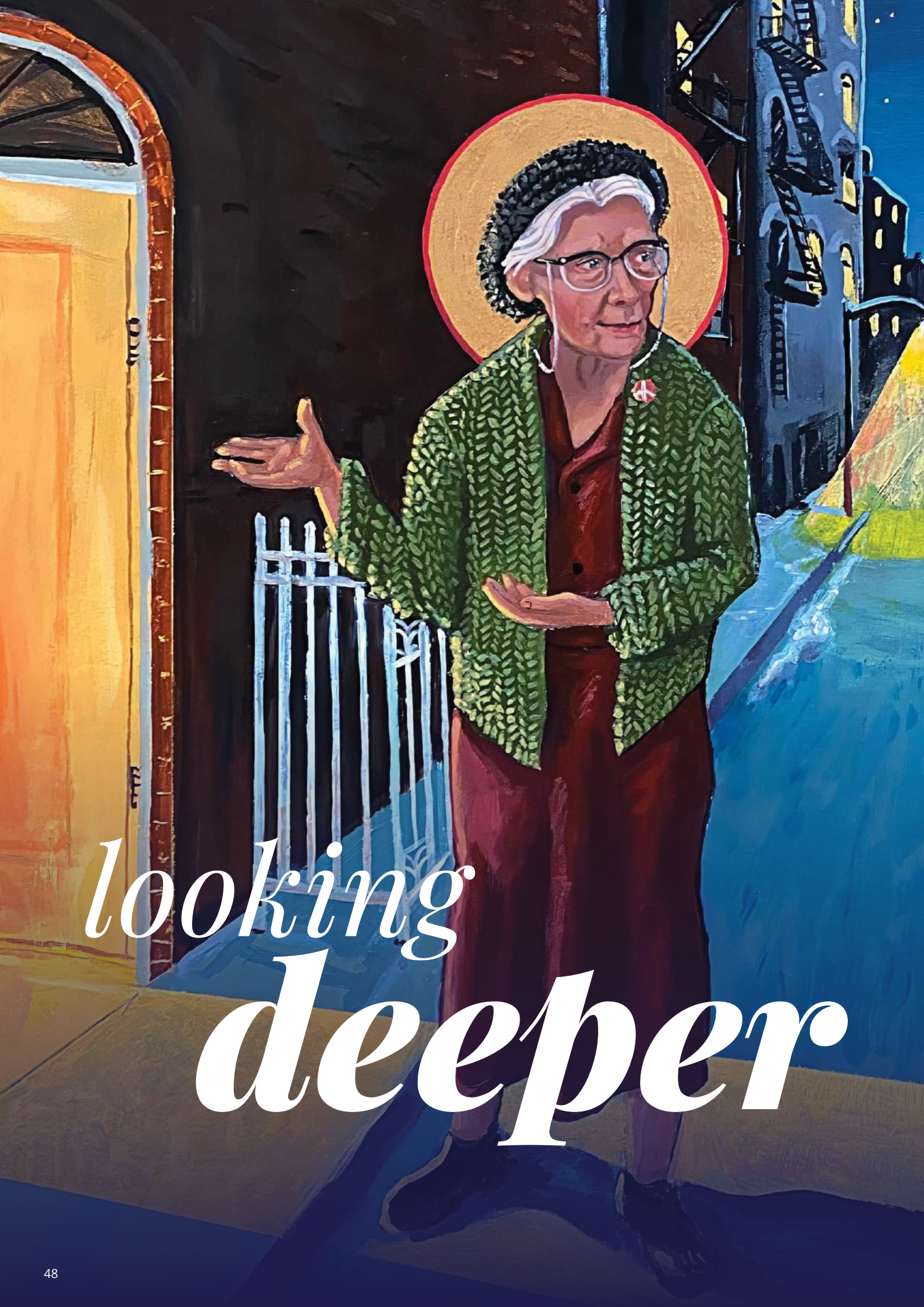
A connection with Australia

He has a close relationship with Australia and Australian Catholics, having visited the country several times before becoming pontiff, and counting many Australians, including fellow Augustinians of the Diocese of Parramatta, among his friends.

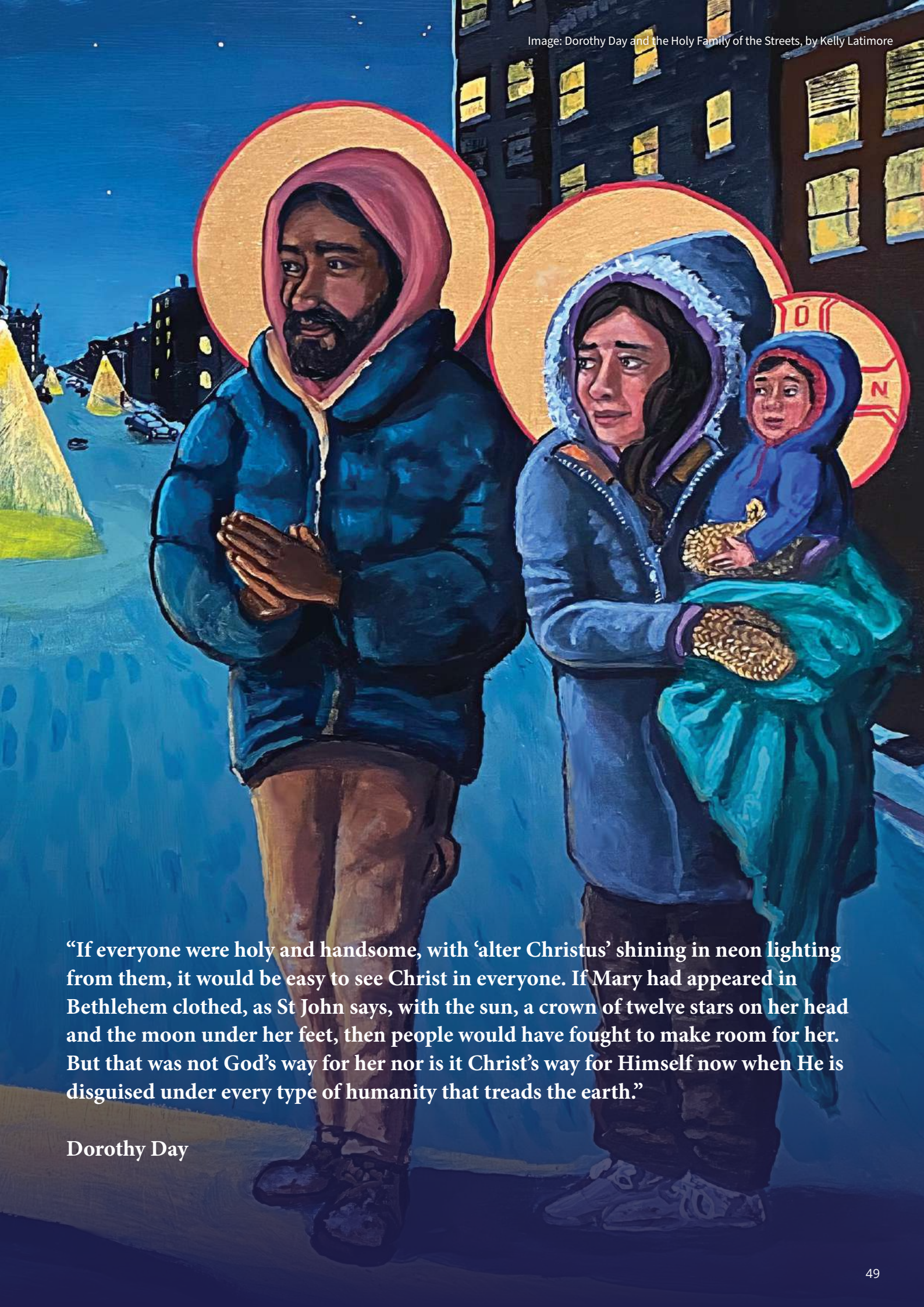
One fellow Augustinian who has known Pope Leo since his time as Prior General, Fr David Austin OSA from Holy Spirit Parish, St Clair-Erskine Park, said like his predecessor, the pontiff would bring “the common touch born of hands-on experience and connectedness with the poor in the missions.

“As time goes on his leadership style will become clearer. Certainly, his gentleness and soft-spoken manner, his humility and humour, his skill for listening and preference for dialogue are great strengths which will give credibility to his teaching, always faithful to the Gospel,” he said.

“Ever since Pope Leo was ordained and served initially in Peru, his experience of Church has been one of collaboration with, and empowerment of, laity following the cooperative model of ministry developed by the Augustinians there in the spirit of Vatican II.” ✝



*looking
deeper*



“If everyone were holy and handsome, with ‘alter Christus’ shining in neon lighting from them, it would be easy to see Christ in everyone. If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed, as St John says, with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head and the moon under her feet, then people would have fought to make room for her. But that was not God’s way for her nor is it Christ’s way for Himself now when He is disguised under every type of humanity that treads the earth.”

Dorothy Day

HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN:

A Christmas meditation

BY BR MARK O'CONNOR FMS

God never forces himself on us. He never makes us listen. He leaves us free. He comes to us as one of us. He 'came down from heaven'.

Jesus left His glory behind, the glory that He had with His Father. He 'emptied himself' - we call this the kenosis or 'emptying of himself' - to assume the form of a servant, taking on our human condition.

Jesus came down from heaven to become one of us. Like any immigrant, He brought with Him the culture, language and lifestyle of His home in heaven. And what is at the core of the language and culture of the 'immigrant' Son of God, who comes from the very heart of the mystery of the Trinity?

Quite simply, that God is a lover who gives himself to us totally with boundless self-sacrifice. That to be divine

is to become a servant of others. As the great Anglican New Testament scholar and bishop, N. T. Wright, has noted: "God became flesh not to stop being divine. It was a decision about what it means to be divine!"

This decision has enormous implications for our discipleship.

'Washing the feet' of those who are in need is an imperative and a test of our being authentic and true to our Catholic faith. It is our way of imitating Him who 'came down from heaven'.

For Jesus chose to come as one of us. He chose to come as one of the working poor, living in an occupied territory, surrounded by scandal and accusation, living in relative obscurity in the middle of nowhere.



"Jesus came down from heaven to become one of us. Like any immigrant, He brought with Him the culture, language and lifestyle of His home in heaven."

You could say the feast of Christmas each year is, therefore, calling us to a spirituality of emptiness and service. Jesus emptied Himself to serve humanity and, as Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, we, therefore, have to empty ourselves of all rivalry and conceit and all thinking of ourselves as better than others.

Such a spirituality of emptiness prompts us to think of what is inside us that we need to empty out. Is it being

judgemental? Is it a tendency to sidestep the call of the Gospel to share generously with others? Could it be an arrogance which looks down and refuses to accept others in all their difference? Might it be a subtle racism?

Whatever it is for each of us personally, this spirituality of emptiness demands our inner conversion.

Being close to God is not about going up the 'escalator' of life. Rather, it is all about following a God who is always 'descending' and constantly bending down to serve. That is how we live our way into the mystery of God. †

Br Mark O'Connor FMS is Vicar for Communications and Editor of *Catholic Outlook*.

The background of the page is a detailed Baroque painting titled "The Annunciation to the Shepherds" by Abraham Hondius. The scene is set in a dark, rustic stable. In the center, a large white ox stands prominently. To the right, a group of people, including a woman holding a child, are gathered, some with their arms raised in a gesture of awe or prayer. In the foreground, a swan is visible. The upper portion of the painting is filled with a multitude of cherubs and angels, some appearing to descend from the sky. The overall atmosphere is dramatic and filled with divine light.

peace

THE CHRISTMAS GIFT OUR WORLD NEEDS

BY SR RITA MALAVISI RSJ

Everywhere we go in these few weeks, we hear the themes of Christmas songs – the cheerful, communal side of Christmas. Peace is a gift that the world still needs. We hear peace echoed in the carols, greetings and prayers across the world.

There are many symbols or images to remind us of the changing season. One image is the brightly coloured flowers on still-upright stalks. Their shiny sword-shaped green leaves contrast brightly against the colour of the purple and white of the flowers – agapanthus. Their name comes from the Greek *agape* – love – and *anthus* – flower. Little did I know these umbels of purple and white were flowers of love. It's impossible not to love them, they are easy to grow. They remind me that Christmas is on the way. As well as spreading love at this time, we are called to be people of peace.

Indeed, peace is the essence of all religions. The musical "Come From Away" tells of an event following the atrocities of 11 September 2001. It shares the incredible real-life story of the 7000 airline passengers from all over the world who were grounded in Canada in the wake of 9/11, and the small Newfoundland community that invited these 'come from aways' into their lives. The song 'Make me a channel of your peace' united them and indeed bonded them in a deep level, and showed how hospitality, friendship and peace can change people. The anonymous

text is normally called the Prayer of St Francis and it is a widely known Christian prayer for peace.

Peace can feel fragile in a world marked by conflict, division and uncertainty. The message of Christmas invites us to look deeper – to the quiet, unassuming place where peace was born: in a humble manger, under a star, in the vulnerability of the child Jesus. This peace is grounded in love, forgiveness and trust. Some may feel an absence of peace the closer that Christmas comes. To live Christmas peace means to make

"The message of Christmas invites us to look deeper – to the quiet, unassuming place where peace was born: in a humble manger, under a star, in the vulnerability of the child Jesus."

room for gentleness in a hurried world. It might mean choosing to listen, choosing compassion over competition. It might be as simple as forgiving someone who has hurt us, reaching out to someone lonely, or offering a kind word to a stranger.

Mary and Joseph can be inspirations for us at this time – when in weariness and uncertainty they found peace in trusting God's promise. Peace is more than just a word we sing at Christmas. May it be a way of life for us – our families, our communities and our world. Through the songs we sing at Christmas, we are invited not

only to remember the peace of that first Christmas night, but to carry that same peace into our lives today. Peace is not just an absence of war, but a profound, active and transformative reality.

After his election, Pope Leo XIV greeted the world, as he appeared on the balcony of St Peter's Basilica with the words: "Peace be with you all". He urges us that peace must begin in our hearts. And encourages us in his latest Exhortation "*Delexi Te*" – that peace is linked with caring for the poor, marginalised and the whole of creation.

How many times is the word peace used in the Old and New Testaments? Biblical scholars do not agree on just one number, so let's say it's used more than 300 times. Biblical peace means completeness or wholeness, it points to the presence of something else. Peace is the fruit of a life that trusts Jesus and is

dependent on the Holy Spirit.

Apart from God, we cannot conjure up peace on our own. May we be co-creators of peace this Christmas. We are reminded that the gift of Christ is also a mission: to be bearers of peace to our families, communities and our world – gathering with loved ones, exchanging gifts, decorating, and enjoying the season of peace. ✚

Sr Rita Malavisi RSJ is the Faith Formation Coordinator at the Mary MacKillop Spirituality Centre, Melbourne.

Christmas is a time to hope for a better world

BY DR CHRISTOPHER J MONAGHAN CP

Recently I went to buy some second-hand electrical equipment on Facebook Marketplace. When I arrived at the address, I found Bilel and his brother sitting at a low table in their driveway drinking tea. After arranging the sale of the equipment, they invited me to sit with them and drink some lemon and ginger tea. As we chatted, I revealed I was a Catholic priest, and they responded in kind indicating they were devout Muslims. Rather than putting an end to our conversation it opened a door to deeper dialogue. It was a profound moment of grace as we shared our thoughts on the world and religion. We spoke about the dangers of fundamentalism and the beauty of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. We agreed wholeheartedly that true religion leads to love and peace, and that devotion to our own tradition should not lead us to close our minds and hearts to others because we are all brothers and sisters before God.

When we look around us, we see a fractured world where so many people are at war with one another and there is so much violence. Sadly, it's a story that's as old



as Cain and Abel that continues to this day. There has always been violence and brutality in the world. What makes our time in history so different is that we have immediate and continuous access to much of what is happening through the internet, social media and 24/7 reporting. It can leave us feeling overwhelmed, punch drunk and helpless. That's why Christmas and its themes of peace, goodwill, and welcome, is so important. Hope needs to be reborn in our hearts every year.

The infancy narratives found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written for Christians living in a world like ours that was often frightening and intimidating. They wanted to give us a vision, a light in the darkness, a star to steer our course by. Matthew relates how Joseph is informed in a dream that Jesus is to be called Immanuel (God-with-us). This is one of the most important truths that Matthew wants to convey – Jesus is God-with-us in all our joys and sorrows.

Last year, the film entitled *Mary* told the story of Mary and Joseph in the form of a Hollywood blockbuster. It

was certainly exaggerated but it rightly highlighted a basic truth that Matthew wanted to convey – even from his birth Jesus' life was in danger. The Magi quickly realised that Herod could not be trusted. How quickly their fears were realised when he ordered the brutal killing of all male children two years and under. Mary and Joseph became refugees and had to flee for their lives to a foreign land. In Egypt they were confronted with the challenges of finding work and lodgings to set up a new home as a young family.

Luke's infancy narrative is much more tranquil, but let's not forget that even though Jesus is the Messiah he is born in a manger because there is no room for him in the inn. This too, is a story of vulnerability and God daring to share in our human reality. When Jesus is presented in the Temple, Simeon is filled with the Spirit and proclaims him to be a light and hope for all humanity. At the same time, he warns Mary and Joseph that the road that lies ahead will not be easy, and that Jesus will encounter both acceptance and rejection. Not only that, a sword would pierce her heart also.

The book of Proverbs 29:18 reminds us that where there is no vision the people perish. The birth of Jesus provides us a vision to plot our course so that we don't drown in despair or give up hope in a better world for us all. His birth should not ever be reduced to some saccharine sweet image. The deep beauty of the incarnation is it's a love story where God enters our world not with a powerful coronation, but with all the vulnerability and helplessness of a newborn child.

The festive season is accompanied by so many emotions. It is a time when we speak of peace, joy, unity and goodwill. Images of happy families and joyous homecomings are the order of the day. For many people that is their experience, despite the exhaustion that often accompanies the end of year gatherings and trying to visit both sides of our families. For others, Christmas drives home the painful reality of divisions in families, unresolved hurts, not being able to be with loved ones, or the hurt of being estranged or loneliness.

Christmas is a time to hope for more: a better world, where relationships are healed and we can gather in peace, love and friendship. If our hearts are open there is always reason to hope and keep the vision alive. God has not given up on us, and we should not give up on each other. ✚

Rev Dr Christopher J Monaghan CP is the President of the Yarra Theological Union, a College of the University of Divinity, Melbourne.



Image: *The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel*, by Duccio di Buoninsegna/Wikimedia Commons



A CUPPA WITH A *priest*

FR PHILIP ALESIN

Policy and Advocacy Officer for Catholic
Schools Parramatta Diocese



In the 20 years since his ordination Fr Philip Alesin has continued his vocation as a priest – first in the Diocese of Ekiti in Nigeria, his country of birth, then Glasgow, Brisbane and now the Diocese of Parramatta – despite not always being in a parish full time.

As a supply priest in the Diocese, he fills in on weekends when priests are unavailable, or if they need an extra pair of hands ministering the sacraments. In this capacity, he has already ministered at more than 10 parishes since he arrived in the Diocese more than three years ago.

He does this mostly on weekends, as his Monday-to-Friday job as the Policy and Advocacy Officer for Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD) keeps him busy.

Discerning the way

The path that led Fr Philip to where he is now, via many years of academic study culminating in a PhD from The University of Queensland, began on his family's cocoa farm in rural Nigeria.

He is one of 13 children and when he was growing up family life largely revolved around faith and the farm.

When Catholicism first arrived in the village his grandfather's house was the site for the first Masses. He remembers his father was very religious and all the family would attend Mass regularly.

"I wasn't as pious as my elder brother, who was an altar server, but along the way I became a member of Charismatic Renewal, and it was with that group that

I started thinking about the priesthood," Fr Philip says.

When he finished school, he decided to enrol in a civil engineering degree at university "because I was very good at science". He lasted one semester before returning home to tell his father he wanted to join the seminary.

"I started rethinking my path; is that what God really wants me to do?" he says of his decision.

"My dad initially wasn't happy, partly because he paid a lot of money. On the other hand I knew that deep down he would be happy that God had answered his prayer (to have a priest in the family)."

The pull of further study

After nine years at the seminary, Fr Philip graduated with an honours degree in philosophy, writing his dissertation of Hegel's conception of war, as well as a degree in theology, and began life as a parish priest in rural Nigeria, where he remained for almost a decade.

The rhythm of rural life meant long periods of solitude when villagers were busy on their farms. It was during this time Fr Philip remembers occupying himself by following important global events, such as wars and other conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. This eventually kindled in him a desire to return to university.

His initial studies had made him appreciate "the value of human life when you see how lives are wasted around the world... and knowing that life is



God's gift and that it shouldn't be taken for any reason".

He was awarded a scholarship to do a Master's degree at the University of Glasgow, where his thesis focused on conflicts in northern Nigeria. This in turn got him thinking about doing a doctorate on the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance to people displaced by war.

In 2017, he received a scholarship to do a PhD at The University of Queensland, which he completed in 2021. "That was how I found myself in Australia," he says. "This is where God wants me to be."

After that he moved to Sydney in 2022, taking jobs first at St Vincent's Care Services as a pastoral care coordinator, then at Catholic Healthcare, before landing the role with CSPD in 2024.

"It is all about how we influence government policies to serve the interests of Catholic education," Fr Philip says. "But being a Catholic organisation we are also interested in social justice matters, as well as First Nations affairs." On these he coordinates submissions to parliament, writes reports and more. He also coordinates CSPD's *Laudato Si'* Action Plan project, and is working on its next Closing the Gap Report.

Continuing his vocation

But since the time Fr Philip left Nigeria, and his role as parish priest, he has continued his priestly vocation wherever he has been, whether it was studying in Glasgow and Brisbane, or working in Sydney.

"I never contemplated leaving the priesthood for anything because the two can always go together," he says.

When he arrived in Sydney, Fr Philip got in touch with the chaplain for the Nigerian Catholic Community, and from there was gradually introduced to Bishop Vincent Long, Vicar General Fr Peter Williams AM and others in the Diocese of Parramatta.

He is now living at the clergy residence at St Patrick's Cathedral, where he celebrates some weekday Masses. And since June, he's spent weekends at the Windsor parish helping with Masses and other sacraments, as well as at other parishes when he can.

"I've always built relationships with parishioners wherever I go. I'm privileged to meet so many people. So, the idea of being a priest relating with the people of God and interacting with the people of God remains part and parcel of my life." †





PARISH PROFILE

SACRED HEART, LUDDENHAM-WARRAGAMBA

‘No strangers among us’

BY ANTONY LAWES

Paul Rohan joined Sacred Heart Parish more than 40 years ago when he and his wife moved into the area and began attending Mass at St Mary’s Mulgoa – one of the four churches in the sprawling parish. Back then, he remembers it was “just like a country town, very friendly”, where many of their neighbours all attended church together.

Over the years, the countryside has become more urban as more and more houses have sprung up. But the friendliness and sense of belonging have remained strong features of the parish as it has grown.

“The current parish is made up of parishioners from every walk of life, many of them having English as a second language,” says Paul, adding that Masses are also held in Italian and Spanish.

“The parish is very unique, not too many have four churches, all used from time to time.”

A history of welcome

The parish was formed in 1952 at the time the township of Warragamba was starting to expand with workers who were constructing the nearby dam. However, the history of worship in the parish goes back more the two centuries to 1818, when the first church was built in the nearby town of Greendale.

The church of St Mary’s at Mulgoa dates from 1892 and is the oldest of the four churches still standing in the parish – the others are Sacred Heart at Warragamba, Holy Family at Luddenham and St Francis Xavier at Greendale.

The Parish Priest, Fr Shinto Francis, has been at the parish for only several months but already he is feeling at home. He spent a short time at the parish in 2023 and was surprised that so many parishioners remembered him when he returned.

“From the very first day, parishioners reached out with genuine kindness and heartfelt gestures that made it easy for me to settle right back into parish life,” he says.

“Deacon Charles Abela, the parish staff and those in various ministries make a great parish team. There’s a wonderful sense of community here, and I’m truly grateful to be part of it once again.”

He says there are “many wonderful things happening” in the parish at the moment, especially the involvement of young people in parish life.



One of the recent highlights was the installation of 14 new junior altar servers.

“Our youth group is also flourishing and reaching out into local schools, helping young people connect their faith with everyday life,” Fr Shinto says.

“It’s also a real joy to see so many young families attending Mass regularly – we’re blessed with quite a number of children and toddlers in our congregation.”

‘It truly feels like a family’

Parishioner Leia Ruzic says the presence of young families and their children fills the parish “with so much joy and life – it truly is wonderful to see”.

She has been in the parish nine years and in that time has become a reader, an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist and now leads a parish choir.



Fr Shino Francis at his installation as Parish Priest.

“Being involved in the parish makes me feel whole,” she says. “It fills my soul with joy knowing I can serve where God needs me.

“Everyone is so welcoming and supportive, it truly feels like a family.”

Grace Buda, who joined the parish more than 50 years ago and volunteers doing whatever she can, says “the love, togetherness and family outlook” of others is what she most enjoys about Sacred Heart Parish.

Paul agrees. He is a member of several parish committees and says the parish is blessed with “so many volunteers from all walks of life that take on a

range of duties to add to the parish family”.

Fr Shinto has noticed that regardless of how long people have been at the parish there is a strong sense of belonging – people know each other and “there are really no strangers among us”.

“There’s a great sense of enthusiasm and commitment that runs through the parish and that energy is truly inspiring.”

‘Connecting with his parishioners’

Paul says all the parish priests he has known over the years have brought their own “special gifts to us”, and Fr Shinto is no different. “His homilies and his awareness of the Parish needs” are two things that stand out already.

Leia agrees that Fr Shinto’s homilies are a stand-out. “Sometimes they make us laugh, sometimes they make us reflect deeply, but they always share the Gospel in such a meaningful and inspiring way.

“It’s also wonderful to see a priest that truly loves connecting with his parishioners.”

For Grace, Fr Shinto is always ready to listen and is “very kind and generous with this time”.

Importance of Advent and Christmas

One of the special events in the parish during the season Advent and Christmas is the children’s Christmas Mass, where young ones dress up as shepherds, angels, Mary and Joseph and more – “bringing the story of Jesus’ birth to life in such a beautiful way... it’s a beautiful reminder of the meaning of Christmas,” Leia says.

Another highlight is the end-of-year dinner for all parishioners that “is always filled with much laughter and joy”, she says. ✝



Parishioner Leia Ruzic.
Image: Supplied



Image: Donna Laurianto/threetwoone photography



Honouring milestones of devotion

BY MARY BRAZELL

In this Jubilee Year where the global Church recognised and celebrated the Jubilee of Consecrated Life (8-9 October), Bishops (25 June), Priests (25-27 June), Seminarians (23-24 June) and Deacons (21-23 February), *Catholic Outlook* wishes to acknowledge and honour the clergy and consecrated men and women who have celebrated significant anniversaries in 2025. †

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Fr Thomas Thien Hien Bui

Parish of Baulkham Hills

Fr Pio Yong Ho Jang

St Paul the Apostle Parish, Winston Hills

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Fr Philip Alesin

Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese

Fr Jose (Joe) Manjaly

St Nicholas of Myra Parish, Penrith

Fr Jobi Payyappilly

St Paul the Apostle Parish, Winston Hills

Fr Robert Riedling EV

St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta

Fr Kevin Redmond SM

St Andrew the Apostle Parish, Marayong

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Fr Walter Fogarty

Sacred Heart Parish, Westmead.

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF RELIGIOUS PROFFESION

Sr Jeremiah Mendoza CFSN

Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth

Sr Christina Ramada CFSN

Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth

Br Louis Schmidt OFM Conv

Order of Friars Minor Conventual

Sr Vicki Maree Wilson SMSM

Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary



Bishop Vincent with consecrated jubilarians.



30TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Fr Michael Gitau Gathuku

Our Lady of the Way Parish, Emu Plains

Fr Gerard O'Dempsey OFM Cap

The Good Shepherd Parish, Plumpton

Fr Henry Huu Duc Tran

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Seven Hills

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Fr Anthony Khoudair

Chaplain

Fr John Rizzo

Chaplain

Fr Vincent Savarimuthu

Holy Name of Mary Parish, Rydalmere

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

Sr Mary-Louise Petro RSM

Sisters of Mercy (Parramatta)

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Fr John Powell

55TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Fr Arthur Cook

Fr Christopher Dixon

Monsignor Ron McFarlane

Sacred Heart Parish, Mt Druitt South

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

Sr Elizabeth Murray SGS

Sisters of the Good Samaritan

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Fr Robert (Bob) Anderson

Fr Paul Hanna

Fr Michael McGloin

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

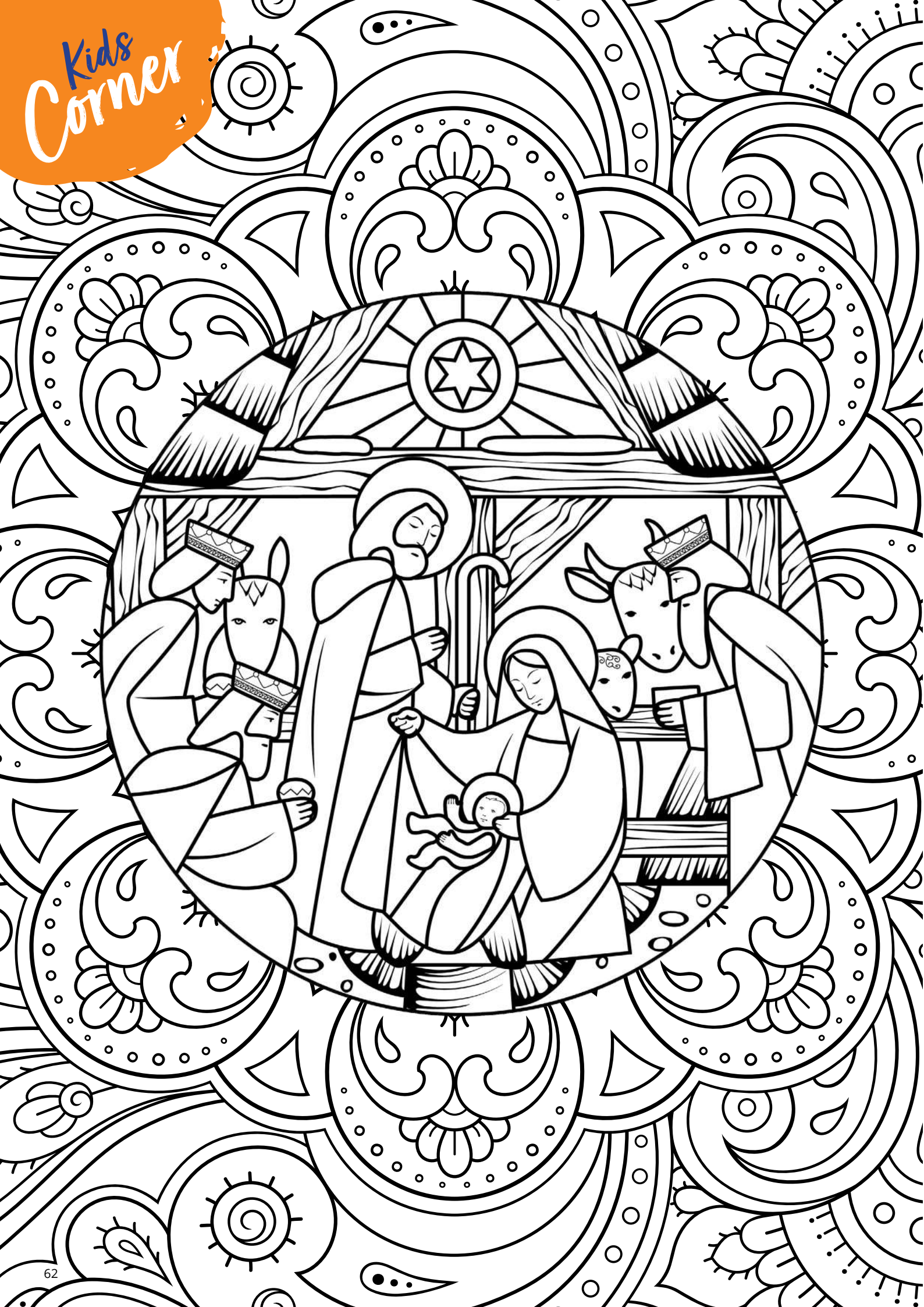
Sr Barbara McDonough RSM

Sisters of Mercy (Parramatta)

The Diocese prays for the repose of the souls of Fr Tim Hogan (6 July) and Deacon Rodrigo ('Rudy') Rupac (16 February), who passed away this year.

Clergy of the Diocese of Parramatta.

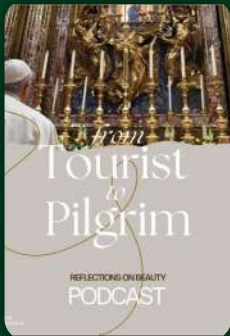




Listen

Watch

Read

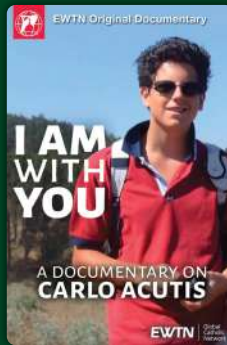


FROM TOURIST TO PILGRIM – THE ROAD BEST TRAVELLED

Vatican News Podcast, 2024-25

Narrated by art historian Liz Lev, *From Tourist to Pilgrim* offers a refreshing perspective on Rome's sacred landmarks. Rather than a travel guide, the podcast presents as a spiritual journey – revealing how places that tourists flock to were first built to draw pilgrims closer to God. Blending history, art, and prayer, *From Tourist to Pilgrim* unveils the hidden beauty and sacred meaning behind Rome's landmarks – from Michelangelo's Pietà to the Altar of the Chair in St Peter's Basilica to St John Lateran. A highlight, Episode 7: Michelangelo's Pietà, beautifully unpacks the emotion and symbolism behind this timeless work.

Listen here >>>

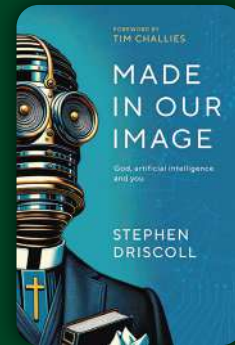


I AM WITH YOU: A DOCUMENTARY ON CARLO ACUTIS

EWTN, 2021

Filmed on location in Italy, *I Am With You* is a 35-minute EWTN documentary exploring the life of then-Blessed Carlo Acutis. Through family interviews, personal photos and videos, and moving testimonies, the film brings to life the story of a young man whose deep love for the Eucharist continues to inspire many. The film's strength lies in its heartfelt portrayal of Carlo's faith and influence. Both a tribute and an invitation, *I Am With You* serves as an inspiring introduction to a modern model of holiness, particularly for young audiences.

Watch on YouTube >>>



MADE IN OUR IMAGE: GOD, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND YOU

By Stephen Driscoll
(Mattias Media, 2024)

Winner of the 2025 Australian Christian Book of the Year (SparkLit), *Made in Our Image* offers a fearless and thought-provoking exploration of artificial intelligence through the lens of Scripture. Driscoll unpacks the technologies shaping AI and the profound ways they could change our world, challenging readers to consider what it means to be human. While AI reflects our image and can both enhance and threaten life, Driscoll reminds us that our ultimate moral compass is not technology, but God. Rooted in the truth that we are made in God's image, we occupy a place no algorithm can determine.

Insightful, easy to read and memorable, this book is a timely guide for anyone navigating the promises and perils of our AI-driven future.

Christmas Mass Times

ACROSS THE DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA

Prepare to welcome the Christ child into your families and faith communities with our curated list of Christmas Mass times throughout Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. The Diocese of Parramatta wishes you and your families a hope-filled and joyful Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Baulkham Hills Parish

St Michael's, Baulkham Hills
Christmas Eve: 5:30pm, 8pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 10am

Our Lady of Lourdes,
Baulkham Hills South
Christmas Eve: 6:30pm, 8:30pm
Christmas Day: 9am

Blacktown Parish (Mary, Queen of the Family)

St Patrick's, Blacktown
Christmas Eve: 5:30pm, 8:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7am, 10am

St Michael's, Blacktown South
Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 8am, 9:30pm

Castle Hill Parish (St Bernadette's)

Christmas Eve: 5pm, 7:30pm, 9:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7:30am, 9am,
10:30am

Cranebrook Parish (Corpus Christi)

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 8:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 9:10am

Doonside Parish (St John Vianney)

Christmas Eve: 7:30pm
Christmas Day: 7:30am, 9:30am

Dundas Valley Parish (St Bernadette's)

Christmas Eve: 7:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 10am

Emu Plains Parish (Our Lady of the Way)

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 8pm
Christmas Day: 9:30am

Glenbrook Parish (St Finbar's)

Christmas Eve: 7pm, 10pm
Christmas Day: 9am

Glenmore Park Parish (St Padre Pio)

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 10am

Glenwood-Stanhope Gardens Parish (St John XXIII)

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 9am, 10:30am

Granville Parish (Holy Cross Parish)

Holy Trinity, Granville
Christmas Eve: 7:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 10am

Holy Family, Granville East
Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 8:30am

Greystanes Parish (Our Lady, Queen of Peace)

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 8:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7:30am, 9:30am

Guildford Parish (St Patrick's)

Christmas Eve: 5:30pm
Christmas Day: 8am, 10am

Harris Park Parish (St Oliver Plunkett)

Christmas Eve: 7pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 10am

Kellyville Parish (Our Lady of the Rosary)

Christmas Eve: 5:30pm, 8pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7am, 9am,
11am

Kenthurst Parish (St Madeleine Sophie Barat)

Christmas Eve: 5:30pm, 8pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 10am

Kingswood Parish (St Joseph's)

Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8:30am, 10am

Lalor Park Parish (St Bernadette's)

Christmas Eve: 5:30pm, 8pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 9am

Luddenham-Warragamba Parish (Sacred Heart)

Holy Family, Luddenham
Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 10am

Sacred Heart, Warragamba
Christmas Eve: 8pm
Christmas Day: 8am

Marayong Parish (St Andrew the Apostle)

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 8pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7:30am,
8:45am, 10:30am

Marsden Park Parish (St Luke's)

Christmas Eve: 7pm, 11pm
Christmas Day: 8am, 10am

Merrylands Parish (St Margaret Mary's)

Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7:30am, 9am,
10:30am

Mount Druitt Parish (Holy Family)

Holy Family Church, Emerton
Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 9am

Willmot Community Hub, Willmot
Christmas Eve: 8:30pm

**Mount Druitt South Parish
(Sacred Heart)**

Christmas Eve: 8pm
Christmas Day: 7:30am, 9am

**North Rocks Parish
(Christ the King)**

Christmas Eve: 5:30pm, 7:30pm
Christmas Day: 8am, 10am

**Parramatta Parish
(St Patrick's Cathedral)**

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 9:30am,
11am, 6pm

**Parramatta North Parish
(St Monica's)**

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm (Cantonese)
Christmas Day: 12am, 9am, 11:30am
(Cantonese)

**Penrith Parish
(St Nicholas of Myra)**

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7am, 8:30am,
10am, 6pm

**Plumpton Parish
(The Good Shepherd)**

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 7am, 9am, 12pm
(Vietnamese)

Parish of Richmond

St Monica's, Richmond
Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7:30am, 9:30am

St Gregory's, Kurrajong
Christmas Eve: 8pm
Christmas Day: 8am

**Parish of the Upper Blue
Mountains**

Our Lady of the Nativity, Lawson
Christmas Eve: 5pm
Christmas Day: 8:30am

Sacred Heart, Blackheath
Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 9:30am

St Bonaventure's, Leura
Christmas Eve: 5pm

St Canice's, Katoomba
Christmas Day: 12am, 10am

St Francis Xavier, Wentworth Falls
Christmas Day: 8am

**Quakers Hill-Schofields Parish
(Mary Immaculate)**

Christmas Eve: 5:30pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 10am,
5:30pm

**Riverstone Parish
(St John the Evangelist)**

Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 7am, 9am, 10:30am

Rooty Hill Parish (St Aidan's)

Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7:30am, 9am,
10:30am, 5:30pm

**Rouse Hill Parish
(Our Lady of the Angels)**

Our Lady of the Angels Church,
Rouse Hill
Christmas Eve: 5:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8:30am, 10am,
3pm (Mandarin)

Santa Sophia Catholic College,
Box Hill
Christmas Eve: 6:30pm
Christmas Day: 11:30am

**Rydalmere Parish
(Holy Name of Mary)**

Christmas Eve: 5:30pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 8am, 10am

**Seven Hills Parish
(Our Lady of Lourdes)**
Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 9:30am

**Springwood Parish
(St Thomas Aquinas)**
Christmas Eve: 5pm, 8pm
Christmas Day: 8am, 9:30am

**St Clair-Erskine Park Parish
(Holy Spirit)**
Christmas Eve: 6pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 9:30am

**St Marys Parish
(Our Lady of the Rosary)**
Christmas Eve: 6:30pm, 8:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7:30am, 9am,
10:30am

**Toongabbie Parish
(St Anthony of Padua)**
Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 9:30am

**Wentworthville Parish
(Our Lady of Mount Carmel)**
Christmas Eve: 5pm, 7pm, 9pm
Christmas Day: 8am, 10am

Westmead Parish (Sacred Heart)
Christmas Eve: 6pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 9:30am

Windsor Parish (St Matthew's)
Christmas Eve: 6:30pm, 8:30pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 7:30am, 9am

**Winston Hills Parish
(St Paul the Apostle)**
Christmas Eve: 5pm, 8pm
Christmas Day: 12am, 8am, 9:30am

**Chinese Catholic Community
(St Monica's Parish, North
Parramatta)**
Christmas Eve: 9 pm (Cantonese)
Christmas Day: 11:30 am (Cantonese)

Vietnamese Catholic Community
Good Shepherd Church, Plumpton
Christmas Day: 12pm

Holy Trinity Church, Granville
Christmas Day: 5pm

**Sri-Lankan Chaplaincy (St Patrick's
Church, Guildford)**
Christmas Eve: 11:45pm

Directory of services



**DIOCESE of
PARRAMATTA**

Chancery Office

www.parracatholic.org
(02) 8838 3400
diocese@parracatholic.org

Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv
(02) 8838 3400
bishop@parracatholic.org

Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese
parra.catholic.edu.au
(02) 9840 5600
communityliaison@parra.catholic.edu.au

Community Ventures
(Catholic Diocese of Parramatta Services Limited)
1300 2VENTURES (1300 283 688)
enquiries@cdpsl.org.au
www.communityventures.org.au

Ambrose Early Years Education and School Age Care
1300 4AMBROSE (1300 426 276)
enquiries@ambrose.org.au
www.ambrose.org.au

Catholic Care Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains
(02) 8843 2500
catholiccarewsbm.org.au

Mission Enhancement Team (MET Parramatta)
Catholic Youth Parramatta; Peace, Justice, Ecology; Marriage; Natural Fertility; Worship; MET Facilitators
met@parracatholic.org
parracatholic.org/connect

Confraternity of Christian Doctrine
(02) 8838 3486
ccd@parracatholic.org

Tribunal Office
(02) 8838 3480
tribunal@parracatholic.org

Vocations
(02) 8838 3460
vocations@parracatholic.org

Parramatta Catholic Foundation
(02) 8838 3482
yourfoundation@parracatholic.org

Diocesan Development Fund
(02) 8839 4500
enquiries@parradfd.org.au

Holy Spirit Seminary
(02) 9296 6300

Office for Safeguarding
(02) 8838 3419
safeguarding@parracatholic.org

catholic care
WESTERN SYDNEY AND THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Call us on (02) 8843 2500 or visit catholiccarewsbm.org.au

Catholic Care Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains is the Diocese of Parramatta's social welfare agency. Guided by the mission of Christ, it serves our community – regardless of background or faith – with compassion, dignity, and a commitment to offering care when it's needed most. Services include:

Family services

Family support programs include positive parenting workshops to help vulnerable and disadvantaged families, as well as counselling and casework support for families, parents and carers.

Housing and support for women

Through the nationally accredited Houses to Homes program, young mothers aged 16–25 in Blacktown and Parramatta can access medium-term housing and personalised support, especially if they are homeless or at risk due to financial hardship, family or domestic violence, or relationship breakdown.

For women aged 55 and over, the Homes for Older Women program in the Blue Mountains offers housing and tailored support to tackle housing insecurity and homelessness. Catholic Care also partners with community housing providers to prioritise applications and connect women with the help they need.

Counselling services

Catholic Care offers confidential, affordable counselling for individuals, couples, and families facing life's challenges – whether it's grief, loss, parenting, financial stress, relationship difficulties, trauma, or family law matters. Support includes help for those affected by domestic, family, or sexual abuse.

Through Project Elizabeth, Catholic Care offers trauma counselling and practical parenting support for women and families expecting a baby, coping with loss or termination, or caring for a child up to three years old.

Early learning and children's services

Through the home interaction program for parents and youngsters (HIPPY), a family day care service in 50 locations across Western Sydney, and a creche at Mamre House and Farm in Orchard Hills, Catholic Care provides essential care and support for children, with engaging activities to promote early learning development during their first 2000 days of life.

Community engagement

Catholic Care's community centres, activities and programs support people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including First Nations communities; as well as those experiencing disadvantage or social isolation. Programs include wellness, English classes, reading groups, work readiness groups for women, food banks, material aid, art and craft groups, men's health groups, free legal advice, community garden working bees and more.

Chaplaincy services

Catholic Care's chaplaincy services offer spiritual and emotional support to people in correctional facilities and hospitals across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Our trained chaplains journey with individuals in times of illness, isolation, crisis or incarceration, offering comfort, pastoral care, and the healing presence of Christ to all – regardless of faith or background.

COMMUNITY DROP-IN CENTRES

Emerton

Holy Family Parish, Aboriginal Catholic Services
13 Emert Parade
Emerton NSW 2770

Orchard Hills

Mamre House and Farm
181 Mamre Road
Orchard Hills 2748

Springwood

Unit 3
163 Macquarie Road
Springwood NSW 2777

Contact Catholic Care for opening hours of our centres and further details on activities at each centre.

VOLUNTEER WITH US

Interested in using your skills to support Catholic Care's ministry in Sydney's west? Become a volunteer today.



Latest appointments

Most Rev Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, has confirmed these appointments in the Diocese of Parramatta:

Rev Jonathan Germinanda

Assistant Priest at Mary Immaculate Parish, Quakers Hill-Schofields from 7 September 2025.

Rev Thomas Alackakunnel

Assistant Priest at Our Lady, Queen of Peace Parish, Greystanes from 19 September 2025.

Rev Walter Mallo IVE

Assistant Priest at Our Lady of the Angels Parish, Rouse Hill, from 24 September 2025.

Rev Vincent Ojo

Assistant Priest at St Patrick's Cathedral Parish, Parramatta, for one year, from 28 October 2025.

Rev Ambrose Owusu-Ansah

Assistant Parish Priest at St Monica's Parish, North Parramatta and chaplain to the Ghanaian Catholic Community from 16 November 2025.

Rev Tom Green

Assistant Priest at Mary, Queen of the Family Parish, Blacktown, from 29 November 2025.

Rev Andrew Rooney

Assistant Priest at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta, from 29 November 2025.



DIOCESE of PARRAMATTA

WILL YOU OPEN THE DOORS OF HOPE TO GRIEVING HEARTS THIS CHRISTMAS?

Help provide counselling support for people experiencing grief and loss.

In Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, Catholic Care's counsellors walk alongside people in need, providing care, compassion and hope. With rising pressures today, their support is needed more than ever.

Your gift this Christmas can help bring comfort, hope and peace to grieving hearts.

Scan to give to the Bishop's Christmas Appeal



parracatholic.org/appeal



SIMPLIFYING GIVING THROUGH DIGITAL PAYMENT SOLUTIONS

The **Diocesan Development Fund (DDF)** offers a selection of secure digital payment solutions that support parishes, schools, ministries and other Catholic organisations in today's cashless society, making it easier for people to make a payment – whether it's for Planned Giving, donations, facility hire, weddings, sacraments, or fundraising events. The DDF can help with online payment platforms provided through the Commonwealth Bank of Australia including CommBank's:

SMART TERMINAL



SMART TERMINAL WITH DONATION TAP



SMART MINI



Digital systems assist your organisation by:

- Offering secure online giving through trusted platforms provided by the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.
 - Receiving funds promptly for Planned Giving, one-off events, donations and purchases
 - Minimise on-site cash handling while ensuring financial transparency.
- Reducing reliance on physical cash, you not only streamline your event and transaction management but also make reconciliation and financial tracking more efficient.

The DDF provides financial services that helps to promote the continued growth and development of a vibrant and evangelising Catholic Church in the Diocese of Parramatta by:

- Providing loans to assist Catholic agencies to further their Mission.
- Facilitating transactional services available to all Catholic organisations.
- Operating efficiently to generate income for the Diocese to support the Mission of the Church, pastoral priorities, and ministry programmes.
- Developing deep long-term relationships with all Catholic entities within the Diocese.

To contact the DDF please phone (02) 8839 4500 or email enquiries@parraddf.org.au

Visit the DDF website at www.parracatholic.org/ddf