



Inform

A PUBLICATION OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOP OF CHRISTCHURCH

ISSUE 149 WINTER 2026

A Public Witness of Faith

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From Our Bishop



Magnifica Humanitas – Life Shared, Life Fulfilled

This week, I had three evening commitments which would bring deep and lasting joy, each one coming at the end of a long and busy day, when it would have been so much easier to go straight home and not engage with anyone. One was a combined schools' Mass, another a farewell dinner of an esteemed colleague, and the third, dinner with a family. On each occasion, I had an unexpected experience of deep joy.

At the school gathering, senior students and staff from across our city asked to come together, of their own accord, to celebrate Mass. Seeing these students and staff make this effort, outside of school hours, to pray and support one another, made my heart sing and I told them so.

The second was a farewell for a dearly loved colleague in our diocese. It was deeply moving to see and to hear how cherished he was; more than once, I found tears in my eyes.

The third was dinner with a family. Of course, there are two streets in our wider city with the same name, so I managed to get lost and what should have been a 15 minute drive, became 45, but the best was yet to come. There was the delight of a family's simple warmth: unexpected questions (whether pets go to heaven), a dessert proudly made by a teenager, and a spirited chess match. I left filled with gratitude for family, for faith, for the gift of being with others.

I share this experience, because Pope Leo XIV has just promulgated his first encyclical, Magnifica Humanitas: on safeguarding the human person in the age of artificial intelligence. At its heart, *is a call to re-discover the dignity and greatness of our humanity, most fully alive when we are in communion with one another and with Our Lord.*

I have been reflecting on the document since its release. It is a challenging reminder of a simple but demanding truth: we are made for love and love costs. It is clear that our Holy Father is concerned with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), alarmed that, with it, humanity risks slipping into a kind of isolated comfort, a self-contained world where we live in safety, while others are kept at a distance.

FOUNDATIONS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING

THE FOUNDATIONS	THE PRINCIPLES
<p>Person = image of God</p> <p>“Every human person is planned and willed by God to enter into with others and with creation.” MH 50</p>	<p>to guide today's world in the face of its challenges</p> <p>The common good</p> <p>The good of all is greater than the sum of the good of each individual</p>
<p>Human Dignity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is innate (not earned) • It is infinite • It applies to everyone 	<p>The universal destination of goods</p> <p>So that they may sustain the lives of everyone</p> <p>Subsidiarity</p> <p>Helping without taking over</p>
<p>The value of human rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal • Inviolable • Grounded in dignity 	<p>Solidarity</p> <p>None is saved alone</p> <p>Social justice</p> <p>Providing dignified conditions for all</p>

TWO ROADS AHEAD OF US

The Tower of Babel Syndrome	Choose "Nehemia's way"
<p>Profit before people</p> <p>Reducing people to mere data</p> <p>Growing inequalities</p> <p>Loss of dignity</p>	<p>build together</p> <p>Dialogue</p> <p>Listening</p> <p>Inclusion</p> <p>Shared responsibility</p>

In the document, he reminds us that we are created for relationship. Each person is willed by God and called into communion with Him, with others, and with all creation. Our dignity is not earned or lost by success or failure; it is received as a gift, flowing from God's unfailing love.

Pope Leo speaks of the "grandeur of humanity," a striking and beautiful phrase. Too often, we can measure ourselves against the things that seem greater than us, like the vastness of the universe, the speed of technology, or the power of weapons and looming tribulation, leaving us feeling small. Yet, the Gospel reveals something different: each human life is of infinite worth. We are not merely part of creation; we are invited into communion with the Creator. It is in giving ourselves, in sincere self-gift, that we discover who we truly are.



At the heart of every relationship, lies our relationship with God. From Him, all love begins and in Him, all love finds its fulfillment. Our Holy Father calls on his favourite saint, St Augustine, who prayed, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” When we remain rooted in God, we begin to love as He loves: faithfully, generously, without counting the cost. From this relationship, all others take their shape and strength.

We are at our best in relationship, yet our technological world often pulls us toward speed, efficiency, and fragmentation. Digital culture offers many connections, but it can also thin out our sense of presence. The human heart, however, still longs for something more, for attentive listening, for kindness, for time shared face-to-face. No technology can replace the experience of being truly known and loved. Pope Leo reminds us that virtual connections, while useful, must never replace the depth of real human encounter, which requires presence, patience, and shared life.

In the encyclical, he invites us to examine the ways technology is shaping our lives. The ease with which results are obtained weakens the patience and attentiveness that relationships require. The appearance of objectivity can lead us to trust efficiency over wisdom. The recreation of communication can tempt us to settle for interactions that resemble relationship, but lack its reality.

What then are we to do? The answer is both simple and demanding. Pope Leo calls us to cultivate relationships, to “lovingly safeguard the grandeur of humanity bestowed upon us and revealed in its fullness in Christ, the splendour of which no machine can ever replace.”

THE GREATNESS OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN THE FACE OF THE PROMISES OF AI

Risks of AI	Criteria for a more humane AI
Speed, less critical thinking	Human dignity
False objectivity hides bias	The common good
Simulated relationships illusion	Social justice
Concentrated power everything in the hands of a few	Reliability
	Transparency
	AI is not neutral, it reflects values and choices

He invites us to embrace three principles of relationship:

1. presence over distraction,
2. people over devices,
3. encounter over convenience.

We can live these out in the ordinary moments of life; sharing a meal, visiting someone who is lonely, supporting one another in faith, being available to those in need, eating our meal as a family at the table. Choosing presence, where others drift away; choosing people, where screens would take their place;

“We are at our best in relationship, yet our technological world often pulls us toward speed, efficiency, and fragmentation.”



choosing encounter, where ease would keep us apart. It is here, in these quiet, faithful moments, that love becomes real, because it is given.

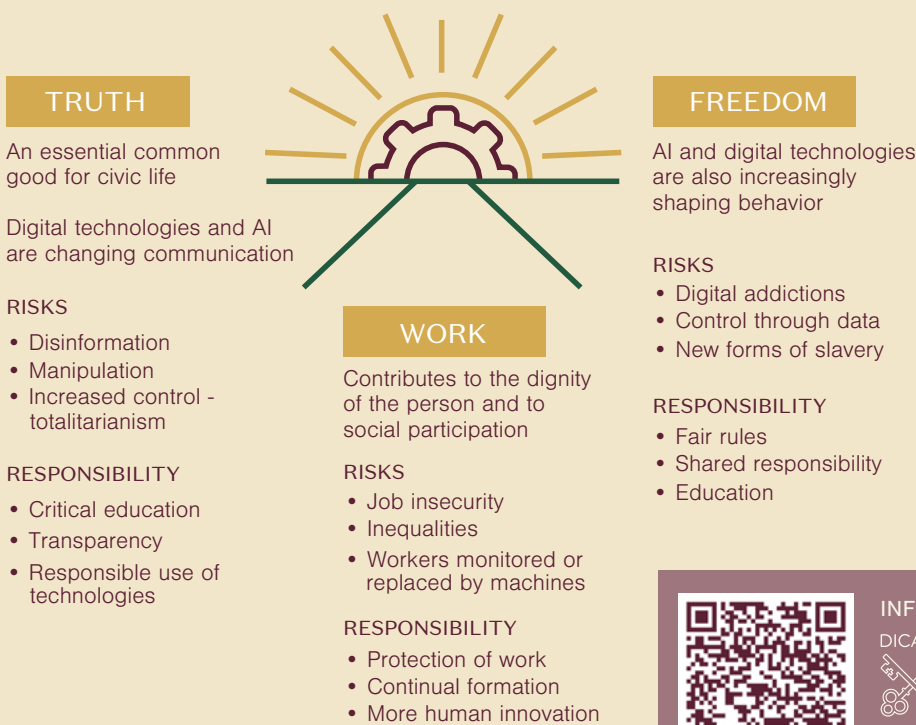
This week has reminded me again of the grandeur of our humanity. Some of the most meaningful experiences are the ones we do not plan, that are born out of the grace of relationships. A case in point was in the writing of this article: I found myself reflecting with gratitude on the beauty of what we share as human beings and more particularly, as Catholics, for the unexpected encounters our faith and fellowship offer us.

We are made for love and love is always a gift of self. When we give ourselves: to God, to one another, even to the small and ordinary demands of daily life, we begin to live more fully, and in that giving, we discover something unexpected: joy.

Yours in Christ

+ Michael Gielen
Bishop of Christchurch

SAFEGUARDING THE HUMAN PERSON IN THE TRANSFORMATION



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Corpus Christi Procession

by Matt O'Connell

The second annual Diocesan Holy Hour and Eucharistic Procession was held on the feast of Corpus Christi, Sunday 7 June, at Our Lady of Victories Church, Sockburn. Msgr Rick Loughnan was the celebrant. Over 500 people gathered for a time of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, which included prayers, scripture, and a homily from Msgr Loughnan. Following this time of Adoration, the Blessed Sacrament was processed around the streets of Sockburn.

Processions form a very important part of the solemnity of Corpus Christi. All around the world, processions were held on this great feast. Pope Leo XIV was on an Apostolic Visit to Spain at the time, and led a Eucharistic Procession through the streets of Madrid. In his homily during Mass preceding the procession, the Pope reflected on the importance of processions. It is worthwhile to briefly reflect on the words he preached, because they help us to realise, once again, the importance of the Eucharist for our lives, the life of the church, and indeed the life of the World.

Pope Leo began his homily by highlighting the fact that the Eucharist is "the gift of Christ's living presence among us ... so that we might enter into communion with the Father and become his children." How

easy it is for us to become complacent about the Eucharist, and that is why we need this feast to help us "return to the heart of the faith to renew our love and fidelity to God." "Eucharistic Processions," says Pope Leo, "held on this day ... for centuries have shaped the piety, art, music, architecture, and life of (not only the Spanish people, but) all people." These processions are a "profession of faith in the presence of the risen Lord, who is alive and continues to walk among us, who becomes bread to satiate our hunger for life, and visits the recesses of our hearts and history, even those shrouded in darkness."

Pope Leo further noted that Eucharistic processions also 'show' that Jesus "is not confined to the church, but comes out to meet us. Jesus travels the streets, crosses the squares, and visits our neighbourhoods, dwelling in the settings of our daily lives. He is a God who is close to us, who walks with his people, the Lord of history," including the sick, the struggling, the poor, and the weak.

Eucharistic processions are also a great witness of our faith in Jesus in the midst of an unbelieving world. Jesus asks us not to hide the light he has given each of us, but to shine for all to see.

I encourage you to participate next year, and even consider the possibility of organising a procession in your own parish on the next feast of Corpus Christi, Sunday 30 May, 2027.

ISSUE 149 WINTER 2026



Nga mihi nui from the editorial desk

Welcome to Inform Issue 149. Along with our regular features, these pages cover Catholic life in the Christchurch Diocese from April through to June.

Bishop Michael shares his initial response to Pope Leo XIV's first Encyclical, Magnifica Humanitas, on safeguarding the human person in the age of artificial intelligence. Our Catholic Social Services Manager invites us to see the child in front of us, to know their name and their need and to respond with the full weight of our resources and our care. In the first of a two-part article, Fr Michael Pui encourages us to re-discover the importance of silence in the Mass.

Our vocations section is comprehensive, offering insight on the call of the laity, of those in married life, the diocesan priest, and on a priest who has left this world, as he moves closer to God.

As we begin considering Pope Leo's Encyclical, I encourage you not to allow your creative writing ability to be given to AI language tools. It is crucial that we hear your voice and your own spiritual insight. Do not allow AI to intimidate you into thinking it will always do a better job of writing than you can do yourself.

Inform is a great way we can inspire and encourage each other in our faith. As you read it, please pray for God's blessing on all the people and stories covered. Share the link to Inform online cdoc.nz/inform and give copies to those you believe would appreciate reading about Christ's Church in the Christchurch Diocese.

In Christ

Ken Joblin, Editor



2025 Procession

Journey with Jesus: our School Retreat Series

by Mark Currie, Diocesan Youth Ministry Coordinator

The first half of this year saw four Year 7 retreats take place in our schools, as part of the Catholic Schools Youth Ministry International programme (CSYMI). The CSYMI model enables senior students to give quality spiritual leadership in our schools and evangelise with confidence and care. During the year, a number of leaders are joining Hannah Chapman from our Catholic Youth Team (CYT) to deliver a Year 7 retreat day in a number of our primary schools.

The retreat day encourages students to reflect on their unique journey with Jesus to this point and beyond. Hannah and her team lead games and activities and facilitate small group discussions. Alongside the programmed time, the leaders build relationships with participants, sharing their own faith with them. Each day ends in an encounter session, where participants (and leaders) reflect on how they would like Christ to accompany them on the journey. They then respond by writing a letter to Jesus.

Our leaders are on their own journey, so their day ends with a debrief, allowing them to share where they see the Holy Spirit working and where we can improve for next time. We pray these CSYMI retreats will be a small but meaningful step in a life with Christ.



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Safeguarding Online Course for Ministry Leadership

Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand (SCCANZ)

This course is open to all but particularly for those involved in ministry leadership in the Catholic Church, whether paid or voluntary role.

Summary of what this online course covers:

- Explores the basis for safeguarding; what has led to the need to identify this aspect of our faith, our Church's expectations around safeguarding and those of our country's legal requirements.
- Takes a closer look at the types and impacts of abuse, some causes of abuse and pastoral response to abuse.
- How to apply course knowledge in all aspects of ministry in the Church.

A one-day kickstart programme is provided to begin the course:

Date: Wednesday September 9th 2026

Time: 9.30am – 3.30pm

Venue: Diocesan Office, 391 Moorhouse Ave, Christchurch

Food: Morning tea and lunch is provided on the day

Cost: \$150 to complete the course. A supporting tutor is assigned to each student for the duration of the course.

The day is facilitated by a tutor from Te Kupenga – Catholic Theological College. Attendees will be tutored through the first of three modules. What remains of the course following the kickstart day is completed online at attendee's place and space and within a two-month window of the kickstart date. It is estimated that the total time to complete the course in this format is equivalent to 15 minutes time a day over a two-month period. Certificate on completion.

Who do I contact to register and find out more?

Please contact Clodagh Ward

Christchurch Diocese
Safeguarding Officer

cward@cdoc.nz



Catholic Business Network

Five years after his last Catholic Business Network (CBN) appearance, former Prime Minister Sir Bill English returned to reflect on leadership, faith, and life beyond the Beehive. Now working as a director and advisor, Sir Bill shared insights from his years in government and offered thoughtful reflections on the current state of New Zealand and the wider world. In his recent presentation in the Limes Room at the Christchurch Town Hall, he offered his plain English perspective on leadership, service, and life beyond politics. One theme which really stood out clearly for us was the role of his Catholic faith, which he described as a steady grounding anchor. Our thanks to all who attended, our sponsors, and particularly Elliot Sinclair, our event sponsor. To be among the first to hear about our future CBN events, visit our website and join our mailing list at the bottom of the CBN website homepage cbn.nz







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Seen, Known, and Supported

The Catholic Social Services Learning Assessment Pilot Programme

by Luis Arevalo, Catholic Social Services Manager

Educational psychologist Hannah Miller describes a moment in her reflection on this programme, which has stayed with me. She writes about parents arriving at their child's school for an assessment appointment as relaxed, greeting school staff that they know and meeting on familiar ground rather than in a clinical waiting room they have never visited before. It sounds like a small thing. It isn't.

For many of the whānau we serve, the barriers to accessing specialist support for their children are not just financial, though the cost of a private educational psychology assessment can be prohibitive. They are also logistical, cultural, and relational. A service that comes to the child, in the place to which the child belongs, changes everything about what is possible.



“A service that comes to the child, in the place to which the child belongs, changes everything about what is possible”

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The Catholic Social Services (CSS) Learning Assessment Pilot Programme, made possible through the generous support of the Rātā Foundation, has been doing exactly this. Working in partnership with Linwood Avenue, Shirley Primary, Gilberthorpe School, and Rāwhiti School, we have been delivering professional learning assessments to tamariki, identified by their schools as most needing them, children who would otherwise simply wait and fall further behind, and perhaps never fully understand why learning feels so hard.

What the Data Shows

The outcomes have been striking. Throughout the case studies captured in our report to the Rātā Foundation, we see consistent and meaningful change. For one student at Gilberthorpe, teacher scores for confidence in class rose from 3 out of 10 before the assessment, to 9 out of 10 six months later. The teacher's own sense of being equipped to meet that child's learning needs moved from 3 to 10. Reading and writing both increased. The parent, who scored their understanding of their child's learning needs at just 1 out of 5 before the assessment, scored it at 5, the maximum, at both the three-month and six-month follow-ups.

These are not abstract numbers. They represent a parent who now knows what their child needs. A teacher who now has the tools and the confidence to provide it. A child who now sits in class feeling capable rather than confused.

Another student's teacher reported that while academic progress had been modest in the short term, confidence had grown across reading, writing, and maths. That shift in confidence, the willingness to try, to attempt the assessment, to stay in the room, matters enormously. It is, in many ways, the foundation everything else is built on.

What the Families Say

It is the testimonials from whānau, though, that carry the deepest weight. Parents have shared that they themselves struggled at school, and that receiving this report, finally understanding how their child's brain works, finally having language for what they had observed

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for years, made them reflect on their own experience. As Hannah notes in her professional reflection, some have wondered whether their own school years might have been different, had they received this kind of support.

This is what the report means when it describes the assessments as “a way of empowering families and breaking generational cycles.” We are not simply helping a child access better support in Term 3 of Year 4. We are potentially interrupting a pattern that has repeated across decades and generations, the pattern of children who learn differently being left to struggle, to disengage, to carry the quiet wound of believing they simply are not clever enough.

A Faith That Demands More Than Charity

Catholic Social Teaching has always insisted that children are not merely future adults to be managed, they are full human beings, bearers of the divine image, deserving of every opportunity to flourish now. The Church’s understanding of integral human development, so beautifully articulated in documents from *Rerum Novarum* through to Pope Leo XIV’s recent *Dilexi Te*, holds that education is not a commodity but a fundamental right, one that allows each person to grow into the fullness of who they are created to be.

The Catechism is direct on this: parents hold a primary responsibility for the education of their children, and society is called to support them in this. When a child with an unidentified learning difference sits in a classroom year after year, without the right support, that is not a neutral fact, it is a failure of the collective responsibility we hold toward one another’s children.

Pope Leo, writing in *Dilexi Te*, reminds us that “the poor are not there by chance or by blind and cruel fate.” The same is true of children who fall behind. It is not inevitable. It is not simply how things are. Behind every child who disengages from learning, there is often an unmet need that could have been identified and addressed, if only the right support had been accessible.

This programme is one answer to that challenge. It does not wait for families to find their way to a private clinic. It does not require parents to know the system, to have transport, to take time off work. It goes to where the children already are and it says: you are worth understanding. Your child is worth understanding.

Looking Forward

We are deeply grateful to the Rātā Foundation for making this pilot possible, and to the schools that have partnered with us so wholeheartedly.

The relationships we have built with principals, learning support coordinators, and classroom teachers, are themselves part of the outcome, the trust that means recommendations are implemented, that a psychologist visiting the school is welcomed rather than regarded with suspicion.

Hannah puts it simply: “There is still much to be done.” She is right. The need for this service extends well beyond the four schools in our current pilot. The children waiting for support, seen by their teachers, known to be struggling, but not yet reached, represent an ongoing invitation for this community to act.

We believe this work is not supplementary to the Church’s mission. It is the mission, the ancient call to see the child in front of us, to know their name and their need and to respond with the full weight of our resources and our care.

Deepen your understanding of the Eucharist in the liturgy

Ars Celebrandi Workshop with Fr Paul Turner

For clergy, parish leaders, school staff and all involved in the sacred liturgy.



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More Than Charity: The Spiritual Heart of Vinnies

For many Catholics, the Society of St Vincent de Paul – often simply called “Vinnies” – is known for practical works of charity: food parcels, welfare support, Op Shops, home visitation, and helping people facing hardship. At its heart, Vinnies is much more than a charitable organisation.

Founded in Paris in 1833 by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, the Society began as a small group of young Catholics, seeking to grow in faith through friendship, prayer, and personal service of the poor. Their mission was not simply to “do good works,” but to encounter Christ through loving and serving their neighbour.

Throughout Canterbury, the Society is currently engaged in a process known as Refounding – a movement encouraging Conferences (local parish-based groups)

to re-discover the original vision of the Society and place prayer, reflection, friendship, and spiritual growth back at the centre of Vincentian life. As part of this, St Vincent de Paul Canterbury has recently appointed Phillip Bell as Conference Co-ordinator, whose role it is to bring better communication throughout the Vinnies family, grow membership and support, as well as assist Conferences in becoming stronger faith communities, grounded in spirituality and authentic relationships.

“We are not just a network of welfare groups, getting together to run Op Shops and distribute some food parcels,” said Mr Bell. “We are intentional Christian communities.”

The Cathedral Conference at St Mary’s Pro-Cathedral has grown significantly in recent years, and currently has a membership of 75. Conference President

Maurice Lawlor puts this down to a re-founded and re-vitalised Conference, with a bigger emphasis on the spiritual growth of its members, which has also led the Conference to become more welcoming and missionary, especially among the diverse cultures that make up the Pro-Cathedral community.

St Peter Chanel Conference in Rangiora has also experienced renewal and growth, through a stronger emphasis on spirituality and community. Conference members speak about meetings where prayer and reflection are no longer seen as something to “get through,” but as the heart of who they are together. Conference President Jenny Carter said: “Now the message is: join the Society and grow your spirituality.”

The message is simple but powerful: when people experience genuine Christian community, they are drawn to it. For many Catholics searching for a practical way to live their faith, Vinnies offers something deeply needed in today’s world – friendship, purpose, formation, and the opportunity to encounter Christ in others. In Canterbury and throughout New Zealand, Vincentians continue to serve quietly in homes, communities, parish conferences, and welfare centres every day. Increasingly, the Society is recognising that its greatest gift may not only be the help it provides, but the faith-filled communities it forms.

For more information about St Vincent de Paul Canterbury head to svdpcanterbury.nz



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Diocesan Men’s Breakfast



On an early April morning, over 140 men from throughout the Diocese gathered with our Bishop for Eucharistic adoration, breakfast, and fellowship. We celebrated the 99 people in our Diocese who entered the Catholic Church at Easter. New Catholic, Merv Bassett, was our guest speaker. His journey included his early conversion before becoming a Pentecostal pastor. Over the past three years, he has been on a journey of research and discovery, being received into the Catholic Church at Easter. Coordinator for the event, Mike Stopforth, said this is the fourth year the men’s breakfast has been held, and it continues to attract men of all ages. We give thanks for the grace of the Holy Spirit, who impels people into full communion in the Church.



Young Vinnies Commissioning Mass at St Mary's Pro-Cathedral

Celebrating Faith in Action Through Our Young Vinnies Commissioning Masses

In May, three Young Vinnies Commissioning Masses were celebrated throughout the Canterbury region, bringing together students, teachers, parish communities, Conference Members, and supporters in a joyful celebration of faith, service, and community. These Masses marked an important moment in the journey of our Young Vinnies, commissioning and encouraging them to continue putting their faith into action within their schools and wider

communities. We thank all the schools, teachers, Conference Members, and parish communities for your ongoing support and encouragement of Young Vinnies. Special thanks is also given to the Catholic Development Fund (CDF) for their generous contribution and continued investment in youth formation. Their support helps make these celebrations and opportunities possible, empowering young people to serve others with compassion, leadership, and faith.



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Priests' retirement villas: an update

Works at the Priests' Retirement Villas have now officially commenced, and the site is being fully established. The Farrell Construction site offices and hoardings are now in place and the project is visibly taking shape. Site clearance works and excavations for each of the building platforms are complete. The project is gaining momentum, with underground service works commencing, ahead of the pouring of the first foundations in the coming period.

Celebrating 90 Years in Christchurch

by Lynette Windle

This year, the Christchurch Catholic Women's League (CWL) is celebrating 90 years in existence. In 1936, Bishop Brodie invited some Catholic women to form a Women's Club and they decided to join the Catholic Women's League, which already existed in Auckland under Archbishop Liston.

The League provided an opportunity for like-minded women to come together to pray and to support each other, as they experienced Christ and his teachings in their lives. Besides sharing the same faith, the women were able to gain fellowship and new friends by attending monthly meetings and organised outings. Projects for raising funds for the Pacific missions and local charities were more productive as a group effort, rather than individuals working alone.

The service aspect of the League's motto of 'faith and service' is seen through the members serving refreshments at funerals, helping in parish liturgies and social activities, knitting rugs and children's clothing, visiting the sick, and helping in some Catholic primary schools, with the paying of Catholic School fees for families less able to do so, or in hearing pupils' reading.

The CWL began its 90th year in February, with an Opening Mass at St Gregory's Church in Bishopdale, attended by members from the five CWL regions in the diocese. Monsignor Rick Loughnan spoke about the CWL patron, St Margaret Clitheroe. This 16th century saint, born a Protestant, showed great courage and

tenacity in upholding her Catholic faith at a time in the city of York in England, when Catholics were being persecuted for treason by the Protestant Queen Elizabeth 1st for their beliefs. Margaret hid visiting priests from authorities in her home and allowed the forbidden Mass to be celebrated in secret.

After her death, all three of Margaret's children remained faithful Catholics. Henry, her eldest and only son, was ordained a Catholic priest, and both of Margaret's daughters entered the religious life. Today's CWL members try to copy Margaret's staunch conviction of her faith.

The annual CWL Christchurch Diocesan Conference was held in St Peter's Beckenham on 21 March, and was attended by approximately 60 representatives from the five regions. The regions are made up of branches in Lincoln, Halswell, Hoon Hay, Christchurch West, Inner City, Christchurch North, Ashburton, Rakaia, Methven, Timaru, Greymouth, St Patrick's Invercargill, and Queenstown.

Monsignor Rick Loughnan, assisted by Region 1's parish priests, Fr Brian Fennessey and Fr Kevin Mowbray, began the Conference with the celebration of the Mass. Conference Guest Speakers were Michelle Taylor, Sr Lauren Butler, Sylvia Mellish, and Dave Bellamy. Michelle spoke of her journey from being a nurse to becoming a funeral director at a time when it was rare for a woman to hold anything other than an office administration role in the funeral profession.



Another career change was told of by Sr Lauren Butler, who gave up owning her own home and a job of 13 years at the Casino, to become a Carmelite extern nun, based at the Halswell Monastery. Sr Lauren lives a cloistered life and is dressed in the religious habit of the Carmelite Order, but also relates to the public as a guest speaker, accompanying nuns to appointments etc. Sr Lauren told about the contribution of St Therese of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun who lived in the 19th century. St Therese, also known as "the Little Flower in God's Garden," influenced many people, then and now, with her "little Way" of showing love for Jesus in simple things. "Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God. Do all that you do with Love." (St Therese)

Our National CWL President, Sylvia Mellish, told of the 800th anniversary of St Francis of Assisi. Francis began the Franciscan Order of Friars and his life's contribution to how to follow Christ. His Prayer, "Make me an instrument of peace" is well known and remains relevant in today's world.

Each year, the CWL members fundraise nationally for what is called the At Home Appeal. In 2025, over \$14,615 was raised to give to SHE, the Women's Refuge. The 2026 At Home Appeal is going to the NZ Alzheimer's Society and a representative, Dave Bellamy, explained how the Society supports the growing number of carers and sufferers, and how the money donated would be spent. The Jubilee fund of \$1,238.45 was given to the Taranaki Retreat Centre, and the National Mission Project raised \$1,725, which was given to the St Teresa's Novitiate in the Solomon Islands. Besides these, most individual branches also provide monetary assistance to a Pacific mission, such as the Father Law Home in Fiji.

To celebrate their 90 years of existence as a League in Christchurch, a large anniversary cake was cut by past Presidents for all the members present to enjoy.



Left to right: current Diocesan President Lynette Windle and past Presidents, Jenny Muschamp, Ann Joyce, Teresa McCarthy (obscured) and Sylvia Mellish



Filipino community members gathered at St Anne's Church for Santacruzán 2026

Faith, Flowers and Filipino Tradition Santacruzán 2026 Unites Community in Christchurch

by Fr Rex Ramos

The Filipino Catholic community in Christchurch joyfully celebrated Santacruzán 2026, on 17 May, at St Anne's Church, Woolston, bringing together faith, culture, and community through one of the Philippines' most cherished religious traditions. The celebration highlighted Filipino devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the enduring significance of faith-centered cultural practices.

The Santacruzán tradition is the search for the Holy Cross associated with St Helena, known in Filipino tradition as Reina Elena. As flowers, prayers, and songs filled the church grounds, Santacruzán 2026 stood as a beautiful reminder that faith traditions continue to flourish even far from home, keeping alive the spirit of Filipino Catholic identity in Christchurch.



Women dressed in traditional Filipiniana gowns participating in Santacruzán at St Anne's Church

Mensa Christi – Table of Christ by Pepe Abela

In late April, Couples For Christ (CFC) Christchurch hosted the CFC South Island Theme Weekend Retreat (TWR) at Rangī Ruru Girls' School. The three-day gathering became a joyful celebration

of faith, family, and community, bringing together 431 participants from Couples for Christ, Handmaids of the Lord, and Servants of the Lord, along with 204 members from Kids for Christ, Youth for

Christ, and Singles for Christ.

Originally rooted in Baguio City in the Philippines, the retreat continues to unite Couples for Christ communities worldwide through a shared mission of evangelization and renewal.

The spiritual richness of the retreat was strengthened by the presence of clergy and bishops who journeyed with the community throughout the weekend. At the Table of Christ, all are welcomed, nourished, and sent forth to become instruments of God's love and joy in the world.

(left) Couples For Christ Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael on the Feast of St Mark the Evangelist. Bishop Michael reflected on Christ's true presence in the Eucharist, and encouraged participants to deepen their devotion and relationship with God.



'Messy' families encouraged to bear fruit

by Debra McTague

Five keys to a healthy and holy family

Families can be messy; most of us know this to be true! In May, we were truly blessed to have Mike and Alicia Hernon from The Messy Family Project share with us the great calling and hope for families and marriages.

Part of the good news they shared is that "you don't need to be perfect; you need to be intentional. Small, faithful steps will shape your family for generations."

The Hernons are genuine, down-to-earth, faith-filled, and funny. Speaking on the theme of "Growing a Family Culture," they gave many practical tips and ideas, and highlighted that a healthy, holy marriage is the foundation of a healthy and holy family. When your marriage is strong and given priority, this in turn blesses your children, as they learn from what is lived in your home.

Five keys to growing a fruitful family culture

The Hernons framed their talk around five ideas, which I'll do my best to summarise here.

This is the age of the family. We're raising children in a culture that often pushes against the very values we're trying to pass on. But as the Hernons reminded us, God isn't anxious about this. He is calling ordinary families to be exactly where renewal takes root.

A strong family culture protects your children. Every family has its own culture: the unspoken rhythms, beliefs, and values that hold it together and tell each member who they are and where they belong. Tend to that, the Hernons said, and you build something that outlasts you and carries your faith into the next generation.

Fruitful families live intentionally. The difference they drew was simple. Frantic families are run by whatever's most urgent, while fruitful families make room for what actually matters. That means knowing, as a family, why you live the way you do and what you're being called to.



Fruitful families meet three deep human needs. The Hernons put it as three questions every person is asking. Who am I? We each need to know we are beloved. Where do I fit? We were made in love, by love, and for love. Why am I here? We are made to give ourselves to others.

Parents have a sacred calling. Holiness isn't reserved for far-off mission fields, they reminded us. For parents, it's worked out at home. That's where we're shaped into who God made us to be and where our children first witness His love.

For more information and inspiration, check out the Messy Family Project podcasts at messyfamilyproject.org — for ideas on family prayer, date nights, and more.

Here at the St John Paul II Centre, we believe healthy, holy marriages and families are the foundation of a flourishing society. Events like this one are made possible by our benefactors, friends, and supporters, and we hope to bring you many more. If you would like to help, please consider a one-off donation at jp2.org.nz/give

"And since in God's plan it has been established as an 'intimate community of life and love,' the family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love... Family, become what you are!"

— Pope Saint John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio (1981), 17.

Pope Saint John Paul II, pray for us!



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Devotion on Display

by Shaun Hickland - Diocesan Archivist

In April, I organised 'Devotion on Display,' an exhibition of Catholic Celtic art. The exhibition was hosted by The Darkroom on St Asaph Street. They gave me use of their art space to fill with Celtic-inspired art I had produced over the last few years.

I have been producing art since 2017, often taking scripture quotes or Catholic chants, creating an art piece in the tradition of medieval manuscripts, and often gifting them to friends or family for birthdays, weddings, or other occasions. Several friends had encouraged me to exhibit my art, and I am grateful to have followed their prompting.

While the visual language has a strong Medieval and Celtic theme, my interest is more than purely aesthetic. Like icons, medieval manuscripts employed images, symbolism, spacing, and arrangement intended to be contemplated in parallel with the written text, to inform their understanding and deepen their devotion. One of my aims for the exhibition was to invite people into these contemplative practices, which come from our rich cultural and religious heritage.

One piece I found people returning to and commenting on, was a chant of the Salve Regina. Friends from the Parish of the Holy Family, Christchurch West, helped perform a rendition of this chant on the opening night, a great witness to how visitors to the same songs, created hundreds of years ago, are still part of our living Catholic tradition. The piece itself depicts Mary as our protective mother, defending the faithful through Christ against the snares of the world.

The exhibition itself was a great success. Around 40 people attended the opening evening, and over 100 in total visited throughout the week. In hindsight, the opening night was a particular highlight, as it combined heritage, art, public history, and youth ministry, areas I have been working in for the last ten years.

I was amazed by the variety of people who came in to look through the week. In addition to friends and family from Catholic communities, I also encountered people from different Christian traditions, different faiths, and even those of no faith. Several people simply wandered in through the doors, led by interest in art, or just curious to see something different. One lady who came in, after



looking at them said, when she looked at a piece, she heard it.

As the week progressed, I was struck by the opportunity the arts afforded to invite discussion and consideration of the faith among religious and secular audiences. Through its sheer beauty, religious art proposes the faith in a beautiful and un-obtrusive way. It allows people to re-discover some of the rich metaphors of the Christian life that have passed down through the centuries. My deep thanks to everyone who came to support this exhibition, and I look forward to doing another in future.

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Editor's Note: What follows is the first of a two-part article by Fr Michael Pui, examining the importance of silence within Mass.

Silence of the Lambs at Mass

by Fr Michael Pui

Nearly twenty years ago, a dialogue line in a movie burned into my mind. The dialogue was between the two main characters from the 2007 post-apocalyptic thriller movie, "I am Legend." The fictional story is about a virologist, who thought he might be the last human survivor in New York City, after a genetically engineered cancer cure mutates into a deadly virus. When he eventually met up with another survivor, she argued that "divine guidance" led her to him, saying, "The world is quieter now. We just have to listen. If we listen, we can hear God's plan."

The story is fictional, of course, but it gives a snapshot and a judgment of our modern world: it is not quiet! It is noisy. It is difficult to hear God's voice in the hustle and bustle of our noisy world. In this environment, how do we drown out the noise of the world to hear God's voice and discern God's plan for us? After all, as Catholics, we speak of 'vocations'; that we all have a calling from God. To hear God calling, we need to hear and listen, and even more so as the modern world gets noisier than ever.

There is a saving grace. Luckily for us Catholics, there is the Church's liturgy. However, I think we Catholics may need to re-discover the truth, that the celebration of the Mass is an antidote to the noisy world, that we may hear God's voice through it. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this antidote may be hampered by our apparent fear of silence within the Mass.

As a priest who goes around the country to promote the Pontifical Mission Societies, I am blessed to celebrate or concelebrate Masses in different parishes. From this parish-trotting exercise, I get a distinct impression that nowadays, in a typical Sunday Mass in a parish church, as the liturgy unfolds, silence is something rare. When I was a parish priest, I too had been guilty of cutting out moments of silence. There always seemed



to be pressure to get things moving along. It was as if active participation in the Mass was about everyone, the priest and the laity, 'doing something', and that 'something' always seemed to exclude silence. Every moment in the liturgy, where there could be silence, a hymn or music had to be invariably squeezed in and the next item had to start immediately after the previous. There are to be no pauses and no silence.

The Second Vatican Council, through its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, called for the faithful to take part in the liturgy through full, conscious, and active participation (*actuosa participatio*). In the immediate years after the Council, many interpreted 'active participation' as engaging in external activities during Mass. As the Council's mind was being unpackaged in the first few decades, 'active participation' was reduced to merely having a role in the celebration of the Mass, like ushering, singing, proclaiming the Word of God, serving, and so on. The good thing about it was that it helped the laity to realise they have an important role in the liturgy.

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI, who was himself a participant in the Second Vatican Council, clarified that 'active participation' is more than merely 'doing

things'. He explained that it is actually a form of deep receptivity, a "prayerful entry into the divine action" and a "consent" to God's work upon the soul, rather than just doing things oneself. He argued that authentic active participation means uniting one's daily sacrifices, life, and prayers to the perfect offering of Jesus Christ on the altar, rather than viewing Mass as just a communal social event and, in that perfect offering of Jesus Christ, there are moments of silence.

This must, however, not be interpreted as being averse to having hymns or singing during Mass. The silence I am referring to is not merely the absence of noise or sound, but the intentional moments which are part of the liturgy, designed to foster reflection, reverence, and internal prayer. This silence is to allow God's voice to be heard, that we may experience a personal communion with Him.

God speaks to us through the mystery of the Mass, primarily by bringing the faithful into a profound encounter with Jesus Christ. It is a "mystery" because its depth allows for continuous, lifelong exploration of God's life and God's Revelation in Christ. The Mass draws us into this mystery, and to be better drawn into it, requires moments of silence in the liturgy.



Godwit/Kuaka

by Karen Meehan, a parishioner of the Catholic Parish of Mid Canterbury and a post-graduate student in the Theology Department of the University of Otago

Ralph Hotere's 18 metre-long mural Godwit/Kuaka, initially resembles a military ribbon or a scientific barcode. Yet, as neither are related to the title, it invites deeper contemplation. While it is not conventionally Māori, nor explicitly religious, I suggest that Godwit/Kuaka might serve as Aotearoa New Zealand's equivalent of the wintering tree of the 17th Century Carmelite, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection.

Born into poverty, Nicholas Herman knew nothing but famine, the Black plague, and the devastation and chaos of the Thirty Years' War; and after a serious battle wound, he was left with a limp and discharged from the army at the young age of 18. Desolate from the horrors he had endured, he suffered a long period of spiritual darkness, until an encounter with a stark tree stripped bare of all signs

of life. Realising that the leaves, blossom, and fruit would return in the right season, he received a profound insight into the providence and power of God that would never leave him. In 1640, he entered the Carmelite monastery in Paris "solely for the love of God." He became Brother Lawrence, of the Resurrection.

Despite being known for his holiness, Brother Lawrence suffered years of unbearable spiritual desolation; not just because of his dislike of his assigned task in the kitchen, but because of his acute awareness of the absence of God. St John of the Cross describes this state as the "dark night of the soul," when heaven seems silent and God hidden.

Hotere's Godwit/Kuaka can be read through this same apophatic lens. Bright mirrored colours and stripes depict the



AROUND THE PARISHES

existence. The unseen nest exists, just as God's hiddenness does not negate his presence either (John 20:29; Heb 11:1-27, 2 Cor 4:18).

The whakataukī asks: Kua kite te kohanga kuaka? — Who has seen the nest of the kuaka? By this proverb the mural becomes a culturally relevant image for Aotearoa. The kuaka's migration reminds us that seasons of darkness, waiting, and distance, are natural to human and spiritual life, they are not signs of abandonment. The kuaka's nest is Aotearoa's spiritual wintering tree.

When the community gathers to

“The kuaka's migration reminds us that seasons of darkness, waiting, and distance, are natural to human and spiritual life; they are not signs of abandonment”

migratory journey of the kuaka, and like visual bookends, they direct your focus to the deep black centre with three perfect circles and an ancient chant. Here the blackness symbolises absence: the kuaka gone during its breeding season, their nests unseen and invisible, and the dark winter months they have left behind. Yet the kuaka's absence does not mean non-

farewell the kuaka as they depart this September, keep hold of Hotere's mural and the absence of the birds during their incredible journey and breeding season. They invite us to trust what cannot be seen; just as the nest is invisible to us, so too can the darkness and absence of God be evidence of the mysterious presence of God.

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We Don't Have a Vocations Shortage!

by Fr Monty Bamford - Vocations Director, Catholic Diocese of Christchurch

This statement may sound strange. After all, in 1970 our diocese had 138 priests; fifty years later we had just 62. The number of religious has also declined, from 560 to 130 in the same period. In the last 15 years, the number of parishes in our diocese has reduced from 50 to 18. Priests are stretched more thinly, religious no longer staff our schools and hospitals, and there are fewer people entering seminaries or houses of formation.

Yet we don't have a vocations shortage! The latest diocesan report records over 63,000 baptised Catholics in the Christchurch Diocese. Interestingly, while the number of priests and religious has fallen, the number of Catholics has remained remarkably stable over the last 50 years. I firmly believe that the Lord is inviting us to discover an unrealised fruit of the Second Vatican Council: the vocation of the laity. By understanding the vocation of the laity more deeply, we will therefore understand the vocation of the diocesan priesthood more clearly and provide our young men with a strong sense of diocesan priesthood.

Too often the lay vocation has been defined negatively – what lay people are not. Vatican II and subsequent popes have instead articulated a rich, positive vision of the laity's mission in the world. Despite this, our practical understanding remains impoverished. Yes, many capable lay people serve in governance, administration, and pastoral care in our parishes and diocese. We are extremely grateful for them and would be totally lost without them! Yet sometimes a subtle clericalism persists: the idea that to be an "active Catholic" one must be involved in the ministries or initiatives of the institutional Church. This mindset risks alienating the vast majority of the faithful of whom, Pope Francis reminded us, the ministerial priesthood is at the service. Much of this understanding of vocation still reflects a "Christendom" model in which priests and religious men and women are the only serious Christians and the laity simply have to "pray, pay, and obey." These days are now long gone.

Consider Tim, in his early thirties with two children under five. Tim is an in-house

“I firmly believe that the Lord is inviting us to discover an unrealised fruit of the Second Vatican Council: the vocation of the laity”

lawyer for a government department, handling a number of complex legal contracts between the government and private providers. He rises early every day for 30 minutes of personal prayer, before getting ready for work. On his commute to work, Tim will pray the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, or listen to a Catholic podcast. He will stop by the local church (if it is open!) on his way to and from work. As well as spending time with his wife and children, Tim enjoys working out at the gym, playing golf, and simply relaxing with his family. He doesn't have the time or the ability to be involved in parish groups, ministries, or programmes. Instead, Tim needs formation and accompaniment that



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The Good Shepherd Still Walks With His Sheep

by Fr Rex Ramos

As Parish Priest of the Good Shepherd Parish in Hurunui, I experience both the beauty and the challenge of priestly life. Our parish stretches across the townships of Amberley, Hawarden, Culverden, Hanmer Springs, and Cheviot. These places are blessed with beautiful hills, farms, vineyards, and peaceful countryside; truly a land flowing with milk, honey, and wine.

I came here as a missionary priest from the Philippines. Leaving my home, family, culture, and familiar way of life was not easy. New Zealand culture is very different from what I grew up with. There were many

“As a missionary priest far from home, I sometimes miss my family, my culture, and the warmth of familiar surroundings. But in those moments of loneliness, I realise that Jesus Himself is my companion”

adjustments to make: the language, the lifestyle, the weather, the food, and even the way people relate and express their faith. At times, I felt alone and out of place. I had to learn not only new roads and new towns, but also new ways of understanding people and ministering to them.

The mission itself is challenging. I spend hours driving from one town to another, just to celebrate Mass, visit the sick, bless homes, and care for the spiritual needs of our parishioners. Sometimes the roads are long, the days are tiring, and the heart becomes discouraged. I give my best efforts, yet I see many people slowly drifting away from the Church. There

are moments when I silently ask God, “Lord, where are Your people? Have You abandoned them?”

Yet deep in my heart, I know the answer. God has never abandoned His people and He has never abandoned me. In this mission, I continue to experience His love every day.

One of the greatest consolations in my priesthood is the presence of God. All the time I drive alone through the quiet roads of Hurunui, surrounded by hills and farmland, I feel the closeness of the Lord beside me.

As a missionary priest far from home, I sometimes miss my family, my culture, and the warmth of familiar surroundings. But in those moments of loneliness, I realise that Jesus Himself is my companion. Even when churches are not full and ministry feels difficult, I know He is still present.

I experience Him in the smiles of elderly parishioners, in the simple gratitude of people after Mass, and in the silence of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes His presence comes quietly, not through big miracles, but through peace in my heart reminding me, “You are not alone.”

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus continues to walk with me. He strengthens me when I am tired and comforts me when I feel discouraged.

Many times, I realise that God’s love is shown through His care and protection. Every safe journey is a blessing. Every difficult day completed safely is a reminder that the Good Shepherd watches over me.

Living in a foreign country also taught me to trust God more deeply. There were moments when I felt uncertain or struggled to adjust, but God always provided people who welcomed me, encouraged me, and helped me feel at home in New Zealand.

Like Psalm 23 says, “The Lord is my shepherd.” I truly experience that in my life as a priest.

One important lesson I continue to learn is that priesthood is not about success in numbers. It is about faithfulness. I remind myself that I came to New Zealand not for comfort, but for mission. God called me here for a reason.

The Good Shepherd continues to walk with me through every road, every Mass, every sacrifice, and every challenge. His presence comforts me, His protection keeps me safe, and His call to perseverance gives me hope to continue serving His people.

As long as the Good Shepherd walks with me, I will continue the mission He has entrusted to me with faith, hope, and love.



Fr Rex Ramos at St Anthony’s Church, Cheviot

Falling Deeper: A Love Without End

Reflections on the Hurunui Marriage Enrichment Retreat

by Sandy Velmonte

In the quiet, scenic backdrop of Amberley, seven couples recently embarked on a transforming journey. Over the weekend of 11-12 April, the Hurunui Unit of Couples for Christ (CFC) hosted a Marriage Enrichment Retreat (MER), which proved to be a profound season of renewal and re-connection.

The theme for the weekend, "Falling Deeper: A Love Without End," was anchored in the beautiful promise of Jeremiah 31:3: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

The retreat was uniquely marked by a spirit of local hospitality and ecumenical warmth. Our retreat was a true community effort, spanning two lovely spaces in Amberley. The journey began at the Anglican Church Hall. The space provided a welcoming atmosphere for the opening talks and reflections, setting a tone of openness and discovery. The experience then culminated the next day at the Holy Passion of Our Lord Catholic Church. During the Mass, each couple participated in a renewal of vows, where they transitioned into a deeper spiritual intimacy. The retreat concluded in a space of shared faith and prayer. Moving between

*"...a moment to pause, pray,
and fall deeper into the grace of
the Sacrament of Matrimony"*



Beaming attendees at the Couples for Christ Marriage Enrichment Weekend



Marriage Enrichment Weekend attendees gathered in the Holy Passion of Our Lord Catholic Church in Amberley.

these spaces felt like a gentle reminder that love and faith bring us all together.

One of the most precious gifts of the weekend was the gift of time. The couples stayed overnight in Amberley, enjoying a rare and much needed break from the beautiful, but often exhausting, demands of parenting. This time away from the daily routine and the kids allowed husbands and wives to focus entirely on one another. The logistics were made possible by the incredible support of Youth for Christ (YFC), fellow CFC members, and relatives who stepped in to care for the children, proving that it truly takes a village to support a marriage.

As the couples returned to their homes and families, they carried with them more than just memories. They left with a renewed understanding of their vocation and the comforting assurance that their love, mirrored in God's own, is intended to be a love without end. The Hurunui MER stands as a testament to the power of taking a moment to pause, pray, and fall deeper into the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

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Memories of Father Denis Collins’ Time in Christchurch

by Dr Paul Maurice

At 6:30 in the evening of 6 March 2026, at Nazareth House in Christchurch, our dear priest and friend, Fr Denis Collins, left this life to go and meet his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. At the very time he died, my wife Ruth and I were receiving Holy Communion and praying fervently for him at a Votive Mass of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was being offered to commemorate the First Friday of the Month. How appropriate this was in view of the fact that Father always had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart.

I remember a wonderful sermon that he preached on one occasion, on the twelve promises Our Lord gave to St Margaret Mary, to those who honour Him by receiving Holy Communion on the Nine First Fridays. God’s timing is truly wonderful!

When we went to visit Father that evening after Holy Mass, we learnt of his death about 40 minutes earlier. We were sad not to have seen him once more while he was alive, but were greatly consoled when we realised where we had been and what we had been doing at the time of his death.

We first met Fr Collins when Ruth and myself arrived in Christchurch, having emigrated from England, in June 2004. At that time, Father was offering the Old Rite Latin Mass as the Saturday evening Vigil every week in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. This is where we got to know him. Since then, we have benefited enormously from his strong faith, his wisdom, and his kindness. He always said the Mass with great devotion, and gave valuable spiritual advice in



“The accompanying photograph shows Father in the beautiful little chapel which he had set up in one of the rooms in his home”

the Confessional. Every time Ruth had to travel to England to visit her family, he would offer a Mass for her, as he did also frequently for Ruth’s elderly and unwell father. He similarly offered Masses whenever one of us had to undergo an operation or had some particular concern. Father also had a great love for Our Lady, and allocated a definite time in his daily routine for the Holy Rosary. On one occasion, Ruth was having a conversation with him and when it got to a certain time,

he apologised and said that he would have to break off as it was time for him to pray his Rosary.

In 2018, Fr Collins moved from Christchurch back to the Archdiocese of Wellington, where he had been ordained in 1959 and ministered for many years. For a time he lived in Summerset Retirement Village in Porirua, and then the opportunity came for him to move to a unit in Waikanae, a place which he had loved to visit for his summer holidays, as

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A Memory of Fr Denis Collins

by Mons Rick Loughnan

Dr Paul Maurice and his wife Ruth, both close friends of Fr Denis Collins, asked me if I would like to write a few words of remembrance of Fr Collins. Fr Denis and I were together in the Cathedral Presbytery while I was, for a few years, Cathedral Administrator. I enjoyed Fr Denis's company. We had many conversations and he often gave me advice and insights, which were very helpful to a relatively new priest. Anyone who knew Fr Denis would know of his kindness for many and his consistent life of prayer and charity. His pastoral approach, though firm, was deeply kind, and he had a great deal of understanding for the struggles of others.

I remember once, having a very disruptive day and seeming to have got nothing done, saying to Fr Denis, "I feel I have done nothing today," to which he asked me, "Have you said Mass today?" to which I replied "yes." He then asked, "Have you prayed your divine office?" "Yes," I said. "Then you have had a good day!"

By dint of circumstance a few days before he died, I was able to be one of those priests who offered him the last sacraments. As sick as he was, his love of the Lord shone through, as he prepared for his death.

May the Lord now give rest to his faithful priest and servant after his many labours in the Lord's vineyard.



he enjoyed swimming in the sea there. The accompanying photograph shows Father in the beautiful little chapel which he had set up in one of the rooms in his home. The first time I visited him in Waikanae I had arrived at my motel late the previous evening. Early the next morning, Father walked round to my motel, carrying a large bag of breakfast provisions for me, including home made jam which he had purchased at the local farmers' market. This is just an example of the kindness and thoughtfulness which he always showed towards others. On subsequent occasions, Ruth and I visited him together in Waikanae and were privileged to attend the private Mass which he said daily in his chapel.

Many people have expressed to us their admiration of Fr Collins. To give concrete examples, two friends have both told us how helpful they found his homilies at the 7.30am Mass in the Pro-Cathedral. Another friend praised the marriage preparation instruction that she had received from him. Another always tried to go to him for Confession, because she received such useful guidance and advice.

He returned to Christchurch in 2022 due to deteriorating health, and took up residence in the Rest Home Wing of Nazareth House. He regularly attended the daily Mass there, and on Saturdays, when there was no Mass in the main Church, he offered a Mass in the upstairs chapel, such was his dedication to Daily

Mass. Father had a liking for Ballantynes Department Store, so every now and again he would accompany Ruth and myself to the tea rooms there, where he always enjoyed a salmon club sandwich and a slice of carrot cake. On other occasions during his earlier times in Christchurch, he invited us to join him to hear Handel's Messiah at the Theatre Royal.

During his time at Nazareth House, there were many people who, because of the esteem in which they held Father, quietly helped him in many ways, such as taking him to doctors' appointments, baking him cakes and biscuits, mending clothes, and running many errands. Father had been chaplain to a praesidium of the Legion of Mary in Christchurch, and the spontaneous prayer gathering of its members around Father's coffin was a testament to the love and respect they held for him.

We will miss dear Father Collins but we will be praying for the repose of his soul and we know that he is praying for us, whether now in Purgatory or soon to be in Heaven.

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Faith, Leadership, and Integrity

Archbishop Paul Martin at Marian College

Archbishop Paul Martin recently visited Marian College, participating in an open and wide-ranging Question and Answer session with students. The discussion spanned a variety of topics, including his personal journey to the priesthood, global political leadership, social media, and the complexities of navigating personal faith in the modern world.

On Vocation and Personal Choice

Responding to questions regarding his early life and his decision to join the clergy, Archbishop Martin observed that his discernment process began during his seventh form year. "Like many of you, I had to decide what I wanted to do with my life. I decided I wanted to go into the seminary. I applied to the Society of Mary and they said yes."

Entering his training at the age of 17.5, he acknowledged the gravity of choosing a path that meant forfeiting marriage and a conventional family for the sake of the Gospel. However, the Archbishop emphasised the fulfillment that comes with committed choices, stating that a definitive decision prevents a life spent dwelling on alternative paths. "One of the great things in life is when you make a choice, it takes you down a path and you don't spend your life thinking about what you don't have, because this is the road I've gone down and so I spend less and less time thinking about that."

On Leadership and Public Dignity

When asked about global politics, particularly what was happening in America, Archbishop Martin spoke about how proud he was of the way Pope Leo had handled the situation. "The Pope is calling out leaders who are not acting and working for peace. I'm really proud of the way [the Pope] conducts himself with dignity, he's not slamming the person, he's addressing the issues." He encouraged the students of Marian College to consider leadership roles themselves, expressing his hope that the next generation of integrity-driven politicians could emerge from within the school.

"The worst thing that happens to us is that we get so blown around by all the things around us, that we don't get to find integrity within ourselves."

On Faith, Integrity, and Overcoming Doubt

Other questions included how to develop a steadfast faith, and overcoming doubt in your personal faith journey. Archbishop Martin acknowledged he was lucky enough to never feel doubt in his belief in God, but understands how important it is for people to find personal faith beyond growing up in a spiritual family, and how young people may doubt the presence of God. "You may have grown up in a family of faith but you've got to make your own decision. These are the things I would say to you — firstly, do you know what we're

here for? If we believe God made each one of us, he wanted each single one of us to be born and given life. [So we need to ask ourselves] what are we going to do with our lives to make them meaningful and prepare us for eternal life with God? What is a life of integrity going to look like for you? What does the world say that looks like? What does the Church say that looks like? How are you going to live your life? The worst thing that happens to us is that we get so blown around by all the things around us, that we don't get to find integrity within ourselves." Without internal anchoring, he warned, individuals risk being "blown around" by societal pressures and finding themselves in situations they did not intend. He emphasised the critical

role of community in a journey towards real faith; participating in Mass, reading scriptures, and joining faith groups are essential to avoiding spiritual isolation. He advised anyone experiencing spiritual difficulties or doubting the existence of God, not to abandon the struggle, but to actively participate in the sacraments and seek guidance. He told students that just as priests rely on spiritual directors for guidance, students should find trusted individuals to talk to openly about their doubts.

Finally, Archbishop Martin answered some more lighthearted questions about whether he has and uses social media (he doesn't!) and how students could use those platforms to share their faith.



New Catholics at the Easter Vigil at St Patrick's Church, Lincoln



Our Lady of the Plains, Selwyn, Receives new Catholics

The Easter Vigil at St Patrick's Church, Lincoln, saw three adults received into the Church, and ten adults baptised. The following Sunday, St Joseph's Church in Darfield received a further two new Catholics into the Church. In mid-June another adult will be baptised into the Church. We rejoice in their response to Christ's call to become part of his Body, the Church. What follows is a beautiful prayer, offered by one of our new Catholics.

Benemerenti Medal Recipients

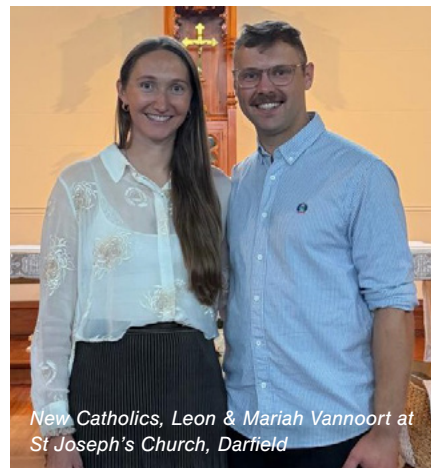
Two parishioners from Our Lady of the Plains Parish in Selwyn were recently presented with their Benemerenti Medals for faithful and dedicated services to the parish. Anne Wilson, from St Joseph's Church in Darfield, was presented with her medal by Bishop Michael, and Margaret Rea, from St Patrick's Church in Lincoln, received her medal from Fr Brian Fennessy. Both parishioners have served their respective Church Communities for many years with outstanding charity.



Fr Brian Fennessy & Benemerenti Medal recipient Mrs Margaret Rea



Bishop Michael presenting Anne Wilson with her Benemerenti Medal



New Catholics, Leon & Mariah Vannoort at St Joseph's Church, Darfield

OCIA Prayer

by Rachel McGregor (a candidate)

Heavenly Father, we come before you today with hearts full of joy and gratitude as we reflect on our shared journey toward the Catholic Faith. We thank you for calling each of us by name and for the grace that led us to this path. We give special thanks for the wisdom and guidance of Fr Brian and Fr Chris. Thank you for the gift of their time, their patience, and the lessons they have shared. Through them, we have better come to know your word and the beauty of the Church's traditions. We are deeply moved by the warmth of this community. Thank you for the parishioners who have walked alongside us, offering their prayers and encouragement. We are especially grateful for our Tuesday evening discussions — for the safe, supportive space where we could ask questions, share our hearts, and grow together in understanding. Thank you, Lord, for the open arms of the Catholic Church. As we are welcomed into this family of believers, help us to remain steadfast in faith, hopeful in spirit, and constant in love. May the journey we have started continue to flourish as we seek to serve you all the days of our lives. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

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MONDAYS

9.00am Board Games
10.00am Morning Tea
10.30am Arts and Crafts
12.00noon BYO Lunch / Socialise
12.45pm Exercise Class
1.30pm Variety Hour
2.30pm Afternoon Tea

THURSDAYS

9.00am Board Games
9.30am Mass
10.00am Morning Tea
10.30am Board Games
12.00noon BYO Lunch / Socialise
12.30pm Housie (numbers limited)
2.15pm Afternoon Tea

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Cathedral Parish Alive

In May, our cathedral community gathered for the Parish Alive Conference, a weekend centred on the theme of becoming missionary disciples and growing together as the Cathedral Parish community. Over 230 people attended the conference, representing a wonderful cross-section of Cathedral parish life. The strong attendance reflected a real desire within our community to deepen faith, strengthen relationships, and explore how we are being called to live and share the Gospel in today's world.

The conference began with a shared dinner, creating a welcoming atmosphere



where people could connect and meet new faces. One of the joys of the gathering was seeing parishioners, drawn from among our Mass communities, ministries, and age groups, spending time together and building deeper connections.

We were blessed to hear inspiring keynote addresses from Bishop Michael and Cathedral Administrator, Fr Simon Eccleton. They both drew from the example of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles, highlighting the importance of creating spaces where people can encounter Christ, grow in faith together, and support one another in everyday life.

Throughout the weekend, various workshops offered practical ways for parishioners to live out their faith more intentionally in their homes, workplaces, and communities. A strong theme emerging throughout the conference was the importance of authentic relationships and small groups. Participants were encouraged to see that missionary discipleship is not reserved for a few, but is the calling of every baptised person.

There was a genuine sense of hope and encouragement throughout the weekend,



with many people expressing gratitude for the opportunity to gather, pray, learn, and grow in relationship with one another. As the Cathedral community, we continue to reflect on how the Holy Spirit is inviting us to become a more welcoming, connected, and missionary community – one where people encounter not only good faith formation, but the living presence of Christ through the beauty of the Church's liturgy and in one another. The Parish Alive Conference was a reminder that renewal begins when people gather with open hearts, willing to listen to God and take the next step together in faith.



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A Joyful Celebration of Faith and Community

Good Shepherd Parish Fiesta

by Sandy Velmonte

The air in Hawarden felt a little brighter in late April, when our parish family from the Good Shepherd gathered at St Raphael's Church, to celebrate a special day of faith and togetherness. It was a warm home-coming for nearly 300 people, traveling from Amberley, Cheviot, Culverden, Hanmer Springs, and even visitors from Christchurch. The spirit of the day was all about connection. It reminded us that even though we live in different towns, we all belong to one vibrant community of faith.

The heart of our celebration was the Holy Mass, led by Bishop Michael. We were also blessed to have our own Parish Priest, Fr Rex Ramos, and Fr Lariz of the Community of Beatitudes, join him at the altar. In his homily, Bishop Michael spoke about the Good Shepherd. He reminded us that we are never lost, we are each known by name, protected with deep love and held by a Shepherd who would give everything for His flock.

A highlight of the day was the Confirmation of 23 young parishioners. This journey started long before the Fiesta; these young people spent many weekends studying and growing at the Sanctuary of Fourviere in Leithfield.

After Mass, the celebration moved outside. The sun was shining and the air was filled with the sweet, smooth sounds of saxophones playing. It felt like a true festival! Families were incredibly generous, bringing a wealth of delicious food to share. This Fiesta reminded us that we are more than just neighbours; we are a community of faith. Until next year, may the grace of the Good Shepherd stay with you all.



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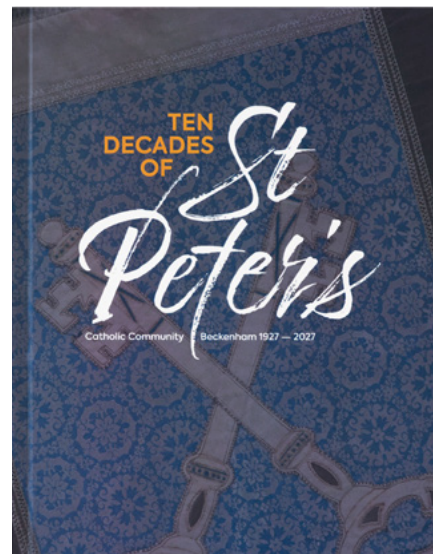
Ten Decades of St Peter's Beckenham

Why did the Monsignor burn his parishioner's clothes-pegs? What were Ember Days? What is a biretta? Why did St Peter's School Principal fear turning into Fisher Avenue? How did the community "canonise" its parish priest?

All the answers are in a new book entitled "Ten Decades of St. Peter's Catholic Community, Beckenham 1927 – 2027." This hard cover, full colour illustrated book traces 100 years of this community from the first known Mass in the Beckenham

character who left his home in Greymouth aged 13 to begin his seminary training in Australia, then in Rome. He needed special permission to be ordained in Rome aged 22, when the minimum canonical age was 24. Monsignor Kennedy was responsible for building the present-day church of St Peter in Fisher Avenue, Beckenham, in 1956, and his influence is still apparent in the present church.

By contrast, the other long-serving parish priest was a "late vocation." Following



“This hard cover, full colour illustrated book traces 100 years of this community from the first known Mass in the Beckenham area... to the present day.”

area, celebrated by Bishop Matthew Brodie in 1924, through the establishment of St Peter's school in a ramshackle building known as "Buckingham Palace," staffed by the Mission Sisters in 1927, to the present day.

The story is dominated by two contrasting monsignorial pastors, who served the community for 33 and 25 years respectively. The first was a larger-than-life

his army experience, he trained as an accountant and became Chancellor of the Diocese of Christchurch after his ordination. Monsignor Tom Power died in 2012, at the age of 92, while still serving St Peter's community.

In the final decade before its centenary, St Peter's community continues to worship on its present site in Beckenham, under the guidance of the Marist Fathers, and

contributes its own unique attributes, honed over the decades, to the new parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace.

The book is available by contacting svdpbeckenham@gmail.com and making a \$25 donation to St Vincent de Paul (Beckenham Conference).

St Patrick's School Kaiapoi Centenary Celebrations

(Right) St Patrick's School Kaiapoi Centenary Celebration Mass, to conclude a weekend (6th - 8th March, 2026) of festivities, remembrance, and celebration.

(Below Right) Bishop Michael giving cricket tips during the centenary parish and school cricket match.

(Below) Father Denis Nolan (previous Parish Priest) Father Do Nguyen (Parish Priest) Bishop John Adams (previous Parish Priest) Sister Gael Henry, Sister Anna Maria, Sister Margaret (Provincial), Mr David Harrison (DRS), Mrs Trish McKendry (Principal) and Bishop Michael (Proprietor)



Parishioners and former parishioners gathered for the Closing Liturgy of Little River Church.



Fr Brian Fennessy, Peter Higinbottom, Ged Foley, Bishop Michael, Bernie Rennell

The Closing of the Church of St John the Evangelist, Little River

The closing of an historic church is always a time of sadness. During November 1925, 200 people gathered with Bishop Matthew Brodie, who formally opened and blessed the Church of St John the Evangelist, Little River. This beautiful church was constructed of Halswell blue stone, with Oamaru stone facings; the roof is of Welsh slate.

This church had been badly damaged during the Canterbury Earthquakes and closed for 15 years. The City Council had placed a covenant on the building for ten years in the hope that necessary strengthening work could be undertaken. However, the damage was extensive, and the cost of repairs, prohibitive.

On 9 May 2026, around 50 current and former parishioners gathered in a marquee next to the church for the closing liturgy, presided over by Bishop Michael, after which, Peter Higinbottom, Bernie Rennell, and Ged Foley offered their memories of the church. It is hoped the marble altar may find a home in another location. We give thanks for the sacramental life which has taken place in this church, and for the intercession of St John the Evangelist, for the Catholic community of Little River.



New Hanmer Accommodation is available for the Diocese

The Hurunui Parish now has a new facility to share with the Diocese - St Roch's Retreat (SRR).

Tucked away behind the St Roch Catholic Church in Hanmer, there is a new short term rental facility available to those within

the Diocese of Christchurch. We have just successfully completed a three month trial period with the Hurunui parishioners, and are now happy to open this up to all within the Diocese of Christchurch, who wish to use this next time they want a short holiday in Hanmer.

Managed by parish volunteers, this flat is made available on a self-cleaning and BYO linen basis. In the main street of Hanmer, it is close to the pools and shopping. At \$120 per night, it is a very affordable two bedroom, family friendly facility. Those interested can apply by emailing the Hurunui parish office at catholichurunui@gmail.com. The office is staffed on Fridays. The proceeds will go towards the running of the parish and used as an option for people to contribute to the new Cathedral fundraising efforts. See Parish office for details.



Hawarden Accommodation is available for the Diocese

For those in the diocese wanting more quiet and solitude compared to what is available in Hanmer, there is also the St Raphael Parish Centre in Hawarden. There is a single bedroom and en suite flat that can be rented for \$80 per night (self cleaning and linen). The St Raphael Parish Centre (SRPC) is at 22 O'Carrolls Road, Hawarden, and is a fully self-contained flat attached, located just behind the church.

St Roch's Retreat or St Raphael's Parish Centre are two welcome retreats: Both of these short term rental options, as well as the Beatitudes community in Leithfield (also within the Hurunui parish), are making the Hurunui Parish of North

Canterbury above the Waimakariri a place for retreats, rest, and recovery. Parishes may consider sponsoring their priests

or pastoral staff to a quiet stay in the Hurunui. Those interested can apply by emailing the Hurunui parish office.



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God present in our Darkest Hour

A King's Call to Prayer

by Fr Brian Fennessy

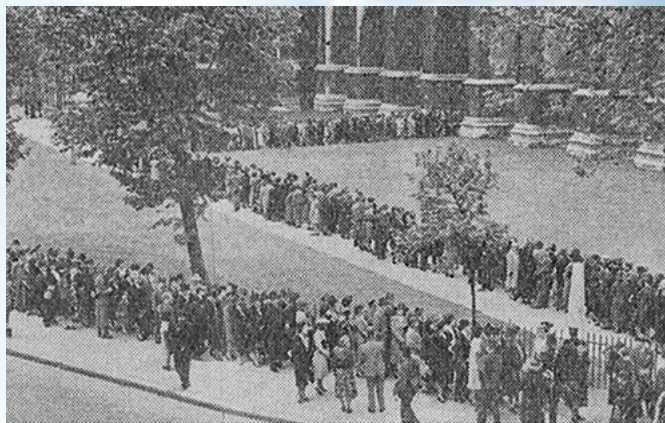
Nine years ago, during 2017, two war-drama movies, 'Darkest Hour' and 'Dunkirk', were released. These two movies were able to re-ignite peoples' awareness of the desperate situation that Britain and her allies, including New Zealand, faced during 1940 in World War II.

The two movies portray the almost unbelievable rescue of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) from the clutches of the German Army. On 10 May, Germany launched its blitzkrieg against the Low Countries and France. The BEF was outmanoeuvred and encircled, and faced possible annihilation. However, one thing that both movies overlooked is King George VI's call to a National Day of Prayer as the situation developed. In order to survive the Fall of France, Britain needed a miracle.

In a national broadcast on 24 May to Britain and the Commonwealth, the King said: "Let us with one heart and soul, humbly but confidently, commit our cause to God and ask his aid, that we may valiantly defend the right as it is given to us to see it."

This Prayer Day was held on Sunday 26 May. There is no reference in either of the two movies to the King's request for a National Day of Prayer and the peoples' overwhelming response. Together with members of the Cabinet, the King attended Westminster Abbey, and millions of people across the British Isles and the Commonwealth flocked into churches, praying for rescue of the troops.

The photograph shows the extraordinary scene outside Westminster Abbey as people queued for prayer.



Queue to pray at Westminster Abbey, 26th May 1940

As we mark the 86th Anniversary of Dunkirk during May, it is opportune to acknowledge a forgotten feature of the 'Dunkirk Story' during those crisis days of the War, and the importance of Intercessory Prayer. God doesn't take sides; he is not a puppet on a string. But thankfully Hitler, perhaps hoping to rely on the dominance of the Luftwaffe, overruled his generals and halted the advance of his armoured columns at the very point when they could have proceeded to the beaches and annihilated the British army.

Then, two days after the Day of Prayer, there was the phenomena of a storm over Flanders that grounded the Luftwaffe and prevented them from flying over the beaches. Dovetailing with this event was the presence of calm seas in the English Channel, that allowed the 800 small boats to undertake their remarkable contribution in the 'Dunkirk Story.'

These events may be considered an answer to prayer. Operation Dynamo rescued 335,000 soldiers, ten times the number that Winston Churchill initially thought could be rescued. (My father, serving with the RAF, was part of the evacuation from France. However, he flew out with his squadron.)

Operation Dynamo provided determination and hope for Britain. Then on 4 June, Churchill gave his famous speech: 'We shall fight on the beaches ... we shall never surrender.'

The movies edited out an important component of the 'Dunkirk Story.' The National Day of Prayer, under the leadership of King George VI, helped to unite the people and gave hope at a critical time. It preceded some extraordinary events that led to the deliverance of Allied troops.

In gratitude and recognition that 'the prayers of the nation had been answered,' a fortnight later there was a Day of National Thanksgiving for the Miracle of Dunkirk. The singing of Psalm 124 was apt for the Service.

Over the period of the War, King George VI called for seven National Days of Prayer – three of these days were called during the period of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz.

Anzac Day is always within the Easter Season; it's a gentle reminder to Christians that God is present in peoples' darkest hours. The Easter Season celebrates God's pledge that we are his people and that evil and death have been overcome. The observance of Anzac Day provides a forum for New Zealanders to express their gratitude and pride in New Zealand fulfilling its duty, at great cost, in order to achieve peace and well-being for people throughout the world.



On Sunday 17 May, the Feast of the Ascension, 50 young people from Christ the Redeemer Parish, Christchurch North received the Sacrament of Confirmation. Please join us in praying for these young people as they continue to grow in faith and live out the gifts of the Holy Spirit.



Papal Honour Awarded in Christ the Redeemer Parish

Christ the Redeemer Parish, Christchurch North, recently presented Myra Barry with a Papal Honour, the Medal Benemerenti, awarded to her by Pope Leo XIV. This honour is in recognition of her faithful, dedicated, and humble service in her parishes, diocese, St Vincent de Paul, and wider community over many years. Those of you who know her, will know something of the extraordinary work Myra has done fostering children, and being involved with many diocesan and parish groups and committees over the years. Often working with her husband Kevin, she has been a source of compassion and commitment to people in the Church and those who struggle in our society. We congratulate Myra on this well-deserved Papal Honour.




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