

# NZ Catholic \$4

The national Catholic newspaper

Jan. 28 - Feb. 10, 2024 • No. 677

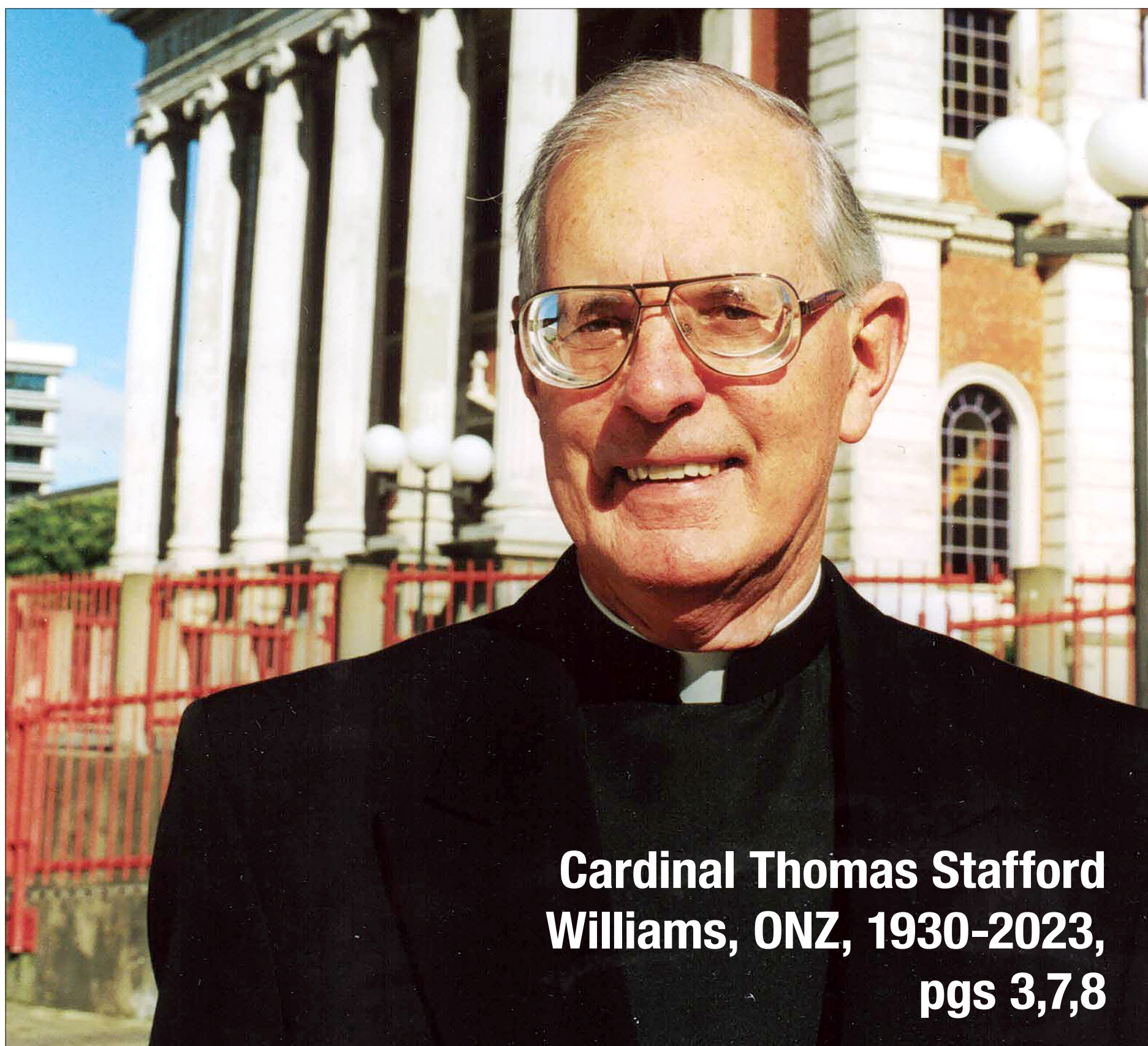
**2024 Clergy  
appointments for  
six NZ dioceses**

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## Vale Cardinal Tom



**Cardinal Thomas Stafford  
Williams, ONZ, 1930-2023,  
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**Six times judged Australasia's leading Catholic newspaper**



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NZCatholic

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Website: www.nzcatholic.org.nz

Publisher: Bishop of Auckland

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NZ Catholic is published fortnightly. Subscriptions: One year, \$73; two years, \$135. Overseas airmail extra. The contents of NZ Catholic are copyright and permission to reprint must be obtained in advance. ISSN 1174-0086

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# Clergy appointments 2024

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

The New Zealand Catholic bishops have announced the clergy appointments in their respective dioceses for early 2024.

## Wellington

Archbishop Paul Martin, SM appointed Fr Dennis Nacorda as parish priest of the Catholic Parish of Wairarapa with Deacon Matthew White assisting him (Fr Nacorda).

Fr Bruce England will be parish priest of St Joseph's (Levin) while Fr Alan Roberts will serve as parish priest of St Mary's (Otaki).

Fr Isaac Songa, MF will be parish priest of Holy Family church (Porirua East) with Fr Nicholas Phone Myint, MF as assistant priest.

Msgr Gerard Burns was appointed administrator of Te Ngakau Tapu parish with Fr Alfred Tong as assistant parish priest. Pre-seminarian John Quang will be in residence.

Fr Patrick Bridgman will be the administrator of the Sacred Heart Cathedral parish. In residence at the Viard House is Fr Viator Muyuni from the Diocese of Bukoba, Tanzania for studies.

St Teresa's (Karori-Wilton) parish priest will be Fr Joy Thottankara with pre-seminarian Long Tran in residence.

The Catholic parish of Wellington South will have Fr Ravi Kumar Voliganti as assistant parish priest with pre-seminarian Dyester Abo-abo in residence.

Fr Akuila Taliauli, SVD will be assistant parish priest at Te Wairua Tapu parish (Lower Hutt) while the Society of Divine Word will assume responsibility for the parish of Te Awakairangi (Lower Hutt) with Fr Raja Kommareddy, SVD as parish priest and Fr Uili Uvea as assistant priest.

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart will assume pastoral responsibility for the parish of Te Whetu o te Moana (Marlborough) with Frs Simione Volavola, MSC and Tavita Lemusu, MSC as parish priest and assistant priest, respectively.

The Holy Family Parish (Nelson-Stoke) will have Fr Noel Corcino, CJM as the assistant parish priest. Parish priest Marlon Tebelin will return home in September.

Fr Michael Bellizzi was appointed parish priest of the Our Lady of the Bays parish (Richmond-Motueka-Takaka) with Fr Jaya-Praveen Yenubari as assistant parish priest. Seminarian Emilio Capin will serve his pastoral year in this parish.

Archbishop Martin also announced the following changes in the diocese:

Fr Ron Bennett will retire as parish priest of Otari-Wilton and will become senior-priest-in-residence at the Holy Cross Seminary in Auckland.

Fr Peter Roe, SM will conclude his contract as administrator of the Ohariu parish.

Fr Alliston Fernandes from the Archdiocese of Malta returns to Malta in March.

Fr David Orange and Michael McCabe have retired.

Fr Cirilo Barlis will take a leave of absence for the year and be returning to the Philippines.

Fr Seph Pijfers' appointment will be announced at a later date.

## Auckland

Bishop Stephen Lowe said the following clergy appointments will be effective on the first weekend of February.

Fr Rob O'Brien is appointed parish priest of Coromandel Peninsula and Hauraki Plains parish.

Fr Larry Rustia will become Flatbush assistant priest and Te Unga Waka parish priest.

Fr Pio Fong, SM will be the parish priest of Glenfield. Fr Alfredo Garcia will be on leave.

Fr James Walsh will serve as parish priest of Kaitia.

Fr Tony O'Connor is appointed parish priest of Manurewa.

Fr Marchellino Park will serve as parish priest of Mt Albert while Fr Thomas Park will become assistant parish priest of Papatoetoe.

Fr Mathew Vadakkevettuvazhiyil will become parish priest of Papakura.

Seminarian Ryan Sy will serve his pastoral placement at the Owairaka parish.

In the meantime, Fr Nathaniel Brazil will return to Palmerston North diocese while Marist priests Patrick Breeze and Peter McAfee will move to Christchurch South Parish.

## Hamilton

Newly-ordained Bishop Richard Laurenson informed the parishioners in his diocese of the clergy shifts that will take place soon to fill in the vacancy left by his appointment as bishop.

These appointments will be effective on February 7, 2024.

Fr Eamon Kennedy is appointed pastor of All Saints parish (Papāmoa Coast). Fr Philip Billing will be on weekend duty only as he is completing advanced studies.

Fr Matthew Gibson will be parish priest of St Anthony, St Paul (Huntly/Ngāruawāhia) in preparation for his advanced studies in 2025.

Fr Mark Field is appointed parish priest of St Mary (Gisborne).

Fr Tovio Iusitino will serve as parish priest at Holy Family (Morrinsville, Te Aroha, Paeroa).

Fr Stuart Young will be pastor of St Columba and Holy Name (Frankton/Raglan) while Fr Joseph George will serve as the parochial vicar. Fr Young and Fr George will also serve as pastor and parochial vicar, respectively, for the parish of Holy Cross (Hamilton).

"I would like to thank all of you for your prayers and support as I take on this new role given me by the Holy Father. I am grateful to my brother priests, all of whom were willing to accommodate themselves to the needs of the Diocese, especially those who agreed without demur to transfer of assignment," Bishop Laurenson said.

## Palmerston North

Bishop John Adams announced the clergy shifts in his diocese for the New Year, and thanked "all our priests who have agreed to be moved and who have so readily accepted these changes, and to the parishes that are 'losing' a priest".

Fr Vui Hoang is appointed assistant priest of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.

Fr Trung Nguyen becomes assistant priest of the Catholic Parish of New Plymouth.

Fr Vijay Dungdung will be assistant priest of the Catholic Parish of Hastings.

Fr Nathaniel Brazil is appointed parish priest of Immaculate Conception, Stratford, while

Fr Marcus Francis will be parish priest of the Catholic Parish of Hastings.

## Christchurch

Bishop Michael Gielen's appointment of priests will be effective from the first weekend of February, 2024.

Fr Rex Ramos will be administrator of the Hurunui parish.

Fr Huynh Tran will serve as parish priest of Hokitika.

Fr Do Nguyen and John Nixon Tholatt are appointed to Waimakiriri as parish priest and assistant priest, respectively.

Fr Tang Phan will serve as assistant priest at the Cathedral, as well as Vietnamese chaplain and Chatham Island assistant priest. Linh Cao will be on pastoral placement at the Cathedral.

Fr Vincent Barboza will be assistant priest of Timaru parish.

Fr Peter Costello will serve at Ashburton but will be semi-retiring.

Fr Michael Pui was appointed national director of the Pontifical Mission Society.

## Dunedin

Bishop Michael Dooley said the following clergy appointments will be effective from the weekend of January 28 and 29, 2024.

Rev Gerard Aynsley is appointed parish priest of Invercargill Central, Georgetown Invercargill, and Western Southland pastoral area.

Rev Michael Hishon is appointed parish priest of the Dunedin South Pastoral Area.

Rev Sani Lam will serve as parish priest of the Gore Pastoral Area, while Rev Brendan Ward will be parish priest of the Alexandra pastoral area.

Rev Jaime Llaguna, MSP is appointed parish priest of Mosgiel/Green Island pastoral area, while Rev Eliseo Sangco, MSP will serve as the diocesan Filipino Chaplain and will reside in the Green Island presbytery.

Rev Jaewoo Lee will be the co-chaplain at the Dunedin Public Hospital and Wakari Hospital, and is appointed parish priest of Ranfurly parish. He will reside at the Kaikorai presbytery.



# Cardinal's untiring commitment to his work

by MICHAEL OTTO

Archbishop Emeritus of Wellington, Cardinal Thomas Stafford Williams, ONZ ChStJ, was farewelled at a requiem Mass at St Teresa's Pro-Cathedral, Karori, on December 28.

Cardinal Williams, who was the sixth ordinary of Wellington archdiocese, died peacefully on December 23 at Charles Fleming Retirement Village, Waikanae. He was 93.

In the homily at the requiem, Bishop Emeritus of Palmerston North, Bishop Peter Cullinane, said that when he thought of "Cardinal Tom's untiring commitment to the work that came his way, when I think of his thoroughness, when I think of his efficiency, and that annoyingly tidy desk, when I think of his conscientiousness, of the careful preparation that he put into everything, I am left with one conclusion — that Tom gave his all".

"So where does that kind of giving come from?" Bishop Cullinane asked.

Noting a passage from St Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 8:31-39), Bishop Cullinane said that, in that passage, "self-giving is emphatically derived from God's self-giving".

"Since God did not spare his Son, but gave him up to the benefit of all of us, after such a gift, is there anything God could refuse us?"

"And then referring to one whom God sent, Paul says, he not only died for us, but rose, and at God's right hand pleads for us.

"And then as if drawing a conclusion from all this, Paul says, there is absolutely nothing that can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Jesus Christ.

"In other words, the meaning, the dignity and the worthwhileness of our own lives has its origin in the gratuitous giving of a God who never even needed to create us in the first place, and in the self-giving love revealed in the person and ministry of Jesus."

Bishop Cullinane referenced a comment by St John Paul II that "deep amazement at the worth and dignity of the human person is another name for the Gospel".

"Cardinal Tom's own self-giving, expressed in the details of his work, derived from that awareness of God's self-giving, which reveals how much we mean to God," Bishop Cullinane said.

"Tom's commitment to social justice is well known," the bishop added. "It would have made complete sense to him when he read Pope Benedict's suggestion that gratuitous giving and forgiving and compassion even be brought into trading relationships, business practices and industrial life, in that way pre-empting the imbalances and the inequities that otherwise have to be redressed through various forms of redistribution."

"That is because love for others that is modelled on God's love for us is compassionate, it is forgiving, and it enters all our human relationships.

"It is also a circuit-breaker, where otherwise tit-for-tat and getting even is as far as we could go in any direction.

"In a word, Tom knew that lives which originate from the gratuitous gift and self-giving of God, can be true to themselves only through their own self-giving and being there for others.

"That is the unfinished work of the Gospel. That is what Tom gave his life for. That is what he would challenge us to continue."

Before the start of the requiem, Laurie Williams paid tribute to his older brother.

He noted how his brother had attended Victoria University of Wellington as a 15-year-old, but did not go on to finish his BCom.

"He never completed it, he never wanted to complete it. He didn't want to be appointed chancellor of the archdiocese," Laurie Williams said, to some laughter from the congregation.

Laurie Williams said that his brother's "journey to priesthood" was significantly influenced by his parents, who were "very, very faithful".

"I recall every Sunday night, we would be kneeling around the dining table, saying the rosary."

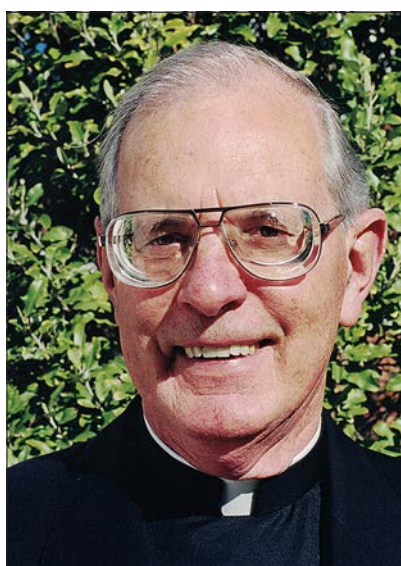
Laurie Williams noted the future cardinal's Catholic schooling in Miramar, Lower Hutt, and St Patrick's College, Wellington.

"He was very, very much involved with the Catholic youth movement. I think the CYM prayer prayed at the opening of every meeting was of special significance."

"Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous, to serve you as you deserve to be served, to give without counting the cost, to fight without heeding the wounds, to work without seeking rest and to spend my life knowing that I do your will."

"I think the Lord Jesus answered his prayer," Laurie Williams said.

He added that, "as the youngest of the family, I really was in awe of my brother — never more so than when I was in the Solomon Islands, the island of Makira, in the little town, and the archbishop was there for confirmation. After the ceremonies, I went and introduced myself to the archbishop. I said to him, I think you may know someone I know. Cardinal Tom.



Cardinal Thomas Stafford Williams, ONZ ChStJ

"The archbishop's eyes opened wide, and there was a big smile on his face. And he said to me — 'Cardinal Tom — the father of the Church in the Pacific'.

"I was quite gobsmacked, and I can imagine Tom saying, for goodness sake cut it out."

Cardinal Williams was the founding president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania. He was also president delegate of the Synod of Bishops for Oceania in Rome during November-December 1998.

According to an obituary on the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference website, in an article on Cardinal Williams, the then-Vatican reporter for the American *National Catholic Reporter*, John Allen Jr, wrote: "Despite his modest style, Cardinal Williams is nobody's fool.

He has thought long and hard over a quarter-century about the distinctive contribution of Catholicism in Oceania, by which Williams has in mind not just people like himself, but also indigenous populations such as New Zealand's Māori, as well as the cultures of Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Fiji. All this makes Williams a passionate advocate for his local church, which has sometimes meant defending it when he believes Rome hasn't sufficiently grasped its challenges and its promise."

At the requiem Mass, on behalf of the family, Laurie Williams thanked those present for being part of Cardinal Williams's life.

"Let us farewell a dedicated servant, a good man," Laurie Williams said.

Pope Francis expressed his sadness upon learning of the death of Cardinal Williams.

Vatican News reported on December 23 that, in a telegram addressed to Archbishop Paul Martin, SM, of Wellington, Pope Francis recalled with "immense gratitude" the cardinal's "contribution to the Church throughout Oceania". and imparted to all who are mourning him his blessing "as a pledge of consolation and peace in the Risen Lord".



A screen photo of Archbishop Paul Martin, SM, walking past Cardinal Williams' casket at the end of the Mass

## Cardinal Thomas Stafford Williams CV

(From "A Kiwi Cardinal's Chronicles" by Cardinal Thomas Stafford Williams 1930 – 2014 (when book was written)).

**Born:** March 20, 1930.

**Educated:** Holy Cross Parish School, Miramar; Sts Peter and Paul School, Lower Hutt; St Patrick's College, Wellington; Victoria University of Wellington.

**Employed as Accountant:** Waygood Otis Ltd. Completed studies for the priesthood: St Kevin's College, Oamaru (1956); Holy Cross College, Mosgiel; Pontifical Urban College de Propaganda Fide, Rome.

**Ordained:** Rome, December 20, 1959.

**Degrees:** Licentiate in Sacred Theology (S.T.L) 1960; Bachelor of Social Science, National University, Dublin, Ireland 1961-62.

**Appointments:** Assistant priest, St Patrick's Parish, Palmerston North (1963-64); Assistant Director of the Catholic Enquiry Centre, Wellington (1965-70); Parish priest, Leulumoega, Western Samoa (1971-75); Parish priest, Holy Family Parish, Porirua East (1976-79); 1979 consecrated sixth Archbishop of Wellington, December 20, 1979; Appointed Cardinal February 2, 1983.

June 2000 – Appointed Member of the Order of New Zealand.

March 2005 – Resigned as Archbishop of Wellington. President of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference 1980-1988.

Secretary of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference 1991-1997.

Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Development (1985-1991) plus other organisations encompassing canon law, hospital and prison chaplaincies, communications, education and Maori.

Military ordinary 1995-2005.

Founding president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania.

Member of the Congregation of the Evangelisation of Peoples (1983-2000); Congregation for Divine Worship (1983-88); Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (1983-1988); Organisational and Economic Affairs of the Holy See (2001-2006). President Delegate of the Synod of Bishops for Oceania (Rome) November-December 1998. Member of the Pre-Synodal and Post-Synodal Councils (1995-2006).

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# NZ Bishops write to all MPs stressing consistent ethic of life

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

New Zealand's Catholic bishops have given a copy of their new ethics teaching document to all 123 members of the recently elected 54th Parliament.

The bishops published *Te Kahu o te Ora: A Consistent Ethic of Life* in September.

Bishop of Auckland Bishop Stephen Lowe, the president of the NZ Catholic Bishops Conference, told the MPs in an accompanying letter that the document was a reminder that the political issues dividing the country were all connected.

"So too is the solution — a lens that sees all life as sacred taonga," said Bishop Lowe.

"We in our respective positions as parliamentarians and bishops are expected to lead and make decisions for the common good. Each of us is also given a lot to read. Nonetheless we hope that you will find *Te Kahu o te Ora* is a worthwhile summer read, and a resource to dip into as you reflect on the issues we face in Aotearoa New Zealand."

The letter, dated December 13, assured MPs of the bishops' prayers and the prayers of the Catholic community.

"Our hope is that you may govern for the common good of all in our land, especially those most vulnerable," the letter stated.

"In our pre-election statement, we wrote of our concern at the growing trivialisation of politics. We lamented that politicians and media often focus on the mistakes, misdemeanours or scandals of individual parliamentarians and tear each other apart. We said we believe that the real scandals in our land are the growing indifference to the sanctity of life, rising levels of poverty and the lack of affordable housing, mental health, and the storm events that have beset our islands as global climate change impacts on us and so many in our world. Our election statement also affirmed our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi as offering a pathway of unity for our nation. At the same time, we expressed our dismay at the rapidly growing toxicity in our communities, which is dividing us as a nation and generating anger, hate and even violence. These issues especially affect our most vulnerable people. For too long they



From left: Bishop Michael Gielen (Christchurch); Bishop John Adams (Palmerston North); Bishop Michael Dooley (Dunedin); Bishop Stephen Lowe (Auckland); Archbishop Paul Martin SM (Wellington) and Bishop Richard Laurenson (Hamilton).

have been treated as political footballs."

The letter noted that "successive election-season promises and the changing of policies in line with the agenda of each new government are not working".

"More and more people in our land are becoming disillusioned and feel disenfranchised. We need you, our parliamentarians, as a House united, to work together across party lines to make real progress in finding genuine, lasting solutions to solve our problems.

"Without this, rising levels of discontent will fur-

ther divide our beautiful land and peoples. To this end we would like to present you with the enclosed copy of our new teaching statement, "Te Kahu o te Ora: A Consistent Ethic of Life". This document is a reminder that the issues dividing us as a nation are all connected. So too is the solution — a lens that sees all life as sacred taonga." The letter also gave the contact details for each diocesan bishop, and expressed a desire to meet with MPs.

A copy of the letter can be found at [www.catholic.org.nz/assets/Letter-from-Catholic-Bishops-to-members-of-Parliament.pdf](http://www.catholic.org.nz/assets/Letter-from-Catholic-Bishops-to-members-of-Parliament.pdf)

## Govt urged to reduce family stress to counter abortion rise

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

New Zealand's Catholic bishops say that the rise in abortion numbers since a 2020 law change is a tragedy, and they want the new coalition Government to promote policies that reduce stresses that can lead to mothers opting for abortion.

The number of abortions peaked at 18,511 in 2003 before falling steadily to 12,823 in 2016, when an initially slow rise began, up 434 over five years to 13,257 in 2021.

Then followed a big one-year jump of 907 or 7 per cent to 14,164 in 2022. Additionally, the number of abortions for each 1000 known pregnancies has risen to 193 from a low of 177 in 2016.

Auckland Bishop Stephen Lowe, who is president of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, said that the bishops will continue to advocate for the legal right to life of all unborn children who have no voice themselves.

"We know that we are living in a time of increased financial constraints, and that this only adds to the stress on families," said Bishop Lowe.

"We urge the new Government to keep the well-being of young parents and families to the fore in their policies, and we urge all Catholics to ensure that our faith communities are places of non-judgemental, welcoming and generous love, compassion and care."

Abortion became simpler to get after members of Parliament passed the Abortion Legislation Act in 2020.

In her foreword to the 2023 annual report *Abortion Services Aotearoa New Zealand*, Director-General of Health Dr

Diana Sarfati linked the 2022 increase to the doubling of the "abortion workforce", more facilities providing abortion services, increased accessibility through midwifery abortion services, and new phone and online services for "early medical abortion", in which women can collect an abortion pill from a pharmacy to take at home.

"The annual report applauds the fact that the increased numbers reflect improved accessibility and equity of access to abortion throughout New Zealand," Bishop Lowe said.

"However, those who work at the coal face providing pregnancy support services know that, for many women, the decision will have been the result of a choice made under significant duress or constraints, including financial constraints. This represents a tragedy on multiple fronts because every pregnancy involves the lives of at least two adults, as well as the newly-conceived child."

In October last year, the Catholic bishops republished an expanded, landmark teaching document *Te Kahu o te Ora: A Consistent Ethic of Life*, a copy of which they sent in December to all 123 members of the new Parliament. In it, they stated that "the unborn child is clearly one of the most vulnerable, innocent and defenceless of all human beings. This imposes a significant moral obligation on us all".

Bishop Lowe said that every new human life is a gift from God, and has an unconditional dignity that gives them an absolute right to life.

"As highlighted in *Te Kahu o te Ora*, we all need to back up our teaching on life with action. We need to remember that our



Photo: Pixabay

obligations and responsibilities extend to creating an environment within families and society where pregnant mothers and their partners are supported, and children are made welcome. In cases where continuing a pregnancy poses challenges for those most directly involved, it is vitally important that people do not see abortion as the only or most desirable possibility.

"We will continue to advocate for the legal right to life of all unborn children who have no voice themselves. It is up to all of us to lobby to make our country a safer place for every unborn child, and that must flow through to the care and support we offer to families after birth," said Bishop Lowe.

"Abortion is abusive, causing long-term harm to the mother, which is almost never addressed. It also causes damage to the father of the child, something also often not addressed, and, of course, it ends the life of a human being."

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# Representations of Jesus in the early Church

by MICHAEL OTTO

We don't really know what Jesus looked like, and every image of him in the movies is "imagination".

So said Te Kupenga Catholic Theological College assistant dean Fr Mervyn Duffy, SM, at a Theology on Tap event held at the Apothecary Licensed Eatery in Howick, East Auckland, on November 28.

Fr Duffy was speaking on "Representations of Jesus: The first 300 years" at the event organised by young people from St Mark's, Pakuranga.

The Marist theologian and lecturer started by saying that there is very little in terms of imagery from the first years of Christianity. There are several reasons for this — there were very few early Christians, and most of them were not wealthy. And, with some exceptions, orthodox Judaism was opposed to depictions of people and animals.

"Christianity starts off like orthodox Judaism in not depicting people," Fr Duffy said.

"But then they start arguing — you can depict Jesus because he became human. God is invisible — so you should not depict God — but Jesus is God made visible, so therefore you can have a picture of Jesus."

But the "earliest portrayal of Christ is words — they tell the Jesus stories". There is a period of oral transmission. Then the words get written down.

Fr Duffy noted that there are no documents that have survived that were in the handwriting of the four Gospel writers or St Paul. "What we have is copies of copies."

The oldest surviving fragment of the New Testament is The Rylands Papyrus, which contains a very small part of John's Gospel. Written in Greek, it is dated at about 125AD.

At this stage, there is not a single picture of Jesus, Fr Duffy said.

But grave markings, from catacombs and the like, tells us something. Christograms such as "Chi-Rho" the first two letters for Christ in Greek, are found, and they make a figure that looks like "PX".

Other imagery on Christian graves involves people praying, and doves and olive branches, hinting at the biblical story of Noah and representing peace. A fish symbol is found on some grave markings. This is an anagram — the Greek word "Ichthys" (fish) standing for "Iota, Chi, Theta, Ypsilon, Sigma" which are the Greek first letters of "Jesus Christ God's Son Saviour".

"The word 'fish' is a cunning way of signalling you are a Christian. Because it is a word that is a picture that stands for a word that stands for a creed," Fr Duffy said.

But what might be the first recorded image of Jesus is "a bit ambiguous and puzzling".

A "graffito" image from an ancient



Fr Mervyn Duffy, SM, fields a question on his smartphone

army barracks in Rome shows a figure on a cross, but with the head of a donkey. A man is depicted praying to this figure, and what is scratched underneath is "Alexamenos worships his god".

This image, dating possibly to about 200AD, is likely to be one soldier mocking the religion of another soldier, Fr Duffy explained.

"So here is a mockery of Christian belief. We have got so used to it [the cross], we wear little crucifixes around our necks. But the crucifixion was scandalous, it was shocking."

"Alexamenos worships a god who got crucified. What sort of god gets crucified?"

Fr Duffy then spoke about the oldest Christian church found by archaeologists. This is in Syria. It is a house that was turned into a church, dating from the middle of the third century. This structure had a baptistry and paintings on the walls.

Figures like the Good Shepherd are depicted, as are Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as well as Jesus healing the paralytic, and Jesus walking on the water.

"What do the people who gather in this house church believe about Jesus?" Fr Duffy asked.

"That he is miraculous, that he is a wonder-worker. . . . So Jesus has the power to heal, Jesus has the power to forgive, Jesus has the power to walk on water. Jesus is the wonder-worker."

This depiction of Jesus healing the paralysed man is "the first clearly dateable picture of the Jesus of the

Ministry", the historical Jesus. The image can be dated to 232-252AD. Jesus is wearing a toga, has bare feet, spikey hair and is clean-shaven, Fr Duffy said.

There is no halo. He looks like a human being, Fr Duffy noted.

But later grave art did start to show Jesus with a halo. "It is a symbol of the emperor. Kings have halos. As well as calling Jesus 'king', they start giving him the attributes of a 'king'."

Summarising his talk, Fr Duffy said that nowhere in the four Gospels is there any description of what Jesus looked like, or what any of the apostles looked like.

"They are remarkably uninterested in his appearance. There are legends that St Luke was an artist, and legends that there are pictures of the Blessed Virgin Mary. . . . There is the legend of Veronica and the veil. . . It is not in the Bible. It is a Christian legend."

"There are no photos of Jesus. Every movie you have seen is imagination. So really, we don't know what Jesus looked like."

Fr Duffy finished by stating that his talk covered representations of Jesus up to 300AD. Then everything changed.

"In 313 AD, [the Emperor] Constantine declares Christianity to be a tolerated religion, so it is no longer persecuted. . . . Suddenly, lots and lots of people become Christian, and the Church becomes wealthy, the art becomes public," Fr Duffy said.

And then there are many, many depictions of Jesus in art.



Some of those at the Theology on Tap event

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## A podcast for preachers

In 2021 Fr John O'Connor of the Christchurch diocese, co-director of the National Liturgy Office for the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, had an idea for helping preachers to prepare their Sunday homily.

He wondered if preachers might benefit by hearing parishioners reflecting on the Scriptures of the following Sunday.

Recognising that it is difficult for a preacher to personally organise such a group, Fr O'Connor realised that the Internet could enable one group to be accessible to all the preachers of the country. He co-opted people from different New Zealand

### Fr Mervyn Duffy, SM

dioceses and one from Australia (now a group of 22 participants) who were willing to take part in these Sunday Scripture conversations, allowing their reflections to become this Homily Studio podcast.

For more than two years now, each week via Zoom, three or four of this group have met for a gentle conversation about what had spoken to them in the readings for the coming Sunday, and what emphases might be helpful for a homily on the coming Sunday.

The resulting audio recording is converted into podcast format, and is made available on the Food for Faith website. ([www.foodforfaith.org](http://www.foodforfaith.org)).

nz/podcast/) This site contains more of Fr O'Connor's ideas — a daily 20-minute Lectio Divina podcast, invitations for café-encounters, a forum of prayer requests (with those who ask for prayer receiving an email whenever anyone prays for their intention) and regular written reflections.

Most of the conversation partners have been parishioners, men and women from around the country. Several of them are people connected with Te Kupenga Catholic Leadership Institute. Every participant takes their mission seriously, praying with, and studying, the readings in advance of the recording.

I have been amazed by the insights that have been shared. One of the women contributors confided to me that this was the first time she had ever been asked her opinion of a scriptural text by a priest.

I know about the process because I was one of the conversation partners co-opted by Fr O'Connor. I am not the only cleric, Anglican Bishop David Moxon has also been a regular contributor. However, the heart of this Homily Studio initiative is



The illustration of the contributors of one week — Kate Kearins, Felicity Giltrap, John O'Connor, John Kinder, and Rocío Figueroa.

that the people of the Church are active participants in providing this resource for preachers.

Time will tell if this initiative helps preachers to pray, and parishioners to participate in Sunday homilies. I asked the hosting service, and they tell me that the Homily Studio gets between two and three hundred listeners each week. Many of them are from outside New Zealand!

From the feedback received, most of the listeners are individual Catholics preparing for their Sunday. Some RCIA groups and Scripture groups have taken to listening regularly.

People seem to have found the podcast by word of mouth.

It is available, not only via email subscription (sign up at [www.foodforfaith.org.nz](http://www.foodforfaith.org.nz)), but also on all major podcast platforms.

I felt that this was an example of a good news story of something creative being done in the New Zealand church, and that it deserved to be written up for you, the readers of *NZ Catholic*.

Fr Mervyn Duffy is assistant dean of Te Kupenga – Catholic Theological College in Auckland.

### Ronald Rolheiser

## Our over-complex, tortured selves

When all is said and done, our lives are not all that serene and peaceful. In a manner of speaking, we are always somewhat pathetic. That shouldn't scare us. Pathetic is not a pejorative term. The word comes from the Greek, pathos, which means pain. To be pathetic is to live in pain, and we all do because of the very way we are made.

You might say that doesn't sound right. Aren't we made in the image and likeness of God so that each of us, no matter how messed up our lives might be, carry a special dignity and a certain godliness within us? We do carry that special dignity. However, despite that, and largely because of it, our lives tend to be so complex as to be pain-filled. Why?

Godliness isn't easy to carry. The infinite inside us doesn't easily fit itself into the finite. We carry too much divine fire inside to find much peace in this life.

That struggle begins early in life. To create a self-identity as a very young child, we need to make a series of mental contractions which ultimately limit our awareness. First, we need to differentiate ourselves from others ("That's mom — I'm me"); then, we need to differentiate between what is living and what is not ("the puppy is alive — my doll isn't"); next, we need to differentiate between what is physical and what is mental ("this is my body — but I think with my mind"). Finally, and critically, as we are doing all this, we need to split off as much of our luminosity as we can consciously handle, from what is too much to consciously handle. With that we create a self-identity — but we also create a shadow, namely, an area inside us which is split off from our consciousness.

Notice that our shadow is not first of all a looming darkness. Rather, it's all the light and energy inside us that we cannot consciously handle. Most of us, I suspect, are familiar with the words of Marianne Williamson made famous by Nelson Mandela in his inauguration speech: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us."

Our light frightens us because it is not easy to carry. It gives us great dignity and infinite depth, but it also makes us pathologically complex and restless. Ruth Burrows, one of the foremost spiritual writers of our time, begins her autobiography

"You have made us  
for yourself, Lord, and  
our hearts are restless  
until they rest in you."  
— St Augustine

with these words: "I was born into this world with a tortured sensitivity, and my life has not been an easy one." You wouldn't expect those words from a mystic, from someone who has been a faithful nun for more than seventy-five years. You wouldn't expect that her struggle in life was as much with the light within herself as with the darkness within and around her. That's also true for each of us.

There's a famous passage in the *Book of Qoheleth* where the sacred writer tells us that God has made everything beautiful in its own time. However, the passage doesn't end on a peaceful note. It ends by telling us that, while God has made everything beautiful in its own time, God has put timelessness into the human heart, so that we are congenitally out of sync with time and the seasons from beginning to end. Both our special dignity and our pathological complexity take their origins in that anomaly in our nature. We are overcharged for life on this planet.

St Augustine gave this classic expression in his famous line: "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." There is an entire anthropology and spirituality in that single line. Our dignity and our perpetual restlessness have one and the same source.

Thus, you need to give yourself sacred per-

mission for being wild of heart, restless of heart, insatiable of heart, complex of heart, and driven of heart. Too often, where both psychology and spirituality have failed you is in giving you the impression that you should be living without chaos and restlessness in your life. Admittedly, these can beset you more acutely because of moral inadequacy, but they will beset you no matter how good a life you are living. Indeed, if you are a deeply sensitive person, you will probably feel your complexity more acutely than if you are less sensitive, or are deadening your sensitivity with distractions.

Karl Rahner once wrote to a friend, who had written to him complaining that he wasn't finding the fulfillment he longed for in life. His friend expressed disappointment with himself, his marriage, and his job. Rahner gave him this counsel: "In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable, we ultimately learn that in this life there is no finished symphony."

There can be no finished symphony in this life — not because our souls are defective, but because they carry godliness.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser is a theologian, teacher, and award-winning author. He can be contacted through his website [www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com). Now on Facebook [www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser](http://www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser)

Photo: Unsplash



# Cardinal Williams Rest In Peace

## Editorial

When reflecting upon the life of Cardinal Thomas Stafford Williams, the sixth Archbishop of Wellington, it can be stated with some certainty that he made a difference.

So much so that he was a genuinely national, indeed international figure, whose name was widely known in circles well beyond the Catholic Church.

His ministry was largely carried out before the advent of the Internet and social media, in the heyday of broadcasting. His episcopal ordination was broadcast live by TVNZ from the Wellington Town Hall in December, 1979. A sermon he gave at Totara Point in 1988 was reported on the front page of the *New Zealand Herald* under the headline "Church Leader Attacks Rogernomics".

For all his contributions to the Church in this country and in Oceania, his speaking out on matters of social justice was still being recalled many years after he retired from active ministry.

The cardinal was remembered by left wing secular commentator Chris Trotter in a 2022 column on Pope Francis' condemnation of "cancel culture", in his World Day of Peace message for that year.

"As society's fierce and unyielding conscience, the major denominations have almost entirely vacated the field of intellectual battle," Trotter stated.

"Inevitably, politicians and public servants have come to see Christianity as a social movement populated by the sort of people who flock to hear the likes of Brian Tamaki: poorly educated rubes, incapable of mounting a coherent argument against necessary social and cultural reforms.

"Back in the days of Cardinal Tom Williams, Dean Richard Randerson, and the Salvation Army's Major Campbell Roberts, right-wing politicians of all descriptions were constantly challenged to defend their neoliberal economic policies, against the aforementioned clerics' well-argued Christian critiques."

Bodies like diocesan justice and peace commissions, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, the Nathaniel Centre, the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, and more broadly the Maxim Institute and the Salvation Army's Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit, to name a few, might take issue with Trotter's statements. These groups certainly make contributions to parliamentary select committees and to public debate.

The work of faith-based organisations in contributing to social change was the subject of scholarly analysis in the 2019 report "Making a Difference", from the University of Otago's Centre for Theology and Public Issues. Cardinal Williams was praised in this report by Major Roberts.

"It is valuable to know people who are going to be around the table in high-level meetings. Roberts praised the former leadership of Cardinal Tom Williams, who got to know politicians, and who had credibility and stood out. By knowing the people, you get to know what politicians and policy people are concerned about, which is a key part of the process of engagement," the report stated.

But for all his moving and shaking in high places, Cardinal Williams remained a humble man of faith.

The motto on his episcopal crest, was "Unity in Christ". He explained this at his ordination Mass.

"Only if we are united in faith, hope and love can we truly serve God and neighbour. United in faith, we can give genuine witness to the truths revealed by God through his Son, Jesus — a courageous witness without compromise or dilution. United in hope, we can bring joy and peace to a society too often weighed down with worry and discontent. United in love, we can better bring forgiveness and reconciliation where there are opposing factions; we can better open our hearts to refugees and migrants; we can better assist people in developing countries; we can better play our part with our sister churches in uniting a fragmented Christianity. Only if we are first united according to the mind of Christ can we here in New Zealand grow into a people whose rights are respected, who accord a supreme value to human life, and who are able to move freely within our own culture, as well as in society as a whole, with a real sense of belonging in both."

May he rest in peace.

## The Habit



## Letters

### Godless

New Zealand at its core is a godless country. Not because it doesn't acknowledge a particular god or attend a weekly church service, but because of our collective selfishness and lack of compassion. We have sold our souls to the promise of tax cuts because we have had a reduction in our standard of living referred to as the squeezed middle. In reality, the squeezed middle is not really doing that bad, just not as good as they were.

Poverty and dismal health outcomes are the reality of particular ethnic groups in society more than others. Yet we dismiss this inequity and massage our core belief that they can do better, and it is their failure, not the system that we require them to navigate.

What will the future hold for those on the peripheries of society, those living on a benefit, the low paid worker, the unhoused, the mentally ill, the offender, Māori, all who are the subject of our new Government's policy direction, and what, if anything, will we who profess our belief in the person of Jesus, do about it?

"God is not satisfied with appearance. God wants the garment of justice. God wants his Chris-

tians dressed in love."— Oscar Romero

Teresa Homan, Upper Hutt.

### Honours

A friend sent me a cutting of a letter to the editor in his local paper — which started by praising Professor Frank Bloomfield of the University of Auckland, who was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the New Year Honours list for services to neonatology. But similarly honoured was a North Island doctor for "services to reproductive health", which really means promoting abortion.

The letter referred to the grotesque irony of one OMZM recipient being honoured for saving the lives of babies, and another being likewise honoured for terminating the lives of babies.

I think that there are hints of the Orwellian here — "War is Peace", "Freedom is Slavery" etc.

It is the same sort of contradiction that we have in this country in that we have legalised euthanasia and assisted suicide, while at the same time we are spending time and money on suicide prevention.

One is reminded of the words of Abraham Lincoln in a famous speech in 1858, before he was president.

"I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other."

I fear for Aotearoa New Zealand as we inexorably become "the other", and increasingly extinguish our vulnerable young and old.

As the Bible said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." (Mark 3:25)

John Cowen, Te Atatu, Auckland.

call it "shuffling paper" is insulting. At a time when bureaucracy has become a dirty word, I would have hoped for a more thoughtful response.

John Sullivan, Wellington.

■ In fairness to the reviewer, the review did state that the story, as told in the film, was seen as lacking "... the drama of the events it depicts..." It was the film that made the work look less than it was in reality, in the opinion of the reviewer — Editor.

## Film

Your film reviewer (*NZ Catholic*, December 3) was disappointed that the movie "One Life" represents the work of Nicholas Winton, who organised the rescue of 669 children from Prague on the eve of WW2, as "an exercise in dealing with bureaucracy".

I, on the contrary, was delighted to see a film celebrate the real work essential to rescue missions of this kind. Those children didn't arrive safely in England because of car chases and shootouts. They made it because Winton and his volunteer team provided each one of them with a passport (many were undocumented), travel documentation, and willing foster-parents in England, so that their travel through Europe would not be impeded. This was a herculean effort, and to

## Albanese

The article in *NZ Catholic* (Dec. 3) about the visit by Francesca Albanese concerned me. Why was she given a platform at EJP to speak about the war in Israel? She is not capable of giving an accurate view of the war, unless the EJP Commission wanted to obtain such a view...

She... stated that 500 people died in the bombing of Al Shifa hospital by the Israeli forces. This has been proven to be wrong.

I only hope that EJP will give the Jewish people in New Zealand the opportunity to tell the EJP of the effect on them (and have those published in *NZ Catholic*).

I noted that a recent poll showed that 75 per cent of the people in Gaza supported Hamas.

Barry Harcourt, Christchurch.

■ Abridged — Editor.

Except for our own editorials, opinions expressed in *NZ Catholic* do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the newspaper or of its owner, the Bishop of Auckland, unless otherwise indicated.

**NZ Catholic welcomes readers' letters, although receipt of a letter does not guarantee publication. No correspondence will be entered into concerning publication.** Letters should be no longer than 220 words and should be topical, to the point, and include the writer's address and phone number. *Ad hominem* attacks are not welcome. Emailed letters should be sent as part of the text message — not as an attachment — to editor@nzcatholic.org.nz and include the writer's physical address. Pseudonyms are not accepted, except by special arrangement.



# Cardinal Thomas Stafford Williams, ONZ, ChStJ : Obituary

by PAT McCARTHY

Cardinal Thomas Williams, who was a prominent voice in Church and community affairs during his 25 years as the sixth Archbishop of Wellington, died on December 22, at Charles Fleming Retirement Village, Waikanae, aged 93.

As a Christian leader, Cardinal Williams was at the forefront of initiatives for social justice, human rights and international development. As long ago as 1988 he spoke out against environmental pollution and the threat of global warming.

As archbishop and cardinal, he strongly advocated inculturation of the liturgy for indigenous peoples, giving bishops' conferences responsibility for liturgical translations, and a pastoral approach to divorced and remarried Catholics.

After volunteering for a five-year stint as a parish priest in Samoa in the 1970s, he became a champion of issues affecting the peoples of the Pacific. He was founding president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania, and president delegate of the Synod of Bishops for Oceania at the Vatican in 1998.

Thomas Stafford Williams was born in Miramar, Wellington, in 1930. When his family bought a dairy/grocery store in Lower Hutt, young Tom often served behind the counter before going to school.

The family was keen on sport — his father was New Zealand's first professional tennis coach — but Tom's shortsightedness restricted him to table tennis, at which he won Wellington and national titles.

After leaving St Patrick's College, Wellington, he went to Victoria University at the age of 15 to study commerce, and worked as an accountant before entering Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, to train for the priesthood.

He completed his training at Propaganda Fide College in Rome, where he was ordained in 1959, then did a social science degree at University College, Dublin.

Back in New Zealand, he was assistant priest at St Patrick's parish, Palmerston North, and assistant director of the Catholic Enquiry Centre in Wellington, before taking charge of Samoa's largest parish church as parish priest of Leulumoega.

The parish assets, he found, were two dollars in the parish bank account,

a plantation of cocoa and coconut palms, a cow and two bull calves, and a car so rusted that he could see the road moving beneath his feet. Yet he had five "wonderfully happy" years there.

Tasked with building a secondary school for girls, a convent and a medical clinic — with most of the materials to be ordered from New Zealand, Australia or Japan — he upskilled himself on construction techniques, and even did the water and gas plumbing.

When village pigs invaded the school grounds he resorted to shooting them. In later years he found that his record of pastoral activities and inculturation of Samoan customs into the Mass was overshadowed by his reputation as "the priest who shot pigs".

The next three years were as parish priest of Holy Family parish, Porirua East — the largest parish in the archdiocese, with a polyglot mix of Pacific languages. He was in the process of organising a sabbatical year in the Cook Islands when he was appointed Archbishop of Wellington in 1979, succeeding Cardinal Reginald Delargey.

The responsibilities of his new position were soon apparent. A few hours after his episcopal ordination he was thrust into a tense meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, which decided to integrate all Catholic schools into the state education system.

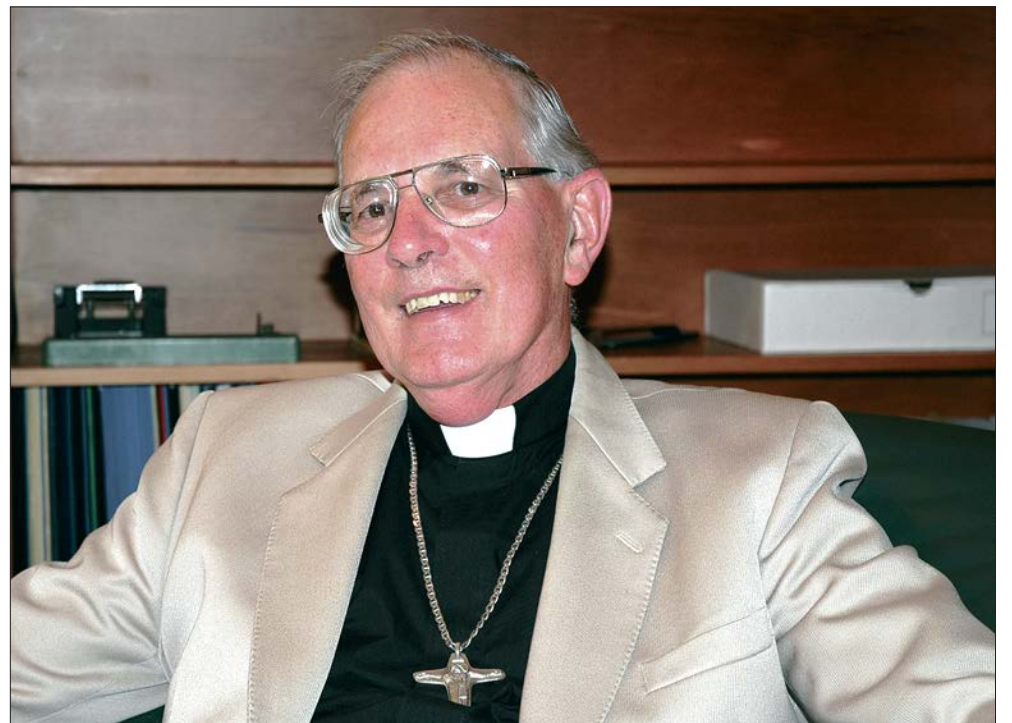
"I didn't know which way was up," he recalled.

The archdiocese was heavily in debt. The former accountant credited an astute chancellor, Msgr Hugh Doogan, with getting it out of the red. But he expressed "immense relief" when Palmerston North was carved off as a separate diocese the following year.

The 1981 Springbok tour saw a less harmonious split in the Catholic community. Archbishop Williams, flanked by his vicar-general and chancellor, led a contingent of Catholic protesters in an anti-tour march through Wellington streets.

He also joined the mayors of the four main cities in a deputation to Prime Minister Rob Muldoon, asking him to stop the tour. "He studiously avoided me at state and civic functions over the next six years," the archbishop recalled.

There were frustrations for the new archbishop. When elected members of the archdiocesan pastoral council



Cardinal Tom Williams (Photo: War Cry)

sought to advance parochial interests rather than those of the archdiocese, he discontinued elections and appointed all members.

At meetings of heads of churches he unsuccessfully tried to introduce discussion of ecumenical theology, and felt frustrated that each denomination had its own understanding of "church".

More positive developments were: strengthening and renovating the unsafe Sacred Heart Basilica as the archdiocesan cathedral; building the archdiocesan centre; founding the Nathaniel Centre (now the National Catholic Bioethics Centre); establishing a personal parish for Māori; forging closer links with the Wellington parishes at the top of the South Island; developing the Launch Out formation programme for lay pastoral leaders; setting up the national Māori Catholic organisation, Te Runanga o Te Hahi Katorika; and launching *Wel-Com* newspaper.

But he regarded the 1988 archdiocesan synod as the "central development" of his 25-year episcopate. Trusting in the "common sense and sound faith of our people", he declared, none of the synod proposals had been imposed from the top and none had been vetoed.

What he regarded as his greatest failure was his inability to set up an effective vehicle for the formation of Catholic youth.

Having spent "the most formative years of my life" in the Catholic Youth Movement, he was convinced that the techniques pioneered by its founder, Josef Cardijn, to apply Gospel teachings to everyday life, had a "universal and perennial value" in forming youth.

After only three years as a bishop, Archbishop Williams was appointed a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 1983. He was called to serve on several Vatican bodies, including 25 years as a member of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples.

In 1986 he sent the French bishops' conference a dossier supporting the Pacific Islands' advocacy for a nuclear-free Pacific. When there was no response, he thought the French bishops might have been embarrassed over the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior the previous year.

Preaching at the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Bishop Jean Baptiste Pompallier at Totara Point in 1888, he gave a forceful warning about environ-

mental pollution.

"Over the past 150 years," he said, "we have all but raped our earth to our own destruction. We waste, we pillage, we pollute so prodigally, that the earth we thought our slave has turned on its master and threatens to destroy us."

"The latest proof of this is the 'greenhouse effect'. Scientists are warning us that we have not only tolerated the poisoning of our cities, not only turned the remotest reaches of our globe — the slopes of Everest and the shores of Antarctica — into rubbish dumps, but we are now wrecking the ozone layer protecting earth from the sun's roasting rays."

In 1990 the cardinal was awarded honorary membership of the Distribution and General Workers' Union, in recognition of his willingness to serve on a union-led inquiry into unjust working conditions.

In 2000 he was appointed a Member of the Order of New Zealand.

At the Synod of Bishops for Oceania in 1998, Cardinal Williams was one of four New Zealand bishops who spoke out on the pastoral consequences of divorced and remarried Catholics being excluded from the sacraments.

In an obituary published on the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference website, it was noted that, when asked by *NZ Catholic* in 2019 how he would like to be remembered, Cardinal Williams hesitated before saying, "I don't expect to be greatly remembered but . . . I would like to be remembered as a dedicated servant".

The obituary also noted that, in 2019, Cardinal Williams said that, having ordained 40 men to the priesthood, he had always emphasised in his ordination homilies "that priesthood has nothing to do with power and privilege, but everything to do with sacrifice and service, seeking nothing for the priest himself, but striving to please God, imitate Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd, and commit himself unreservedly to his pastoral responsibilities".

Cardinal Williams "heartily disliked" the different forms of address for prelates, such as 'My Lord', 'Your Grace' and 'Your Eminence': "I hope they have been consigned to the domain of [the] historian and archivists."

Cardinal Williams retired in 2005 to a small bungalow at Waikanae, and devoted himself to reading, beach-walking and gardening.



Cardinal Tom Williams with St John Paul II in 1994



# Headmaster calls on Govt to stop following education fads

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

The headmaster of one of the biggest Catholic boys' schools in Auckland has expressed hope that the new Government will be making education a priority, even as he called on the government to "stop following fads".

In St Peter's College's November newsletter, headmaster James Bentley said that, over the last two decades, the education system had been "captured by zealots who have foisted on schools methods and philosophies that have no proven track record".

"New Zealand once used to have an education system that was up there with the very best. This happened because we followed methods that worked, that were backed up by research and data," Mr Bentley said. "Our nation's kids are not an experiment to be conducted on."

He said that the most urgent matter that needs to be addressed is getting kids back to school.

"The recent statistics put out showing that only 47 per cent of students attend school regularly is as alarming as it sounds.

"If you are not in school, you cannot learn, and you will fall behind. The outcomes of this will be

catastrophic for thousands of our young people, and for us as a society," he said.

Mr Bentley said that the Government should consider putting more resources into schools to solve this problem.

He also said that the Government should bring "credibility back" to the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

"Astonishingly, the review into NCEA has now ticked past six years, with still no end in sight," he noted.

Mr Bentley also said that the Government should listen to those who are in the educational sector, and should run ideas past them before implementing said ideas.

He also called for "a robust curriculum".

"New Zealand has one of the most flexible curriculums in the world. While this has some positives, it also means that some essential topics of a subject can be avoided," he explained.

"While it is important to maintain some form



James Bentley

of flexibility, it (curriculum) also needs to be tightened to ensure that students in all schools are taught the same skills and knowledge."

He also asked the Government to make the teaching profession attractive, so that "quality aspirants" will join.

"This may mean paying future teachers to train, or covering their course costs. If we don't have decent teachers in our nations classrooms, then everything else you implement will be pointless," he said.

Mr Bentley also called on the Government to "do something about youth vaping".

"A recent OECD report had NZ's [uptake] of youth vaping as the second highest in the world. Coming in

just behind Estonia, our 8.2 per cent take-up rate should ring major alarm bells," he said. "We also can no longer take comfort in fooling ourselves that everyone else has the same issues — Australia's rate is 2.1 per cent."



Jennifer Mary Schollum, QSM (Photo: Facebook)

## Puhoi community work acknowledged with QSM

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

Puhoi/Warkworth parishioner Mrs Jennifer Mary Schollum was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for her services to the Puhoi community, and for the preservation of the community's heritage.

Mrs Schollum, who has been volunteering in the community for more than 50 years, has been involved with the Puhoi Historical Society since 1985. The society is now known as the Puhoi Heritage Museum.

She has been past president and secretary of the group. Currently, she is serving as treasurer, historian, museum coordinator, archivist, and newsletter editor.

She compiled folders for all of the

families who came to Puhoi in 1863 from Bohemia. She volunteers up to four days a week at the museum, and helps families trace their ancestry.

Mrs Schollum founded and has led the Puhoi Bohemian Dance Group since 1987, which has performed for various community and school groups.

She was also involved in organising an anniversary celebration marking 150 years since the arrival of Bohemian settlers in New Zealand.

She contributed her knowledge of Bohemian settlers, and appeared on an episode of the television show "Passengers" in 2023.

Mrs Schollum was Puhoi Public Cemetery Secretary from 1986 to 2004, and has

been treasurer of the Puhoi Community Forum since 2014.

She was on the Puhoi Centennial Hall Committee, and Secretary and Treasurer from 1992 to 1996. She has organised ANZAC Day commemorations between 2015 and 2017.

Mrs Schollum received a Rodney District Council Community Award in 2005 recognising her contributions.

Meanwhile, a Christian music-producing couple, Mr and Mrs David and Dale Mary Garratt also received a similar honour.

Though not Catholics, their worship music had been hugely popular, and used by some Catholic groups in New Zealand.

## Msgr Charles Cooper was a mentor in liturgy and Church music

by ROWENA OREJANA

A former Wellington archdiocese director of liturgy, Msgr Charles Harold Cooper, passed away on January 3. He was 90 years old.

Wellington Archbishop Paul Martin, SM, said that Msgr Cooper was recently diagnosed with cancer, "but died more quickly than expected."

A requiem Mass was celebrated at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Petone on January 9. A vigil Mass was also celebrated the previous evening at San Antonio Catholic Church at Eastbourne.

Fr Michael McCabe, who gave the homily at the requiem Mass, said that Msgr Cooper "left strict instructions, seven pages of them, that there should be nothing at either Mass in the nature of a eulogy or tribute, but only a homily based on readings".

"And those of us mentored by Charles in liturgy and music soon learned to follow his directions because they had been honed by his time as a chaplain, as Archbishop Paul has said, to the Royal New Zealand Airforce, primarily at Wigram," Fr McCabe said, noting that, "Flight lieutenant Cooper was no shrinking violet".

In his homily, Fr McCabe observed that Msgr Cooper, as well as Fr John Carde and Cardinal Thomas Williams, who all passed away this past year, were ordained shortly before the Second Vatican Council was convened.



Msgr Charles Cooper (Photo: Wellington Archdiocese)

Msgr Cooper was ordained on July 25, 1960, while Fr Carde was ordained in 1958 and Cardinal Williams in 1959.

"When he (Msgr Cooper) was ordained, the order of the Mass began with a very succinct phrase "Sacerdos paratos" meaning 'when the priest is ready'. Just three years later, in December 1963, the Second Vatican Council ushered a new understanding of Sacred Liturgy, and the order of the Mass now begins, "Papalo Congregato", meaning 'when the people are gathered'," Fr McCabe said.

This meant that the context for Msgr Cooper's ordination, as well as for Fr Carde's and Cardinal Williams', had changed, from an ending to a beginning.

"The seminary training for the three of them left them unprepared and ill-equipped for the paradigm shift that would occur at the beginning of their ordained ministry," Fr McCabe said.

But, he said, Msgr Cooper lived out his ministry in a "courageous spirit of collaboration with all the people of God".

Fr McCabe said that, at times of trials, when God was silent, Msgr Cooper's prayer was simple and highlighted in his writings: "Let me see you. Let me hear your voice. Remind us of your love."

Fr McCabe thanked Msgr Cooper for the gift of his (Msgr Cooper's) faith, generative love and perseverance.

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# A divine symphony: the journey of Fr Mahir – a husband, father, and priest

by MINA AMSO

In the vibrant tapestry of life, there are stories that resonate with the divine, tales of unexpected turns and profound encounters that lead souls to their true calling. Such is the story of Father Mahir Murad, a Chaldean husband, father and a priest, whose journey unfolded in the embrace of love, family, and an unwavering call from the heavens.

Born in Zakho, Northern Iraq in 1983, Fr Murad moved to Melbourne with his family at age nine for peace and a brighter future. Little did he know that his life would take a different turn later and become a testament to the extraordinary ways in which God works.

A transformative turn came about at 24, when the young Mahir Murad had just finished university and had entered into work life when he experienced a divine encounter with Christ, setting the stage for a life dedicated to serving God and his community. He later met and married his now wife, Rasha in 2011. He was 28.

The couple had four children — two boys, Yeshua and Joshua, now in heaven, and two girls, Maryam and Rosary, still walking the earthly journey. After nine years of family life, Mahir Murad found himself prompted by God to take a path less travelled, and answer a call to the priesthood.

“I have been aware of God’s call for something. During the coronavirus outbreak, I heard a whisper from God saying, ‘Mahir, what do you think of the priesthood?’ Since then, the whisper kept getting louder and louder. I communicated my thoughts and whispers to my bishop and inquired about the possibility of becoming a priest.”

The couple later met with the bishop to talk things over.

## ■ Talking

“One day, I spoke with my wife and asked her what she thought. She began crying and said, ‘Please Mahir, I cannot give you my yes’. After a while, I brought up the conversation with my wife again. She cried again.

“I suggested that we turn to prayer and if God wills, it will come to pass.”

That night Mahir prayed to God and asked: “Lord, I know you’re calling me to the priesthood, I am giving you my yes, but now I need you to put peace into my wife’s heart that everything will be ok, I have done my part. Now it’s time to do your part, I’ll leave it to you.”

After weeks of spiritual discernment, Rasha felt a transformative love and peace within her, a confirmation that the path towards priesthood was not a solo journey but a shared one with her husband.

“[She said] Mahir I don’t know what’s happening, but I feel like God is doing something to me. I have this love and peace in my heart about the priesthood. Let’s go ahead with the priesthood. I want to go ahead with it.”

With Rasha’s resounding yes, the couple embarked on the sacred journey towards the priesthood, a decision not made lightly, but rooted in faith and trust. Before the sacred vestments were on his shoulders, Murad’s journey began through the ranks of sub-deaconship and diaconate, which led him to his priestly ordination. It was April 14th, 2023.

Reflecting on his decision, Fr Murad says it wasn’t one of seeking comfort but of embracing the greatness for which humans were created for.

“I had the option to live a quiet and comfortable life or a public and uncomfortable life. I chose the priesthood because I knew God would work through me. My joy comes from being at church, spending time with the youth, and serving the community. Like any other profession, the priesthood experiences joys and sorrows, and ups and downs.



Fr Mahir Murad with his wife Rasha and his two daughters Rosary and Mary

“In the priesthood, your boss is God, and he is a great boss who takes care of his employees, which is different from other professions. The joys of being a priest are those when people place their burdens on you and are seeking your help,” he says

Eight months later and Fr Mahir’s joy is obvious, serving the community and guiding the youth, finding fulfilment in shouldering the burdens of those seeking solace.

## ■ Balancing social life?

What about balance? Does the new priest have time for his family and friends?

“My wife and I had a conversation that was centred around this question. The truth is, after I became a priest, my wife and I did not change our lifestyles, neither in our clothing, nor in our outings, nor in our attitudes, nor in our social lives. The reason why is because we were already living a life that was Christ-like in our words, thoughts and deeds.

“She is a modest woman who cherishes her faith and family. The wife’s influence on her husband’s vocation to the priesthood is significant. If a family isn’t practising the faith in its entirety, if a man becomes a priest, there will be challenges and problems. The priesthood should not alter the way a man and his family behave or think, but rather lead by example.

“I agree that if the wife and children are not living the Christian life, if the priesthood enters the family, there will be a lot of problems, a lot of changes, a lot of criticism. In a sense, your life becomes public, people will look at the way you act, the way you speak, the way you raise a family, the way you talk to your children, the way you dress, the places you go, most attention will be on the wife and children, but the wife carries most of that burden.”

## ■ Regrets?

The 40-year-old priest and father says he has no regrets.

“I love every minute of it. I am filled with joy when I encounter people. Priesthood is not a job; it is not a 9-5 job where you clock in and clock out. Serving my people is what priesthood is all about and it truly brings me joy,” says Fr Murad.

He even asks his wife frequently whether she thinks it was a good decision or not.

“I would like to think she hasn’t regretted it and loves every moment. I know because I always ask

her. She always says, ‘Since I said yes, I have seen God do wonders and bring blessings upon me and the family’”.

## ■ More priests please?

Could more men, married with/without children become priests? The challenge, Fr Murad says, lies not in the shortage of priests but in a culture that often drowns out the call of God with its noise. Men, surrounded by a world promoting freedom and exploration, struggle to commit to marriage, let alone chastity, he says.

“The current culture teaches young men to be free and to explore their sexuality, which often puts men in a dark alley where they end up being miserable once they find themselves fighting the addiction of lust, porn and sexuality.”

Celibate priests find true freedom in love, unburdened by the chains of lust and worldly desires, he says.

“I’ve encountered numerous [celibate] priests who are content and joyful in their lives. In the Chaldean church, marrying is not allowed after becoming a priest. The start of marriage is before priesthood, and this is a common practice in the vast majority of Catholic rites in the Roman Catholic Church.

“I think ultimately, it’s what God wants.”

Fr Murad added that God sometimes calls married men to the priesthood, and sometimes he calls men to be celibate. All Christians are called to be chaste, which means “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of [the human person] in his [or her] bodily and spiritual being”. (CCC2337) Married people are called to live conjugal chastity; others practise chastity in continence (CCC2349).

Fr Murad said that being called to the priesthood as a married man is a blessing. Being vigilant is a must because priesthood comes with its own challenges and blessings. He emphasises the importance of a family rooted in faith for a priest to maintain his priestly identity.

Fr Murad’s story is a symphony of love, faith, and divine calling — a melody that echoes through the corridors of time, inspiring others to listen for their own divine whispers amidst life’s cacophony.

He now serves as the parish priest at Our Lady Guardian of Plants, a Chaldean Catholic church in Melbourne. The Chaldean Catholic church is one of 23 Catholic rites, it comes with its own unique identity, liturgical prayers, canon, and Church system.

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# New era and changes for CHARIS – National Service of Communion NZ

by HELEN SMITHSON

“So we leave our boats behind, leave them on familiar shores” was the song which began each session of the CHARIS – Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service – National Service of Communion New Zealand annual meeting in Hamilton from November 17-19.

Twenty-four leaders from throughout New Zealand were at the meeting. They represented various ministries, communities and groups, which are all fruit of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. This began in 1967 with a sovereign move of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we are in a new era and change which is led and guided by the Holy Spirit. So this needs to be embraced. Letting go of our programmes and listening to the Holy Spirit in unity is not an easy option. It involves trust and risk, but the outcome is greater than we can dream or imagine, as it is God’s dream for us. We need to listen and pray together, then step out of the boat with eyes fixed on Jesus, and walk on water undertaking the mission given by Pope Francis to “be a Current of Grace and share baptism in the Holy Spirit with the whole Church”. A focus on Mercy and Christian Unity is also a priority. When we give our “yes”, Jesus can feed 5000, as he did when the boy shared his loaves and fishes. We need expectant faith and to believe for miracles, signs and wonders which will turn our world upside down.

After the disruption, fear and isolation caused by Covid-19, the last nine months have been very full. The March National Current of Grace 2023 Conference, “Receive Holy Spirit Power” at Waikanae was inspiring and was appreciated by many. Further Current of Grace events were held in: Dunedin in February “Come to Me All You who are Thirsty”; Auckland held a Pentecost Celebration Mass; Wellington in October, Josephine Olsen shared her experiences at the first CHARIS Worldwide Intercessors’ Conference at Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast; and Hamilton held “Who Do You Say I Am?” with sharing from several youth who had returned from World Youth Day. Then, a month or so later, “Come to God’s Repair Shop” was a call to come and be restored and renewed.

Pope Francis initiated CHARIS as a Public Juridic Person under the Dicastery of Family, Laity and Life at Pentecost, 2019, with an appointed International Service of Communion. The CHARIS General Assembly of National Coordinators then was to elect the new International Service of Communion every four years. At the end of October, coordinators of 70 countries voted at the 2023 General Assembly in Rome, where Pino Scarfuro was re-elected moderator of CHARIS for a final four-year term. The Asia/Oceania representatives were elected in early March at the Continental Service of Communion gathering at Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

Oceania has now been separated from Asia to be an individual continent through a change to the statutes at the general assembly. At present, there are two nations, Australia and New Zealand, in the Oceania group, but a focus will be to involve other Pacific nations.

CHARIS is about building relationships, creating networks, and leaders supporting leaders. Each of the International Service of Communion representatives either coordinate or support one of the eight CHARIS Commissions. This structure needs to be reflected at a national level and a diocesan Current of Grace level, to enable connection and flow from Rome down to individual coordinators and back up again. The Intercession Commission is proving very effective in this, and has already created many international networks. Through one of these networks, New Zealand was able to join India’s 40 hours of prayer in October, leading a 30-minute segment. Our Human Promotion Commission Coordinator, Josephine Olsen, initiated and led “Project Innocence International” for trafficked children in October. Countries from around the world were able to join this initiative because of the international connections.

These networks provide an outward focus. At our Hamilton meeting, one of our leaders felt we were being encouraged “to see beyond the horizon”, and having a coordinator for each of the CHARIS Commissions moves us in that direction. It is interesting to see, as we let go of what we are holding on to, what God gives us



Some of those at the CHARIS National Service of Communion meeting in Hamilton in November

back. Formation Commission is the next pressing need, and Susilo Kentjana of ICPE is coordinating this with great enthusiasm. Willy Schryvers, Light of Christ Community Nelson, is equally happy to be coordinating the Community Commission, and Deidre Broome the Prayer Group Commission.

Pope Francis desires for youth to be leading now, and at this year’s continental meeting neither New Zealand nor Australia had a nomination for a Continental Youth Representative. However, after much prayer and again at our meeting in Hamilton, we were delighted to have two youth representatives, with Nathan Burtenshaw accepting the role of coordinator of our Youth Commission.

Over the last two years the CHARIS International Formation Commission undertook an on-line “Integral Formation Programme”, which covered all aspects of leadership formation and culminated in a 3-day programme, “Called, Transformed and Sent”, with workshops and teachings held in Rome after the CHARIS General Assembly. Pope Francis addressed this gathering as did Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, Fr James Mallon

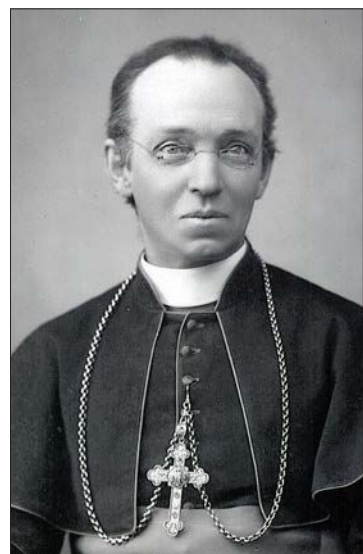
— Divine Renovation, Nicky Gumbel — Alpha, Matt Lozano — Unbound, and Michelle Moran gave an inspirational leadership talk. Michelle was appointed by Pope Francis, with Pino Scarfuro to be responsible for the initial development of CHARIS. Four from New Zealand were able to attend this gathering; Josephine Olsen, Diana and Patricia Ingle and myself. Diana is one of two CHARIS Continental Ministry Representatives for Asia/Oceania.

God has a good plan for each of us and we were born “for such a time at this”. This is not about religion, but discovering and being the unique person God created us to be. When we know how much we are loved by God, we can love God, ourselves and others and service comes out of this love. When the Holy Spirit, whom we all receive at Baptism with all his gifts, is activated in our lives, we have an ongoing knowledge of God’s love for us. “Why did God make me?” To know, love and serve him.

Helen Smithson is coordinator of CHARIS New Zealand, National Service of Communion.

Helen Smithson is coordinator CHARIS New Zealand, National Service of Communion

## ‘Saints in Coffee Jars’: Chch exhibit explores history of relics



Bishop John Grimes, SM

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

Some relics recovered from beneath the now-demolished Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Christchurch are to be displayed in an exhibition next month.

The “Saints in Coffee Jars” exhibition will run from February 6-10 at Pūmanawa Gallery, The Arts Centre (Montreal St end of the Arts Centre Complex) in Christchurch.

The exhibition, which is about relics in general and which showcases a selection of the surviving Cathedral relic collection, is being run by the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives and the University of Canterbury (Medieval and Early Modern History Department).

Christchurch diocese archivist Triona Doocey said that a 2021 article written about the cathedral relics, and published

on *The Spinoff* website, facilitated contact with Professor Chris Jones from the University of Canterbury, and the idea of an exhibition came about thereafter.

“Our idea is to take a very historical look at relics in general, and showcase a selection of the surviving cathedral relic collection, and try to interweave the story of the first Bishop of Christchurch, [Bishop] John Grimes, SM, who assembled the collection of relics,” Mrs Doocey said.

“It is also an opportunity for some passive evangelisation — who knows what it may spark in visitors unfamiliar with Christian traditions.”

Visitors to the exhibition will be able to explore the rich history of relics, spanning more than two millennia, and will learn about the significant impact of relics on today’s culture and faith.

Publicity for the exhibition states:

“Discover how Bishop Grimes, SM, assembled his collection of relics to shape his vision for a new Catholic society in the southern hemisphere. Much like the relics concealed underground following the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Grimes, SM, remains a largely forgotten figure in twenty-first century Aotearoa. As Christchurch’s first Catholic bishop, Bishop Grimes not only oversaw the construction of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament on Barbados St, but also played a pivotal role as a civic leader, impacting diverse areas, from education to animal welfare. In addition to delving into the world of relics, you can also explore the enduring impact of this extraordinary individual at the ‘Saints in Coffee Jars’ exhibition.”

Bishop Grimes was Bishop of Christchurch from 1887 to 1915. The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament opened in 1905.



# Senior Vatican doctrine official says priestly celibacy should be optional

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Catholic Church should revise its celibacy requirement for Latin-rite priests, a senior official in the Vatican's doctrinal office said.

"If it were up to me, I would revise the requirement that priest(s) have to be celibate," said Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta, adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, in an interview with the Times of Malta released on January 7. "Experience has shown me this is something we need to seriously think about."

The archbishop said that the phenomenon of Catholic priests engaging in hidden, long-term sentimental relationships — something he said "happens everywhere" — is a "symptom" of priests "having to cope with" their celibacy requirement. He acknowledged that some priests father children in Malta and elsewhere. "We're talking about priests around the world, so I

think it happens in Malta as well," he said.

A man who feels called to the priesthood, "may mature, enter in relationships, love a woman, love another person, and they have to make a choice", he said. "Right now, they have to make a choice."

The interview was conducted in Maltese, but the Times of Malta provided an English translation of his remarks in its story and in subtitles on the video clip it released. A spokesperson for the archdiocese told Catholic News Service that the translation was accurate.

Archbishop Scicluna said the Latin-rite Church "should learn from the Catholic churches of the Oriental rite", which have a tradition of married priests.

In many of the 23 Eastern Catholic churches, men are allowed to get married prior to being ordained, but

cannot become bishops.

Celibacy, Archbishop Scicluna said, "was optional for the first millennium of the Church's existence, and it should become optional again".

The First Lateran Council in the 12th century forbade marriage for Latin-rite Catholic priests, deacons and subdeacons. Beginning in 1951, Pope Pius XII gave special permissions for Lutheran ministers who converted to Catholicism to be ordained priests as married men, beginning a normalisation of former Protestant clergy becoming married Latin-rite Catholic priests.

Archbishop Scicluna said that the Church has "lost many great priests because they chose marriage".

"Why should we lose a young man who would have made a fine priest just because he wanted to get married?" he asked.

While the archbishop said that

he speaks openly of his position on priestly celibacy around the Vatican, he added that "the decision doesn't depend on me".

But he told the interviewer that it was the first time he was discussing his position on priestly celibacy publicly, and he knew his comments would "sound heretical to some people".

While he insisted that "there is a place for celibacy in the Church", he said that priests should have the option of remaining celibate or getting married, just as in Eastern Catholic churches.

Archbishop Scicluna has led the archdiocese of Malta since 2015, and was appointed adjunct secretary of the Vatican's doctrinal office in 2018; he continues to hold both positions. He was promoter of justice at the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, handling accusations of clerical sex abuse from 2002 to 2012.

## Special guests at dinner under Bernini's colonnade – the homeless



Dinner for 150 homeless people accompanied lighting of a Christmas tree in the Vatican on December 9, 2023, in an unusual space — under Bernini's colonnade (OSV News photo/courtesy Dicastery for the Service of Charity)

(OSV News) — The lighting of a Christmas tree and unveiling of a Nativity scene at the Vatican on December 9 included a group of special guests. For the first time in history, 150 homeless people had a festive meal, served by Italian journalists and their families, under the famous baroque Bernini's colonnade in St Peter's Square.

The meal was organised by the Dicastery for the Service of Charity and St Peter's Parish, with the support of the Governate of Vatican City State, as part of the "actions of a social nature of the Papal Basilica of St Peter's in preparation for the Jubilee" of 2025.

The poor were invited with printed invitations on dark red paper, with Christmas decorative drawings, saying: "With the blessing of Pope Francis, the Apostolic Almonery and St Peter's Parish, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Nativity scene and the lighting of the Christmas tree, which are the signs of the

feast for the birth of Jesus, are pleased to invite you to dinner on Saturday, Dec. 9, 2023."

"May we all welcome Jesus with a heart full of joy and humanity!" the invitation said.

Answering criticism that the architectural masterpiece is "damaged" by homeless people sleeping under the colonnade on a daily basis, and now dining there as well, Cardinal Krajewski said that they are the "ornament" of the colonnade and the heart of it.

With the blessing of Pope Francis, the Apostolic Almonery and St Peter's Parish, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Nativity scene and the lighting of the Christmas tree, which are the signs of the

## 20 missionaries murdered in 2023

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — In its annual report on Catholic missionaries murdered during the year, the Vatican-based news agency, Fides, noted what many of them had in common was living a normal life in areas where violence had become common.

Fides, the news agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies which is part of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, reported on December 30 that 20 pastoral workers were killed in 2023: one

bishop, eight priests, two religious brothers, one seminarian, one novice and seven laypeople.

The agency said that its tally was slightly higher than in 2022, when it counted 18 missionaries who died violently.

In the 2023 list, Fides included Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell, a native of Ireland who had been a priest and later a bishop in Los Angeles for 45 years, who was shot in his home.

Fides reported that the highest number of missionaries killed was registered in Africa, where nine missionaries were killed: five priests, two religious brothers, one seminarian and one novice.

The Americas followed with six missionaries murdered: one bishop, three priests and two laywomen. Four lay men and women died violently in Asia.

One layman was killed in Europe.

## Cardinal Becciu, five others sentenced to prison at Vatican trial

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican City State criminal court has sentenced Cardinal Angelo Becciu to five years and six months in prison on two counts of embezzlement and one of aggravated fraud, but found him not guilty of abuse of office or witness tampering.

The 75-year-old cardinal's attorney, Fabio Veglione, told reporters that his client would appeal.

The three-judge panel of the Vatican court handed down the verdicts late on December 16. In addition to Cardinal Becciu, five other people were sentenced to jail time ranging from three years to seven years, and were ordered to pay the Vatican millions of dollars in damages.

Pending appeal, none of the six

people given jail terms were taken into custody.

Only one of the 10 defendants, Msgr Mauro Carlino, the former secretary of then-Archbishop Becciu when he served as "sostituto", the No. 3 position in the Vatican Secretariat of State, was found not guilty of all charges.

The trial revolved around the Vatican's investment in a property in London's chic Chelsea district. But the way the deal was structured and restructured ended up costing the Vatican as much as US\$200 million. Cardinal Becciu was the No. 3 official at the Vatican Secretariat of State when the property deal, using money invested by the secretariat, was first made in 2014.

The cardinal and three others - Raffaele Mincione, Fabrizio Tirabassi and Enrico Crasso — were found guilty of embezzlement for taking US\$200.5 million from the Secretariat of State's investment fund — a third of the entire fund — and investing it with Athena Capital Commodities.

The court described the fund as being "highly speculative" and risky, which violated Vatican guidelines and canon law on the use of Church funds.

Mincione, who ran Athena Capital, was found guilty of money-laundering for using the Vatican funds to buy the London property, but the court said that Cardinal Becciu, Tirabassi and Crasso were not responsible for the London property disaster because

they had no control over the money once it was invested with Athena.

The cardinal also was accused of embezzling money that he gave to a Caritas project run by his brother in Sardinia, and for aggravated fraud for giving more than 570,000 euros of Vatican money to a woman named Cecilia Marogna, who claimed she could help win the release of a nun kidnapped in Mali.

The Vatican tribunal said that it would confiscate the equivalent of about \$181 million from those found guilty, and ordered them to pay another \$218 million in damages to the Secretariat of State, the Vatican bank, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, and Supervisory and Financial Information Authority.



# US March for Life pledges solidarity with mothers and children

(OSV News) — The US national March for Life in Washington, DC, on January 19 had the theme “With every woman, for every child”.

This year’s march — its second year since the Supreme Court overturned Roe in 2022 — took place as winter weather put much of the US in a deep freeze, snarling transportation and cancelling flights.

While the crowds appeared smaller than in years past, this year’s march showed a movement eager to up its game to help American society embrace a culture that affirms and supports the dignity of all human life, and not just for the unborn.

Jeanne Mancini, president of March for Life Education and Defense Fund, and others emphasised during the March for Life Rally that not only was the national march there to stay, but pro-life marches would be multiplying throughout all 50 states in the coming years.

“We will keep marching every year at the national level, as well as in our states, until our nation’s laws reflect the basic truth that all human life is created equal and is worthy of protection,” Mancini told the thousands

gathered on the National Mall.

Speaker after speaker at the march rally emphasized its theme of making abortion “unthinkable,” in particular by emphasizing the culture-changing and life-saving work of pregnancy resource centres and related efforts.

However, speakers at the march acknowledged that the end of Roe came with both successes and setbacks for the pro-life movement.

But March for Life speakers also indicated strongly that changing the culture for life did not just affect the unborn, but extended to all human beings.

Thousands of Catholics participating in the march came from prayer vigils and Masses held that day or the evening before.

Braving the freezing temperatures of the early morning were nearly 6000 youth and adults who joined the March for Life Rally coming from the second annual Life Fest at the D.C. Armory, where they had fortified themselves listening to inspiring music and personal testimonies, and engaged in eucharistic adoration and Mass.



Pro-life demonstrators carry a banner past the US Supreme Court building while participating in the 51st annual March for Life in Washington, DC on January 19 (OSV News photo/Leslie E. Kossoff)

As the snow continued to fall, and the Supreme Court buildings as thousands of marchers took to the streets to march between the Capitol and the Supreme Court buildings as the song “God bless America” rang out through the loudspeakers.

## Why is world still plagued by poverty, Pope asks leaders at Davos

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Nations and businesses must work together to promote ethically sound models of globalization, Pope Francis told global business and government leaders.

“How is it possible that in today’s world people are still dying of hunger, being exploited, condemned to illiteracy, lacking basic medical care and left without shelter?” he asked in a message sent to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

“The process of globalization, which has by now clearly demonstrated the interdependence of the world’s nations and peoples, thus has a fundamentally moral dimension, which must make itself felt in the economic, cultural, political and religious discussions that aim to shape the future of the international community,” he wrote.

The Pope’s message, addressed to Klaus Schwab, chairperson of the World Economic Forum, was published by the Vatican on January 17.

The annual meeting in Davos from January 15-19 brought together people representing business,

government, academia and media to discuss a number of themes: security and cooperation; growth and jobs; artificial intelligence; and climate, nature and energy.

In his message, the Pope wrote, “In a world increasingly threatened by violence, aggression and fragmentation, it is essential that states and businesses join in promoting farsighted and ethically sound models of globalisation”.

These models must entail “subordinating the pursuit of power and individual gain, be it political or economic, to the common good of our human family, giving priority to the poor, the needy and those in the most vulnerable situations”, he wrote.

Because of the global nature of many businesses and finance, nations “have a limited capacity to govern rapid changes in international economic and financial relations”, he wrote.

“This situation requires that businesses themselves be increasingly guided not simply by the pursuit of fair profit, but also by high ethical stan-

dards, especially with regard to the less developed countries, which should not be at the mercy of abusive or usurious financial systems,” he wrote.

“Authentic development must be global, shared by all nations and in every part of the world, or it will regress even in areas marked hitherto by constant progress,” he wrote.

“It is my hope, then, that the participants in this year’s forum will be mindful of the moral responsibility that each of us has in the fight against poverty, the attainment of an integral development for all our brothers and sisters, and the quest for a peaceful coexistence among peoples,” the Pope wrote.

## Pope says he’ll be buried outside the Vatican, is simplifying funeral

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis has said that he has decided to be buried in Rome’s Basilica of St Mary Major instead of in St Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican, and that he has simplified the rites for a papal funeral.

In a December 12 interview with Mexican news outlet N+, the Pope, in good humour, discussed plans for his own funeral, as well as the trips he still hopes to complete during his pontificate.

The Pope said that he had already discussed preparations for a papal funeral with his master of liturgical ceremonies, Archbishop Diego Giovanni Ravelli. “We simplified them quite a bit,” he said, and jokingly added that “I will premiere the new ritual”.

Pope Francis celebrated the funeral Mass for Pope Benedict XVI in January, 2023, following a rite based on, but not identical to, a papal funeral, since Pope Benedict was not a reigning pope at the time of his death.

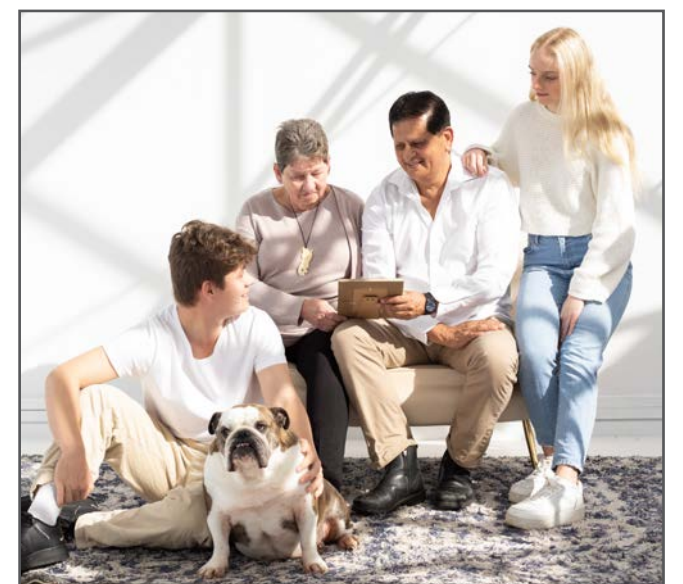
Breaking with recent tradition, Pope Francis said that he has chosen to be buried at the Basilica of St Mary Major because of his “very strong connection” with the church. Pope Leo XIII, who died in 1903, was the last pope not buried at St Peter’s Basilica; Pope Leo’s tomb is in the Basilica of St John Lateran in Rome. Six popes are buried at St Mary Major; the last to be interred there was Pope Clement IX in 1669.

Pope Francis said that he wants to be buried in the Marian basilica because “it is my great devotion”, adding that he would visit St Mary Major on Sunday mornings when he travelled to Rome before becoming pope.

Pope Francis often prays before the icon “Salus Populi Romani” (“health of the Roman people”) displayed in the basilica before and after his international trips, to entrust his safety to Mary.

“The place is already prepared,” he said.

Asked about his future travels, the Pope said that a trip to Belgium is “certain”, and that two other trips, to Polynesia and Argentina, are possible.



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# Law student's artwork captures Mary as mother of all

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

A painting that is a modern interpretation and exploration of Mary as Mother of God and mother of all, was unveiled at The Logos Centre — Whānāu Maria in central Auckland on December 14.

“E Maria e matou whaea (Mary, Our Mother)”, an oil on canvas, commissioned artwork, was created by law student Francesca Adams from Howick. Ms Adams works part time as a youth worker at The LOGOS Project, and is also a youth leader at Our Lady, Star of the Sea parish in Howick.

Speaking of the unveiling of the artwork, Ms Adams said that “both my immediate and LOGOS families gathered to celebrate a beautiful day of personal reflection, waiata, and prayer”.

A description of the artwork sent to *NZ Catholic* stated that “the work depicts parallels between Francesca’s whakapapa (genealogy) to Pawarenga and Pangaru, and the maternal side of Mary that could still be relatable. Within this Māori context, Francesca captured the role of Mary as the feminine version of great love, acceptance and hope. These aspects of motherhood are translated through her laughing with her baby and being surrounded by children. Honouring her in this context was also explored and commented on through the galaxy of stars overhead, illuminating her as the Queen of Heaven”.

“The Matariki artwork imbued in the sky also evokes parallels between what Māori believe are a symbol of new beginnings, remembrance, and joy, and Mary’s message and role, which is eternal. Along with the sacredness emanating from the sky, there are two huia birds [which] accompany Mary. The huia was the most sacred to Māori, a symbol of rangatiratanga (leadership) and mana (power, essence, presence). A single huia feather was worn in the hair like a royal crown; the tapu (sacred[ness]) of the feather entwining with the tapu of the wearer. Francesca chose these birds to represent both the status of Mary as rangatiratanga, and flirt with the idea of traditional Catholic iconography such as angels in a Māori context”.

The description continued: “There was another interest in the interconnectedness of the past, the present, and the future, which Francesca wanted to capture. This work has been divided into three panels, not only by her choice of colours — muted tones in the past and vibrant in the present and future — but also by its subject.

“In the left section, a Māori boy contemplatively looks into the future with a sense of wonder and



Francesca Adams with her painting ‘E Maria e matou whaea (Mary, Our Mother)’

calmness. In the right section, a young girl looks to Mary with certainty, while Whina Cooper and her mokopuna march into the future. The whakatauki which can be seen in the bottom left corner of the work, Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua; ‘I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past’, informed Francesca’s exploration of time and life as a continuous cosmic process. This idea of whakapapa shaping both present and future identity is also integral to the story of the LOGOS

Project.

“Symbolically through the waka, Francesca wanted to capture how the wairua (spirit) and whakapapa of LOGOS in its foundation continues on, with Mary at the centre for all inspiration. It is a reminder of where we have been and where we are going.”

“The resulting body of work is a celebration of motherhood through honouring Mary, and an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of life.”

## Family Matters

Helen Luxford



## Back to school

It’s that time of year again when dread builds up in most kids’ minds — the transition from summer holidays back to a new term of school. This can be a challenging time for many families — ours included! Our kids run the gamut of being excited to go back, to chafing at the reimposed restrictions that being at school all day puts on them. It is important to help children ease back into the routine of school life, and to provide them with the necessary support to make the transition as smooth as possible. Here are some suggestions based on approaches we’ve used to help our children transition back to school after the summer holidays:

Firstly, we’ve kicked off bringing back the routine . . . our kids, especially the ones who have reached teenage years, have slipped into sleeping well past the point where they’d be able to get up and get to school on time. Coupled with a late bedtime, things over the holidays easily end up all over the place. So, a week or so before school, we kick off the transition back into more established routines. This seems to help them adjust without the abrupt changeover that would otherwise occur. At least it’s easier than the adjustment to daylight saving!

We’ve also kicked off getting organised — this is a key to a successful transition back to school.

Our youngest daughter, in particular, has been bugging me repeatedly to “get her drink bottle sorted!” Make sure your children have all the necessary school supplies, including textbooks, notebooks, and stationery. This has been interesting — our school has partnered with one of the office stationery providers, which makes it easy to order and obtain — when we’ve done a cost comparison it’s worked out to be almost the same as if we went and shopped across multiple stores for the absolutely cheapest price! One thing I want to try this year is to set up a designated study area at home, where our younger children can do their homework and study, while being in with us.

It’s critical not to underestimate the amount of emotional support your kids might need to transition back to school. School is made up of a surprising number of milestones as they transition from one level to another, and each year brings new challenges — inevitably at some point they’re going to be separated from friends, or end up with a teacher they’re just not sure about — especially if siblings have spun some stories! Encourage your children to talk about their feelings and concerns. Provide reassurance and support, and let them know that you are there for them if they need help. Just talking it through can

make a huge difference during the transition back.

Once it’s all begun, staying involved in school is important to help children succeed. We’ve seen far too many parents at our children’s schools (but absolutely not all) cut off all involvement with the school once the kids are dropped at the gate. By attending the parent-teacher conferences, joining in the school events, and staying up-to-date with their progress — without being a helicopter parent — we’re able to help our kids feel that it is not just a chore they have to suffer through on their own. It also helps with identifying any issues early on, and being onside with the school to help make things better.

Transitioning back to school after the summer holidays can be a challenging time for many families. However, with the right support and guidance, our kids can hopefully start the school year with confidence, and just maybe a bit of enthusiasm. Or at least not dread. . . .

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Helen Luxford is a physician, working part-time. She is a parishioner of St Michael’s, Remuera. Together with her husband Michael, they are raising their children in the Catholic Faith and reflecting on the challenges and joys that brings.



# End-of-world plots test limits

by NEVIL GIBSON

The movie world's appetite for post-apocalyptic thrillers hasn't abated, despite the overkill delivered by the computer-generated blockbusters. Marvel Studios and its rivals are facing box office fatigue from the surfeit of special effects and slim stories with little substance.

In their place, artificial intelligence (AI) has stepped up as more credible fare, as well as being a real-life issue in the recent actors' and writers' strikes in Hollywood.

While none of these movies has pretensions to save the box office, they have attracted major stars, and have serious intentions at raising topical issues. Who would have suspected Julia Roberts having a middle-class meltdown at threats to her lifestyle and family in *Leave the World Behind* (Netflix)?

This is based on a Rumaan Alam novel, which starts with Roberts, her husband (Ethan Hawke) and two children escaping their comfortable Brooklyn, New York, apartment for a lavish Long Island mansion they have rented for the weekend.

They are just getting settled in when signals of impending disaster start building up. They lose cellphone coverage and, while sunbathing on a beach, see a cargo ship crash on to the shore.

Later that night, the mansion's owners, a black man (Mahershala Ali) and his daughter (Myha'la), suddenly turn up, saying they had to return home because of a city-wide blackout.

That scenario is also the starting point for *Foe* (Amazon Studios), based on a novel by Canadian writer Iain Reid (*I am Thinking of Ending Things*) and set in 2065. A couple, played by Saoirse Ronan and Paul Mescal, are living in



*Leave the World Behind* cast (left to right) Mahershala Ali, Myha'la Herrold, Julia Roberts and Ethan Hawke.

## Movie Review

outback Australia, representing a world that has cooked itself to an inhospitable state.

They, too, are shocked when another black man (Aaron Pierre) turns up unannounced with a proposition that may save them. In both movies, the racial tension is a manipulative thread that runs through to the end.

It is most obvious in *Leave the World Behind*, where the bigoted Roberts character suspects the visitors are not the owners, gives vent to her prejudices that favour her own family's survival, and questions whether a blackout exists despite mounting evidence that includes a mass-pileup of self-driving Teslas (a scene taken from *White Noise*, another post-apocalyptic thriller).

In *Foe*, the twist is that the stranger offers the husband a future on board a spaceship, and

the promise of a flesh-and-blood avatar for the left-behind wife. In addition, the recruiter remains part of the household to monitor their relationship, adding a spookier dimension to an already emotionally-fraught triangle.

Director and co-writer (with Reid) Garth Davis (*Lion*, *Penguin Bloom*) has a harder job to maintain interest despite the high-end pairing of Ronan and Mescal in his three-handed cast. By contrast, writer-director Sam Esmail (*Mr Robot*) has more resources in his cast, which includes Kevin Bacon as an off-the-grid weirdo.

But attention spans are tested due to an inconclusive ending, and a running time that outlives that content.

Ratings: *Leave the World Behind* — Mature audiences. 141 minutes. *Foe* — R16, 110 minutes.

## CLIPS

### Maestro (Netflix)

Bradley Cooper is among the frontrunners for an Oscar with another of his vehicles in which he is the writer-director, as well as the lead (the first was *A Star is Born* (2018) with Lady Gaga). This time he plays composer-conductor Leonard Bernstein, but if anyone gets an award it's likely to be for Carey Mulligan, who plays his Latin American wife Felicia Montealegre. Her behind-the-scenes role is as dramatic as Bernstein's acclaim for his music in the 1960s and his private life, which was mostly hidden from the public. The narrative takes time to warm up, with the early years of their marriage depicted in monochrome. But as his fame grew, so did the chain-smoking Bernstein's depression, and the emotional burden on his family. Fortunately, Cooper ensured access to Bernstein's music and his performances, including *West Side Story* and a Mahler symphony, which play a major role. Rating: Mature audiences. 129 minutes.

### Two Tickets to Greece/Les Cyclades (Palace Films)

Chalk and cheese childhood friends reunite in middle age for what promises to be a bonding luxury holiday in the Greek islands. French comedy director Marc Fitoussi quickly establishes why this odd coupling of uptight and newly-divorced Olivia Côte with permanent "wild child" Laure Calamy won't work. Both also starred in *Antoinette in the Cevennes*. The trip starts in chaos, as they are dumped on a featureless island because cheapskate Calamy didn't pay for the full trip to a luxury resort. While Calamy adapts to every setback, seizing opportunities as they come, Côte doesn't get going with the flow until they meet one of Calamy's old friends (Katharine Scott Thomas in another of her multilingual roles), who lives out her hippie dreams on Mykonos as a jewellery maker. Here, the three women are faced with problems that no one wants on holiday. Rating: Mature audiences. 110 minutes.

### Next Goal Wins (Walt Disney/Searchlight)

Writer-director Taika Waititi has a self-deprecatory habit of playing down expectations for his brand of entertainment. He says he did this story of a hopeless sports-team-comes-good "for the money" — meaning it needed someone of his stature to get a Hollywood deal for a based-on-fact movie set in American Samoa, but made in Hawaii. Its lead is the formidable laconic Michael Fassbender, whose credits such as *The Killer*, *Alien*, *Prometheus*, and *X-Men: Apocalypse* make him ideal as a comedic foil. A co-star is Elisabeth Moss (*Top of the Lake*), who plays Fassbender's ex, and is partly responsible for him being sent to this remote island in penitence for his coaching shortcomings and anger problem. His job is to create a team, in a place where other forms of football than soccer hold sway, that can at least score one goal in its next qualifying match. Every possible Polynesian cliché is trotted out, ensuring an easy watch with familiar faces Oscar Kightley, Rachel House, and David Fane. A standout is Kaimana, who plays real-life soccer star and fa'afafine Jaiyah Saelua. Rating: Parental guidance advised. 84 minutes.

# Vatican to publish 'private' homilies of late Pope Benedict

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican publishing house announced it will release a book of some 130 homilies given by the late Pope Benedict XVI at private Sunday Masses — 30 given while he was pope, and more than 100 given to members of his household once he retired.

The homilies were recorded and transcribed by the consecrated women, members of *Memores Domini*, who lived with him and ran his household, said Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, president of the board of directors of the Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI Vatican Foundation.

Announcing the publication on December 23, the foundation and the Vatican publishing house did not give a date for its release, but they published a homily that Pope Benedict XVI had given on December 22, 2013, the fourth Sunday of Advent of his first year of retirement.

The homily focused on St Joseph and the biblical description of him as a "just man", which, before the birth of Jesus, would have signified that he followed the Torah, the law given to the people of Israel.

"The danger is that, if the Word of God is essentially law, it can be regarded as a sum of prescriptions

and prohibitions, a package of norms, and the attitude therefore would be to observe the norms and thus be correct," Pope Benedict had said in the homily.

"But if religion is like that, if that is all it is, there is no personal relationship with God, and man remains within himself, seeks to perfect himself, to be perfect," he had said, and it is difficult to love a God "who presents himself only with rules and sometimes even threats".

But with the coming of Jesus, the late Pope said, the law is not a set of regulations to be observed, but it is "an expression of God's will", and, by trying to understand and follow God's will, one enters into a relationship with him.

"A truly righteous person like St Joseph is like this: for him the law is not simply the observance of rules, but presents itself as a word of love, an invitation to dialogue," the homily continues. The dialogue leads one to discover "that all these norms do not apply for their own sake, but are rules of love, they serve so that love grows in me".

When one understands that "the whole law is only love of God and neighbour", one begins to see the face



Pope Benedict XVI is pictured during Mass at Yankee Stadium in New York in 2008 (OSV News photo/Nancy Phelan Wiechec, CNS file)

of God and is led to Christ, he said.

Pope Benedict said that Christians face "the same temptation, the same danger that existed in the Old Testament: even a Christian can arrive at an attitude in which the Christian religion is regarded as a package of

rules, of prohibitions and positive norms", and they can believe that, if one tries hard enough, he or she can reach perfection.

The point of faith, though, he said, is to find Jesus, "the way of life and the joy of faith".



We are here ▼ Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

THE CHURCH YEAR

Advent

Christmas

Ordinary Time

Lent

Eastertime

Ordinary Time

# An awareness of how God communicates with us

## Scripture

by Fr Kevin Waldie SM

Of interest to us today is the perspective adopted by each biblical author within the particular wording of these verses of Scripture. So, as we read or listen to them, we are being invited into an awareness of how God communicates with us, speaking through chosen individuals at different times in human history.

Moses is the first of these individuals. In Deuteronomy, he highlights the importance of the words spoken by God's designated prophets. God's intentions for his people are thereby plainly articulated. What Moses himself prophetically declares sums up the sublime role played by God's elect. Taking to heart the import of his words is,

therefore, a necessary step for every person who is the recipient of his message.

Paul also speaks about his vocation as an avowed agent of God's Word. He instructs the Corinthians to rightly perceive of their state in life. The specific contrasts he makes therefore conjure up a clearly voiced message. Everyone is to be intent on doing what the Lord commands. That, by its nature, requires every believer to be mindful of godly behaviour, and being devoted to what the Lord reveals through a personal, earthly means.

In Mark's Gospel, the extraordinary portrayal of Jesus makes us look to him as the truly su-

**January 28:** Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time. **Readings:** 1. Deuteronomy 18:15-20; **Psalm:** 95; 2. 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; **Gospel:** Mark 1:21-28.

perative, earthly agent, through whom God both speaks and acts. What the audience here experiences is quite astounding. As a consequence, their reaction to his words and deeds is revealing. And Mark adds to that by remarking that word of this phenomenon spread well beyond Capernaum. Something never before witnessed shows these people how God has come very close in an astonishing way.

These three texts enlighten and inspire us for our journey of faith. For they simply but powerfully pull us into a beguiling experience of God's caring will for us all.

# Weighing up how the reality of life affects us

This Sunday's readings call for some reflection on the human condition, and its everyday challenges. As we therefore consider what these texts are saying, we come to weigh up how the reality of life affects us.

Job's words may seem terribly depressing and gloomy. But they are downright realistic about life's ups and downs. His own personal circumstances have caused him to compose a kind of lament concerning the frailty of human existence. Yet a brighter future for God's faithful people is hinted at, and the whole book of Job bears that out. The saving intervention of God in this world is therefore a hoped-for event that can calm the present disquiet.

Addressing the Corinthians, Paul also pursues a line of thought that ponders his present circumstances and mission. As someone entrusted with proclaiming the Good News about Jesus the Christ, he is only too aware of his mission's challenges. It is his very vocation, though, to savour the Gospel message he received, and to deliver it knowing that he must endure whatever comes while awaiting the completion of God's plan. Thus, his words are to be seen within the larger frame of enacting God's will.

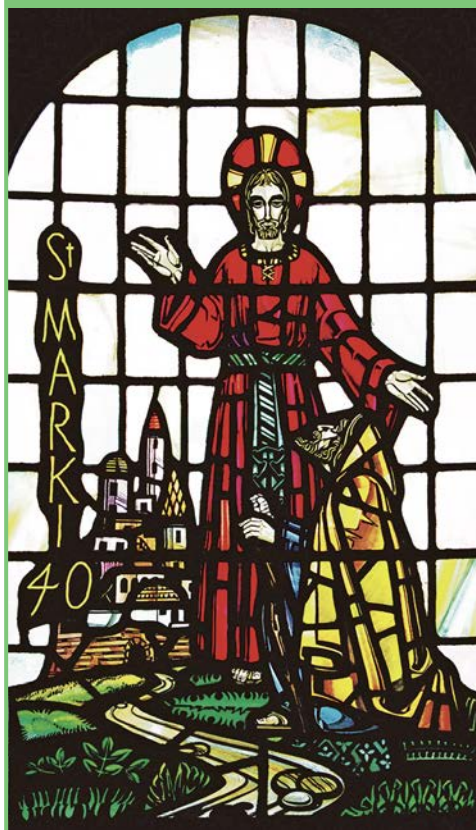
When Mark's Jesus begins his mission, he quickly moves to encounter all sorts of people. And, in the process, he brings to them the powerful love of God in word and deed. Curing Simon's

**February 4:** Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time. **Readings:** 1. Job 7:1-4,6-7; **Psalm:** 147; 2. 1 Corinthians 9:16-19,22-23; **Gospel:** Mark 1:29-39.

mother-in-law signals the purpose for which Jesus entered the world. By conquering disease and demonic forces, he launches into his task, utterly intent upon bringing about the kingdom of God. And in noting that, we grasp the very core message of who Jesus is, and what he came to change in our world.

These inspired texts shed interesting light on our need for salvation, and the transformation our lives are undergoing.

## SAINTED GLASS



Next Sunday, the fifth in Ordinary Time, the Gospel (Mark 1:29-39) features Jesus curing many "diseases of one kind or another". This window from First Presbyterian Church, Invercargill, shows one such event. I have witnessed Jesus healing today, too, through those gifted by the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12). He might heal you, too, if you believe enough to ask. — Glen McCullough

# Church destroyed by ISIS in Iraq completely restored 10 years later

MOSUL, IRAQ (CAN) — The Dominican Church of Our Lady of the Hour, one of the most emblematic in Mosul, northern Iraq, has been completely restored after the destruction carried out by Islamic State terrorists 10 years ago.

On December 31, Father Olivier Poquillon, director of the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem, posted on social media some photographs of the church, which was rebuilt with the collaboration of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

That same day, on the occasion of the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, the Dominicans of Iraq celebrated a Mass for peace in the church for the first time since its destruction. The Eucharist was celebrated by Father Gerard Francisco Timoner, superior general of the Dominican order, in the presence of several friars and believers, in an atmosphere of joy and hope.

The Latin Church of Our Lady of the Hour, whose official name in Arabic is al-Saa'a, was established in 1873 as the centre of the Dominican presence in Iraq.

It was also an important cultural and academic centre, including the first girls' school, and it had the first printing press in Iraq.

Located in the old city of Mosul, a historic district that was characterised by strong relationships between various cultures and religions, such as Christians, Yazidis, Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as Arabs, Chaldeans, and Kurds, this church offered a space



The Dominican Church of Our Lady of the Hour, Photo: ACI Mena/CNA

for dialogue fostered by the Dominican friars.

However, this delicate balance was shattered with the invasion and occupation of the city by Islamic State terrorists in the summer of 2014. The church, like much of Mosul's historic centre, was heavily damaged by the jihadists, and by clashes during the Iraqi army's offensive to retake the city.

In addition, ISIS used the church as a weapons warehouse and for torture. Its archaeological artifacts were stolen, including its famous clock, which was a gift from the wife of Emperor Napo-

leon III to the city's Dominican fathers.

The destruction of the church was not only an architectural tragedy, but also negatively affected all residents of Mosul, Muslims and Christians alike, as they lost an important symbol of the city's history and identity.

In April 2020, UNESCO undertook restoration work on both the church and the old city of Mosul. The Dominicans were actively involved in this task, so that the reconstruction was not limited only to material aspects, but also contributed to reestablishing the ties between the various cultural and religious communities.



# Doctrinal dicastery explains how, when, gay couples can be blessed

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — A Catholic priest can bless a gay or other unmarried couple as long as it is not a formal liturgical blessing, and does not give the impression that the Catholic Church is blessing the union as if it were a marriage, the Vatican doctrinal office has said.

The request for a blessing can express and nurture “openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered”, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith said in a formal declaration published on December 18.

The document, “Fiducia Supplicans” (“Supplicating Trust”) was subtitled, “On the pastoral meaning of blessings”, and was approved by Pope Francis during an audience with Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, dicastery prefect, on December 18.

In his introductory note, Cardinal Fernández said that questions about a priest blessing an LGBTQ+ or other unmarried couple had been sent to the doctrinal office repeatedly over the past few years.

The need for a fuller explanation of blessings became clear, he wrote, after Pope Francis responded to the “dubia” or questions of several cardinals in a letter released in early October.

In his letter, the Pope insisted that marriage is an “exclusive, stable and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to conceiving children”, which is why the Church “avoids all kinds of rites or sacramentals that could contradict this conviction, and imply that it is recognising as a marriage something that is not”.

At the same time, the Pope said, “pastoral prudence must adequately discern if there are forms of blessing, solicited by one or various persons,

that don’t transmit a mistaken concept of marriage”.

Cardinal Fernández said that the declaration “remains firm on the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage, not allowing any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite that can create confusion”, but it also explores the “pastoral meaning of blessings” in a way that opens “the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples, without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church’s perennial teaching on marriage”.

The Church “remains firm” in teaching that marriage can be contracted only between one woman and one man, he said, and continues to insist that “rites and prayers that could create confusion” about a marriage and another form of relationship “are inadmissible”.

But in Catholic tradition blessings go well beyond the formal ritual used in marriage and other sacraments.

“Blessings are among the most widespread and evolving sacramentals. Indeed, they lead us to grasp God’s presence in all the events of life and remind us that, even in the use of created things, human beings are invited to seek God, to love him, and to serve him faithfully,” the declaration said. That is why people, meals, rosaries, homes, pets and myriad other things can be, and are, blessed on various occasions.

“From a strictly liturgical point of view,” the declaration said, “a blessing requires that what is blessed be conformed to God’s will, as expressed in the teachings of the Church,” which is why the then-doctrinal congregation in 2021 excluded the possibility of blessing gay couples.

But, the new document said, Catholics should “avoid the risk of reducing the meaning of blessings” to their formal, liturgical use, because that



Pope Francis poses for a photo with Msgr Armando Matteo, left, secretary of the doctrinal section of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, and Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, dicastery prefect, during a meeting in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on December 18, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

“would lead us to expect the same moral conditions for a simple blessing that are called for in the reception of the sacraments”.

“Indeed, there is the danger that a pastoral gesture that is so beloved and widespread will be subjected to too many moral prerequisites, which, under the claim of control, could overshadow the unconditional power of God’s love that forms the basis for the gesture of blessing,” it said.

A person who asks for God’s blessing, the declaration said, “shows himself to be in need of God’s saving presence in his life. and one who asks for a blessing from the Church recognises the latter as a sacrament of the salvation that God offers”.

The Church, it said, should be grateful when people ask for a blessing, and should see it as a sign that they know they need God’s help.

“When people ask for a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed as a precondition for

conferring it, that is, those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection,” it said.

At the same time, the declaration insisted that the Mass is not the proper setting for the less formal forms of blessing that could include the blessing of a gay couple, and it repeated that “it is not appropriate for a diocese, a bishops’ conference” or other Church structure to issue a formal blessing prayer or ritual for unwed couples. The blessing also should not be given “in concurrence” with a civil marriage ceremony, to avoid appearing as a sort of Church blessing of the civil union.

However, it said, a priest or deacon could “join in the prayer of those persons who, although in a union that cannot be compared in any way to a marriage, desire to entrust themselves to the Lord and his mercy, to invoke his help, and to be guided to a greater understanding of his plan of love and of truth”.

## Cardinal says that the Vatican is not moving toward accepting gay marriage

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican’s affirmation that a priest can give an informal blessing to a gay couple who asks for one is not a first step toward the Catholic Church recognising same-sex marriages, said Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

“Those who say so either have not read the text or have ‘bad blood’, if you will pardon the expression. The statement clearly and ad nauseam states that these blessings are non-ritualised, so that they are not interpreted as a marriage,” the cardinal told the Spanish newspaper *ABC* in an interview published on December 25.

The doctrinal dicastery’s document, “Fiducia Supplicans” (“Supplicating Trust”), which was approved by Pope Francis, said that, while the Church “remains firm” in teaching that marriage is a life-long union between a man and a woman, in certain circumstances priests can

give non-sacramental, non-liturgical blessings to “couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples, without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church’s perennial teaching on marriage”.

Several bishops’ conferences in Africa and elsewhere reacted strongly against the document, which was published on December 18, and issued statements forbidding their priests from offering such blessings.

While Cardinal Fernández insisted that the document “upholds with great clarity and simplicity the Catholic teaching on marriage and sexuality”, he said that bishops have a right and duty to advise their priests on the possible use of such blessings.

“What they (African bishops) raise is the inappropriateness of performing blessings that could easily be confused with a legitimisation of an irregular union in their regional contexts,” he said.

In addition, he said, several Afri-

can nations have laws that “penalise with imprisonment the mere fact of declaring oneself gay”, so it would be difficult to imagine a priest in those countries giving a gay couple a blessing.

“If a priest gives this kind of simple blessing, he is not a heretic, he is not ratifying anything, nor is he denying the Catholic doctrine on marriage.” —Cardinal Fernández

“In reality,” the cardinal said, “it is up to each local bishop to make this discernment in his diocese, or in any case to give further guidance.”

In other situations, Cardinal Fernández said, people reacting negatively to the document simply

did not read it.

“The central theme of the document is the value of ‘non-liturgical,’ ‘non-ritualised’ blessings, which are not a marriage, they are not an ‘approval’ or a ratification of anything,” he said. “They are simply the response of a pastor to two people who ask for God’s help. And, in this case, the pastor does not set any conditions.”

Blessing two people who ask for God’s help is not accepting their relationship as a marriage, “nor is it a ratification of the life they lead, nor is it an absolution”, the cardinal said. “It is a simple gesture of pastoral closeness that does not have the same demands that a sacrament has.”

“If a priest gives this kind of simple blessing, he is not a heretic, he is not ratifying anything, nor is he denying the Catholic doctrine on marriage,” Cardinal Fernández said.



# Questions on baptismal records and on earthly sufferings and Purgatory

## Our Faith Q&A

by JENNA MARIE COOPER (OSV NEWS)

**Q: My cousin is getting married and will need to obtain a copy of her baptismal certificate for inclusion in the pre-nuptial enquiry. As a newborn baby, it wasn't clear if she would survive, and so she was baptized in emergency at the hospital. To whom should she write, in order to obtain her baptismal certificate? (Ireland)**

**A:** The short answer is that she should write to the parish in whose geographical territory the hospital in question is located.

In canon law, it's clear that sacramental record-keeping in general is intended to happen in a parish context. For example, canon 535 tells us that: "Each parish is to have parochial registers, that is, those of baptisms, marriages, deaths. . . The pastor is to see to it that these registers are accurately inscribed and carefully preserved." Of course, marriages and baptisms can and do happen outside of parish churches. But even when a wedding or baptism is celebrated at a non-parochial space — such as a shrine, university chapel, or the chapel of a religious community, or even a hospital — the local parish must be informed so that it can be recorded properly in that parish's record books.

We read in c. 878 (which actually seems to envision an emergency baptism scenario, like your cousin's): "If baptism was administered neither by the pastor nor in his presence, the

minister of baptism, whoever that was, must notify the parish priest of the parish in which the baptism was administered, so that he may register the baptism." Therefore, the hospital's local parish should have your cousin's baptismal record.

Granted, sometimes it can be hard to determine exactly in which parish's territory the hospital was located, especially if it was part of a large urban area with several nearby Catholic churches.

If your cousin runs into this issue, the best thing to do would be to contact the relevant diocese. The diocesan chancery office would have access to maps of parish territorial boundaries, and would also be familiar with any "quirks" of local sacramental record-keeping.

**Q: When I was a kid, I would often hear adults say, particularly at funerals, that when a long term and chronically ill person finally passed, they would go "straight to heaven," as God counted their years of suffering as sufficient to pay for their sins, and required nothing further from them. Could you comment? (St. Joseph's, Indiana)**

**A:** Short of a formal canonization process or a clear case of martyrdom, there isn't any way to know for sure how long or short a particular person's stay in purgatory will be, much less whether they have been able to skip purgatory altogether. Purgatory isn't about "serving time" for sins committed, so much as it is a time of



Photo: Unsplash

purification and becoming ready to enter fully into God's presence. The degree to which an individual needs this kind of purification is something which is only truly known between that soul and God.

That being said, the church does teach that suffering in this life can be redemptive. As we hear in one of the prayers which a priest might use to conclude the sacrament of penance, as follows: "May the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of all the saints, whatever good you do and suffering you endure, heal your sins, help

you to grow in holiness, and reward you with eternal life." The clear implication here is that suffering, when patiently endured, can help heal the wounds caused by sins. So, I think it's reasonable to hope that a generally virtuous person who suffered through a long illness could have had their time in purgatory at least shortened — though it's important to still pray for the repose of their soul, regardless.

Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist, whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.

## Papal Prayer

**The Pope's universal prayer intention for January: For the Gift of Diversity in the Church**

Pope Francis calls for prayers to the Holy Spirit "to help us recognize the gift of different charisms within Christian communities and to discover the richness of various ritual traditions within the Catholic Church."



## WORDS TO PONDER

“Pray, hope and don't worry. Anxiety doesn't help at all. Our Merciful Lord will listen to your prayer.” – St Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) (1887-1968).

## 40 YEARS AGO

### NEW BISHOP OF RAROTONGA

A New Zealand Marist priest, Father Robin Leamy, currently provincial of the Marist Province of Oceania, has been appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Rarotonga.

He succeeds Bishop Denis Browne, who was named Auckland's tenth bishop in June last year.

Aged 49, Father Leamy was born in Wellington and educated at St Patrick's College, Silverstream. He trained at the Marist seminary at Greenmeadows, and was ordained on July 21, 1958.

He gained his Master of Arts degree at the University of Canterbury and, during his time in Christchurch, resided at Rochester Hall, a hall of residence for Catholic students.

Father Leamy has been a parish priest in Western Samoa, a teacher in Catholic secondary schools, principal of Moa Moa College, and director of Catholic education in Samoa.

For the past six years, he has been regional provincial of the Marist Fathers in the Pacific.

Father Leamy will be bishop of a diocese made up of the 14 islands of the Cook group, plus Niue. They have a land mass of less than 200 square miles, spread over 900,000 square miles of ocean.

Of the population of about 18,000, half are under 15 years, 2827 are Catholics.

A date for Father Leamy's ordination has still to be announced.

— *Zealandia*, January 29, 1984

## CAPTION CONTEST



Write the best caption for this photo and win a \$30 Countdown voucher. Email your ideas by Friday, Feb. 9 to [design@nzcatholic.org.nz](mailto:design@nzcatholic.org.nz) Subject 'Caption Contest 677'. Or post to NZ Catholic, PO Box 147000, Ponsonby, Auckland 1144. Please include your postal address.



# Papal honours for two Mid-Canterbury parishioners

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

Two long-serving parishioners of St Augustine of Canterbury Parish in Mid-Canterbury were recently awarded papal honours in two different churches within the parish, where they have served for many years.

On November 12, parish priest Father Lito Mago Quiñones presented Kevin O'Brien with the Benemerenti Medal and certificate in Holy Name Church, Ashburton, and on the fol-



Mid-Canterbury parish priest Father Lito Quiñones presents Kevin O'Brien with the Benemerenti certificate.

lowing Sunday Methven parishioner Viv Barrett also received the Benemerenti award in Our Lady of the Snows Church in Methven, from Father Quiñones.

Benemerenti medals are awarded by the Pope for long and exceptional service to the Catholic Church, and that was something that was emphasised in both these awards.

Kevin O'Brien grew up in the Leeston parish, but in 1964 bought a farm in the Ashburton district and attended the former St Ita's church at Hinds. He became heavily involved with the upkeep of the church and its grounds, as well as in ecumenical activities in the area. When the family left Hinds in 2002 to live in Ashburton, the Hinds Anglican community put on a farewell function for them.

Once in Ashburton, he became involved with many aspects of parish life, including the parish Conservation and Maintenance Committee and St Vincent de Paul Society. He is well known for his practical ability, carrying out many maintenance tasks, and he also assists at funerals in Holy Name Church. Kevin is aged 90.

Viv Barrett has been serving Our Lady of the Snows church (originally Holy Family church) in Methven for



Father Quiñones presents Viv Barrett with the Benemerenti medal (Photo: Annie Jacobs, Snowfed Newspaper, Methven)

more than 60 years, and was recently responsible for the restoration of a large stained-glass window of the Holy Family.

Speaking to the congregation after the award Viv said "Why me? People ask why I do what I do. I do it because I love it. Thank God I'm well enough to do it at my age." Viv turned 91 two

days after the presentation.

Viv is also a member of the St Augustine of Canterbury parish Conservation and Maintenance Committee, and is responsible for maintenance of the Methven church and grounds. He can often be seen trimming edges and shrubs at Our Lady of the Snows, as well as doing building maintenance.

## TOP SCHOLARS 2023

### St Peter's College, Gore



Dux  
Kate Perkins



Proxime Accessit  
Marielle Penus

### St Joseph's Māori Girls' College, Napier



Dux  
Holley Carlson

### St Mary's College, Auckland



Joint Dux  
Emilie Garland and Isabelle Lloyd

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## DEATHS

**HARDIMAN, Sabina, Sr Mary Chanel, RSM, QSM.** On October 21, 2023, at Sacred Heart Home, Brockville. Dearly loved member of Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand, in the 67th year of her religious profession. Dearly loved daughter of the late Patrick and Ellen, and loved sister and sister-in-law of Sr Therese, RSM, Maureen and David Nicholson, Sr Alice, SMSM, Patricia and Sean Fitzgerald, Kevin, Mary and Michael Lawlor, Stephen and Joan and Sr Frances, SMSM, a very much loved aunt and great aunt, a very special friend to many. Grateful thanks to the Little Sisters of the Poor, the staff of Sacred Heart Home, and the chaplain for their loving and respectful care of Chanel. The Funeral Mass was celebrated on October 27, 2023 at St Patrick's Basilica, South Dunedin, followed by interment at the Andersons Bay Cemetery.

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lom444



# New vision launched for parish of New Plymouth

by NZ CATHOLIC staff

On the feast of Christ the King, November 27, the fruits of a five-year journey have culminated in the launch of a new vision for The Catholic Parish of New Plymouth. Their new Bishop John Adams came to celebrate the whole parish Mass to launch the vision, and join in a panel discussion about the vision with parishioners.

Priorities like evangelisation, leadership, community, ministry, and worship are at the heart of the new vision, which is broadly based on the Divine Renovation principles of the “primacy of evangelisation”, the “best of leadership”, and “reliance on the Holy Spirit”. Several parishes throughout the country have experienced the transformation this brings.

“... “We’ve got a vision, we’ve prayed to the Holy Spirit for it... it gives us a clear mental picture of what could be... uniting us after some very tough years through the pandemic,” Fr Story told The Catholic Weekly from Sydney.

“We have been a fragmented community in decline. Now we’ve got a big reason to come together and be unified behind a vision.”

When Fr Story accepted a call to return to the parish where he first served eight years earlier, the changes he saw shocked him.

“Many parishioners had gone. Huge numbers of people were no longer around,” Fr Story reportedly said in The Catholic Weekly article.

Parish leadership saw the need to move



Bishop Adams at Mass in New Plymouth

towards a mission option that aimed to make disciples of Jesus Christ, hoping that this will also renew the parish. A mission discernment team was formed to discern a parish vision. The Sydney Archdiocesan document “Go Make Disciples” was a reference when penning the vision. Fr Story and a group from his parish went to a Sydney evangelisation conference run by Divine Renovation in February 2023. Much was learned, especially regarding leadership and evangelisation.

“[It is all about working towards] a

future for ourselves — create a vision of what we could see happening in New Plymouth,” said Fr Story.

“[We were inspired to] write the vision in the way we have now,” said Shanon Stallard, a parish volunteer assisting Fr Story.

By next June, New Plymouth parish plans to develop the practical strategies to put the vision into practice.

While the long road ahead remains, priests and parishioners have strong hopes that the vision and inspiration will bear great fruit.

## WIT'S END

### Some summer time humour:

An airline once infused its cabins with a lavender-and-chamomile scent called “Calm”. A magazine asked its readers to come up with a better name to match “the ambience of the packed economy cabin”. Some suggestions were: “Eau the Humanity”, “Giorgio’s Arm-on-Me”, “Chanel No. 5 inches of legroom”, “Mist Connection”.

### A new year’s resolution is something that goes in one year and goes out the other!

Proverb: May all your troubles last as long as your new year’s resolutions.

### Youth is when you’re allowed to stay up late on New Year’s Eve. Middle age is when you’re forced to.

What’s the problem with jogging on New Year’s Eve? The ice falls out of your drinks!

## WHĀNAU MERCY MINISTRIES

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Key to your success in the role will be your emotional intelligence, your business skills (including finance, property and people management), your ability to work from a Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Catholic foundation and your experience in supporting effective governance.

The ability to blend strategic grasp with operational detail, to relate in an emotionally mature manner with a wide range of partners and stakeholders and to communicate in a clear and compelling way will also be vital.

You will report to the Chair of Whānau Mercy Ministries, with the role location open to discussion.

For a confidential discussion about the role, contact Gerald Scanlan (Trustee) on 021 375292.

For an information pack or to apply for the role, email Gerald at [mercy@scanfam.nz](mailto:mercy@scanfam.nz).

Applications close on Monday 19 February.

WMM677

# Contentious parish building plan in Arrowtown abandoned

by PETER OWENS

After eight years of debate and a court appeal, a contentious plan to build a parish and community centre next to Arrowtown’s St Patrick’s Catholic Church has been abandoned.

Olive Leaf Centre Trust chairman Colin Bellett said that it would not appeal November’s Environment Court ruling, which rejected the trust’s appeal of a 2020 planning commissioners’ decision to turn down resource consent for the building. The trust had also ruled out making a revised consent application after considering legal advice, Mr Bellett said, on whether the design was contemporary or traditional.

With its “Olive Leaf” name derived from a floating, leaf-shaped roof, the Fred van Brandenburg design for the Hertford St site has divided opinion in Arrowtown since it was first unveiled in 2015. After the trust’s resource consent application was publicly notified in 2018, it attracted 368 submissions, with 218 in support and

150 opposed.

However, the NoLeaf Incorporated Society was formed to oppose the project, and received support from community organisations such as the Arrowtown Village Association, the Arrowtown Promotion and Business Association, the Queenstown Historical Society, and Lakes District Museum.

In 2020, independent planning commissioners declined consent, prompting the trust to appeal the decision in the Environment Court. After a week-long hearing in May, Judge Prudence Steven and commissioner Kathryn Edmonds released the decision on October 30. NoLeaf chairwoman Susan Rowley said that its supporters felt “deep relief” that the matter was not going to the High Court.

Ms Rowley, also a St Patrick’s parishioner, said that the parish now had an opportunity for a “genuine consultative process” on how to redevelop the existing building beside the church.



An artist’s impression of the proposed Olive Leaf centre next to St Patrick’s Church in Arrowtown





Bishop Stephen Lowe speaks at Totara Point

# People flock to celebrate the anniversary of Bishop Pompallier's first Mass in NZ

by DEACON STEVE FRASER

More than 230 people gathered in 31-degree heat at Totara Point in the Far North on January 13, to mark the 186th anniversary of the first Mass celebrated on New Zealand soil.

The first Mass was celebrated by Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pompallier on January 13, 1838, at Totara Point in the Hokianga.

Some 186 years later, in the same location, Auckland Bishop Stephen Lowe celebrated Mass, with Kaitiāia parish priest Fr Larry Rustia, and Panguru parish priest Fr Maliu 'Otutaha concelebrating.

Well-known Panguru katekita (catechist) Henare Te Wāke enjoyed seeing two of his grandsons — Syllas and Saul — receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Mass. In his homily, Bishop Lowe spoke personally to the young men of the grace they would receive, and how it will determine their road ahead in Christian life and action. Turning to the whole congregation, he discussed the importance of the Sacrament of Confirmation in daily life, how it drives our identity, and the legacy and the blessing that this sacrament returns to whānau and hapori.

Several groups attended the Anniversary Mass as a part of pre-planned self-directed pilgrimages or visits. Among their number was a Wellington group from Caritas Aotearoa NZ, a group from the Sisters of Mercy in Auckland, and a group from St Francis Xavier parish, Whangarei, as well as many people who arrived from the local hapori in and around the Hokianga.

Following a celebratory lunch, many travelled to the small church of Hāta Maria in Motuti — the burial place of Bishop Pompallier — to pay their respects, and to share the stories of the early days at the time of his arrival through the dangerous waters of the Hokianga Harbour, his love of the Māori people, and the legacy that was the beginning of the Catholic Church in this land.

As an aside, Bishop Lowe outlined his support of the coming 200-year anniversary in 2038, when he hopes that all will come together in planning for suitable buildings and infrastructure to house the celebrations — both on that significant occasion, and to serve the anniversary celebrations thereafter. The buildings would remain as a centre for pilgrims and visitors to the place of the beginning of the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.