



Inform

A PUBLICATION OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOP OF CHRISTCHURCH

ISSUE 148 LENT 2026

Waimakariri parish celebrates 150 years of St Brigid's

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From many lands, one home

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A true pilgrimage of hope

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From Our Bishop



Greetings to you all

As I write, we have almost completed a sacred season of prayerful self-examination. We are journeying with Jesus toward Jerusalem and are invited to enter more deeply into His death and resurrection.

The Rite of Election

On the First Sunday of Lent, it was a great joy to gather with 99 people from throughout the diocese, who have presented themselves to be received into the Church as adults. I had the privilege of reading each of their stories: encounters with Jesus, with His Church and with the gentle call that has drawn them into this great adventure of faith. Like us, they speak of Christ walking beside them, guiding and sustaining them along the way. It is always humbling to listen to another's story of faith, as it invites us to pause and ask anew: why am I Catholic and why — amid a world of endless choices — do I choose to prioritise a relationship with this man who lived, died and rose again two thousand years ago?

Those who will join us at Easter, come from many nations, cultures and walks of life, including some whose parents were ministers of religion and others whose families were openly antagonistic toward Catholicism. Yet, all have been drawn by the same Lord, who continues to call hearts to Himself and into His Church.

Merv's Story

I would like to share one such person's story and do so with his permission. Merv is a husband, father, grandfather, and former Pentecostal pastor, whose Christian journey spans more than four decades. He came to faith at the age of 21, through a decisive encounter with Christ and went on to serve for 25 years in pastoral ministry, including senior leadership roles in New Zealand and the UK. As a growing restlessness took hold, he encountered faith-filled Catholics and was shaped by the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, which gradually drew him toward the Church. After years of prayer, study and resistance, he speaks of joyfully surrendering to the Catholic Church through the OCIA in 2025, convinced he was responding to a long-awaited invitation of grace, with assuring words spoken to him in prayer from the Cross: "I knew you would come." It is a great joy to welcome Merv, along with the many others who have responded to the call of Jesus from within His Church. The same Jesus who during Holy Week, thanks us too with the words, "I knew you would come".



Catechumens and candidates at the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent.



Visiting seminarians at a barbecue hosted by the diocese at the Cathedral Presbytery.

Carlo Acutis relics and Eucharistic Miracles to visit Christchurch, 17-20 June



Carlo Acutis was an ordinary teenager with an extraordinary love for God, remembered today as the Church's first millennial saint and a patron of the digital age. Born in London and raised in Milan, he loved football, video games and computers, yet placed the Eucharist at the very centre of his life, famously calling it his "highway to heaven". Gifted in technology, Carlo

used his skills to create a website documenting Eucharistic miracles around the world, convinced that the internet could be a tool for evangelisation rather than a distraction. Struck by leukemia at just 15, he faced suffering with remarkable serenity and faith, offering his life for the Church. Canonised in September 2025, Carlo Acutis' life reminds us that holiness is possible, not by escaping modern life, but by living it with joy, integrity and deep friendship with Christ. Please take this opportunity to open yourself to this grace-filled invitation.

Seminarians Visit the Christchurch Diocese

During the second week of February, all the seminarians of New Zealand, (31 in total, plus the Rector and formation staff), visited our diocese. They began their pilgrimage on a Sunday evening with Mass and dinner at Nazareth house, where they heard about the history of the faith in our diocese. On Monday, they went to Timaru and Temuka and visited the places that St Mary MacKillop travelled to. They ended the evening with a barbecue at the

Cathedral Presbytery, with the priests of the diocese. On Tuesday, they visited the Beatitudes Community, where they spent a day of prayer and reflection. Wednesday saw them head to Akaroa on pilgrimage to learn more about the founding of the faith and visit the site of the first Catholic Mass in the South Island. They visited our Carmelite Community on the way back into town and then ended the evening with 250 young people at an Encounter night, as part of the Youth Ministry Equipping School. The Rector and many seminarians shared with me their appreciation of being introduced to the rich history of our diocese. Let us keep the seven seminarians from our diocese and all our seminarians in your prayers.

As we are about to enter the sacred season of Easter, I pray each of you will experience a closeness with Jesus, like that of those who have just been received into the Church.

Yours in Christ

+ Michael Gielen
Bishop of Christchurch



"...responding to a long-awaited invitation of grace, with assuring words spoken to him in prayer from the Cross: "I knew you would come." "



ISSUE 148 LENT 2026



Nga mihi nui from the editorial desk

Welcome to Inform Issue 148, our Lenten edition.

These pages cover Catholic life in the Christchurch Diocese from November through to March. Anglican Bishop Peter Carrell sets the Lenten Scene in his homily for the ecumenical Ash Wednesday service in our Pro-Cathedral. Bishop Michael Gielen offers some thinking on the spirituality of St John Henry Newman, recently made a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIV. We join with our Waimakariri parish in celebrating 150 years of St Brigid's, Loburn. Stella Maris parish shines a star in the east, showcasing their vibrant cultural day and an energetic youth camp. We join the Beatitudes community and friends for the annual Festival of Lights, where our bishop contemplates our first missionaries and invites us to look to our Blessed Mother. In this issue, we also enjoy profiling our 2026 student leaders.

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

In Christ
Ken Joblin, Editor

Catholic Education Mass

On 19 February, around 150 teachers and others associated with our Catholic schools, gathered in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral for the annual Catholic Education Mass. This Mass is one of three held around the diocese to pray for our teachers, our schools and all those associated with them. Bishop Michael encouraged those gathered to read Pope Leo XIV's recently issued Apostolic Letter, "Drawing New Maps of Hope". Making clear that technology is at the service of humanity, the Pope warns that artificial intelligence and digital environments must be guided by ethical reflection, and a concern for human dignity, justice and the value of work. Our Catholic Education Office (CEO) awarded certificates to those who recently achieved theological qualifications to assist their teaching in our schools. Those present gave thanks to Mike Nolan and Cushla O'Connor from the CEO, for their dedicated service and expertise.



For a complete list of

Holy Week Liturgies & Easter Mass Times

& Sacrament of Reconciliation times
in all parishes throughout the
Christchurch Diocese visit:

cdoc.nz/easter



**CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF CHRISTCHURCH**
TE TAKIWA Ō TE PIHOPA



Advance notice of some significant offerings from the Bishop's Pastoral Office

by Mike Stopforth, Bishop's Pastoral Office Director

Each year the Bishop's Pastoral Office provides events and other initiatives to support parishes in their mission and individuals to grow in faith. The Office includes a wide variety of ministries; parish renewal, prayer events, liturgical support, formation, sacred music, safeguarding, youth ministry, vocations, diocesan archives and the prison, hospital and tertiary chaplaincies. Below are some great events from the Bishop's Pastoral Office, about which we would like to give you advance notice. Keep an eye on the diocesan website which will provide more information on these various events as details are finalised.

Relics of St Carlo Acutis

The relics of St Carlo Acutis will be coming to Christchurch as part of a New Zealand national tour. He was canonised in September 2025 by Pope Francis and is a role model for young people. These relics have been travelling internationally and we are fortunate to have them in Christchurch as part of the national tour. The relics will be accompanied by a Eucharistic Miracles Exhibition. Plans and dates are still being finalised but at this stage will be here June 17th to 20th.

Fr Paul Turner visit

This is part of a national tour of all dioceses in New Zealand, where Fr Turner will share his wisdom around the celebration of the liturgy at Mass. Clergy sessions are being held on 6 and 7 August and the laity session is on the morning of Saturday 8 August.

Corpus Christi Procession

In the Jubilee Year of Hope, the Corpus Christi procession was re-introduced in the diocese which included a holy hour and benediction. The procession provides an opportunity to deepen our love and devotion as a diocese to the Holy Eucharist. This year it will be held on the Feast of Corpus Christi, on the afternoon of Sunday 7 June, with the venue to be confirmed.

Prayer Conference

A very successful one-day diocesan prayer conference has been held in the past two years with keynote speakers and a wide range of workshops, covering various aspects of prayer, as well as times of prayer in the celebration of Mass and adoration. In 2026 this conference will be held in Timaru, with the date being finalised.

Men's and Women's Ministries

In 2026, there were a number of initiatives for both men and women. With Lent under way and following last year's successful Exodus and Fiat programmes, there are parishes offering similar programmes for men and women, based around prayer (adoration), fraternity and physical disciplines.

One event already being planned is a men's breakfast to be held on Saturday 18 April. We hope to have retreats for men and women throughout the year so keep an eye out for those dates.

Youth Ministry

The CYT camps are always very popular and are filled to capacity. These experiences of faith sharing, prayer experiences in a fun and alive context often become foundational in the lives of young people. The two camp programmes offered are Revolution to be held on the weekend of 3-5 July for those in years 7 to 9 and Antioch 25-27 September for those in years 10 to 13. Be in early when registrations open so you don't miss out!

Last year the Youth Festival was introduced, and this will be happening again on the World Youth Day weekend; held on Sunday 2 August. This was an event for 200 young people and this year promises to be just as popular.

More Information for all CYT events can be found on the CYT Facebook page www.facebook.com/CYTministries/.

We look forward to seeing many of you at these various events again this year!

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but will also raise us up through his power."*

- 1 Corinthians 6:14 -

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“Turn Away from Sin and Be Faithful to the Gospel”

Homily from **Ash Wednesday Ecumenical Service**, 18 February 2026

Given in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral by Bishop Peter Carrell, Anglican Bishop of Christchurch

In a few minutes, we will use this phrase when ashing people:

“Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel.”

Each of our readings tonight challenges us, provokes us, probes us: how are we living? Have we turned away from sin? Joel 2:12-13 Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

Psalms 51:7 Remove my sin, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Have we become friends with God — reconciled sinners with God? Are we faithful to the gospel? Do we strain to avoid being seen in our faithful devotion to God by anyone other than God himself?

Matthew 6:17-18 When you go without food, wash your face and comb your hair, so that others cannot know that you are fasting — only your Father, who is unseen, will know.

These are provocative, probing texts.

Ash Wednesday is for all of us, not just some of us — much as we may want the terrorists, gangsters and tyrants of this world to repent — what we hear in Scripture is a call to each one of us.

None of us are immune from unjust

living, from failing to care for the poor, from religious hypocrisy, from all kinds of wrongdoing.

We all need a Saviour — One who will save us from our sin — who will save us. Save us, that is, from our more blatant acts of wrongdoing through to our subtle attempts to manipulate God to do our will.

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:1 ... we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Our challenge in this life is to co-operate with God's will, with God's plan for our lives. Paul continues, as we heard, in 2 Corinthians:

As we work together with God, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.

To work together with God, to accept the grace of God with everlasting impact on our lives, is something we might begin for the first time tonight or which we might renew for the 20th or 50th time.

Tonight, as we are ashed with the sign of the cross, we hear familiar words,

“Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel”.

In receiving the ashes, we are saying “Yes” to God's invitation to work together with him.

And to receive the sign of the cross is to bear witness to the seriousness with

which God views our wrongdoing: God in Christ became sin, dying on the cross and rising again, that we might become the righteousness of God.

What might turning from sin mean in 2026?

Pope Leo has published a stirring address for Lent. Speaking to the importance of listening and of fasting, he says this about turning away from sin:

“In this regard, I would like to invite you to a very practical and frequently unappreciated form of abstinence: that of refraining from words that offend and hurt our neighbor.

Let us begin by disarming our language, avoiding harsh words and rash judgement, refraining from slander and speaking ill of those who are not present and cannot defend themselves.

Instead, let us strive to measure our words and cultivate kindness and respect in our families, among our friends, at work, on social media, in political debates, in the media and in Christian communities. In this way, words of hatred will give way to words of hope and peace.”

We need these words, don't we. We need them because there is a spirit of anger in the world today which sweeps across our keyboards when we are on social media, as well as in our general words about one another.

Rash judgement and harsh words, indeed, tap their way from our sinful hearts onto the screens of people who are fellow human beings, and, on Christian social

*“Words of hatred will give way
to words of hope and peace.”*



media, including Anglican and Catholic social media, onto the screens of people who are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Pope Leo continues his address in this way, helping us to understand what it means to be faithful to the gospel:

“Likewise, our parishes, families, ecclesial groups and religious communities are called to undertake a shared journey during Lent, in which listening to the word of God, as well as to the cry of the poor and of the earth, becomes part of our community life, and fasting [becomes] a foundation for sincere repentance.

In this context, conversion refers not only to one’s conscience, but also to the quality of our relationships and dialogue. It means allowing ourselves to be challenged by reality and recognising what truly guides our desires – both within our ecclesial communities and as regards humanity’s thirst for justice and reconciliation.

Dear friends, let us ask for the grace of a Lent that leads us to greater attentiveness to God and to the least among us.”

May we respond to Pope Leo’s call in such a quiet manner that with St Matthew’s help, we recall the words of our Lord:

Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Amen.



Saying YES to the Adventure of Life:

The Sisters of Life in Christchurch by Jessica Jackman

Fish and Chips have never seemed so extraordinary!

Outside St Teresa’s in Riccarton, a group of young religious sisters gasped with joy and wonder as they unwrapped an innocuous white paper packet, much to the amusement of the young Catholics nearby, who had gathered to meet them. It was this infectious joy for all things in life, that the Sisters of Life left with all of us who encountered them in Christchurch last December.

Invited to lead an Evangelisation Mission in Holy Family Parish, Christchurch West, the six sisters arrived in New Zealand after a packed couple of weeks of mission in Australia. The Sisters of Life, founded in 1991 in New York, are a community of religious, dedicated to upholding the truth, beauty and dignity of every human person and in particular, to promote the sacredness of every human life.

Over three days, the sisters shared this charism of LIFE with us. Their mission began with an evening for all ages, where they inspired us with testimonies and stories from their incredible work accompanying women in crisis. A time of prayer followed, with the sisters leading us in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament through their gift of music, proclaiming the truth of God’s love, through their original and uplifting songs.

Over the next few days, the sisters visited some of our primary schools and Villa Maria College, before leading a night of prayer for about a hundred young adults (at which the famous fish and chip encounter occurred). Saturday afternoon saw 135 women from all over the motu, gather at St Teresa’s for a retreat. Once again, we were inspired by testimonies and spent time in Eucharistic Adoration, in the presence of the One who loves us.

The Sisters’ joyful witness was a much needed reminder that saying Yes to Christ, like Mary, is saying Yes to the adventure of Life. While only in Christchurch for three days, their visit has left a lasting impact on all those who encountered them.

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Catholic Enquiry Centre Update Serving, Supporting & Connecting

by Carly Mulqueen, Director, Catholic Enquiry Centre



Since July last year, the Catholic Enquiry Centre has entered a new season of growth and renewal. Many of you will already know this, but I am delighted to now be serving as Director. It is truly an honour, a privilege and a joy to step into this role, working in service of our Bishops and the wider Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.

One of the great blessings of this new chapter is being based here in Christchurch. Being located alongside the Diocesan Offices has created wonderful opportunities for collaboration and I am deeply grateful for the encouragement and support of Bishop Michael Gielen, the Diocesan Pastoral Team and my own parish community at St Peter Chanel Parish in Waimakariri. Together, we continue to explore fresh and practical ways to support and equip those engaged in evangelisation.

A particularly exciting development is Catholic Enquiry Connect, a growing network centred on welcome, accompaniment and connection. At its heart is a simple idea: evangelisation often begins with ordinary conversations, genuine hospitality and people willing to walk alongside others.

Within this network, Connectors offer that warm first point of contact – welcoming


enquirers, sitting with them at Mass, listening to their stories, introducing them to other parishioners and helping them feel at ease as they take early steps. Champions help keep Catholic Enquiry Centre resources visible within parish life, ensuring posters, flyers and samples of our materials are readily available.

Both roles are beautifully simple, yet deeply meaningful expressions of the Church's mission. Anyone within the diocese who has a heart for people and for sharing the hope of the Gospel, is warmly invited to get involved. We offer quarterly Zoom gatherings which include prayer, lectio divina, worship, formation around accompaniment and evangelisation and opportunities for small-group sharing.

One of the most striking aspects of this role has been witnessing the number of people getting in touch. I have been genuinely surprised – and deeply encouraged – by both the volume of enquiries and the speed at which they are increasing. We are hearing from people who are curious about the Catholic faith, those seeking to become Catholic and many who feel drawn to return to their faith. A significant number of these enquiries are coming from within our own diocese.



“Evangelisation often begins with ordinary conversations, genuine hospitality and people willing to walk alongside others.”




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Catholic Enquiry Connect

What do Connectors & Champions do?

Connectors

- ✓ Offer a warm, welcoming first point of contact
- ✓ Help enquirers feel at ease within parish life
- ✓ Listen, encourage and walk gently with those asking questions
- ✓ Connect seekers with people, groups and pathways

Champions

- ✓ Help foster a culture of invitation and welcome
- ✓ Support Connectors and accompaniment within the parish
- ✓ Keep Catholic Enquiry Centre resources visible and accessible
- ✓ Help the community stay attentive to seekers and returning Catholics

Both roles are simple, relational and deeply meaningful.

While many people also connect directly with parishes and diocesan ministries, this shared movement is a hopeful reminder that hearts are searching and God is gently at work among us.

For those unfamiliar with the Catholic Enquiry Centre, we continue to offer a range of resources to support individuals and communities. Our *What Catholics Believe* booklets are widely used by individuals, parishes, OCIA teams, Alpha groups, schools and chaplaincies. These resources are designed to be clear, accessible and welcoming — especially for those encountering the faith for the first time — and are available free of charge.

In addition, the Catholic Enquiry Centre is pleased to offer grants for parishes seeking to develop or strengthen evangelisation initiatives. These grants are intended to support creative, locally led efforts that foster welcome, encounter and faith formation.

Please know that the Catholic Enquiry Centre is here to serve you and this diocese. Whether you are accompanying someone, supporting a returning Catholic, exploring Catholic Enquiry Connect, or simply curious about available resources, we are always glad to help.

Interested in joining Catholic Enquiry Connect?

Perhaps you're someone who enjoys people... Perhaps you've had your own journey of faith... Perhaps you simply have a heart for welcome.

Catholic Enquiry Connect is not about having all the answers. It's about being present, being kind and being willing to walk alongside others.

If this resonates with you — we'd love to hear from you.

info@catholicenquiry.nz <https://www.catholicdiscovery.nz/>



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Standing Together: Catholic Social Services and the Fight Against Poverty in Canterbury

How Catholic Social Teaching Guides Our Work in the NZCCSS “Free from Poverty” Campaign

by Luis Arevalo, Catholic Social Services Manager

“What are the principles underpinning your work?”

The numbers are stark and deeply troubling: 485,600 New Zealanders are living without the basics — a population larger than Christchurch. Here in Canterbury, we see this reality every day through the faces of families seeking help at Catholic Social Services (CSS), through the increasing requests for food parcels and through the stories of working families who cannot make ends meet, despite their best efforts.

This is why CSS has committed to being an active partner in the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) “Free from Poverty” campaign, ahead of the 2026 General Election. As convener of their Child and Family Policy Group, I've witnessed firsthand how our faith-based organisations are uniquely positioned to call for the structural changes our communities desperately need.

NZCCSS brings together six major Christian denominations — the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support, the Methodist Church and Salvation Army. Through this partnership, NZCCSS represents over 100 organisations providing social support services throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. Our collective voice carries the weight of thousands of interactions with New Zealanders facing hardship every single day.

Canterbury's poverty crisis mirrors the national picture, but the impact on our local communities is deeply personal. Our team at CSS encounters families struggling with impossible choices: heating or food, rent or medicine, children's school shoes or this week's groceries. Housing costs consume nearly half of many clients' total incomes, leaving families precariously balanced on the edge of crisis.

The ripple effects extend throughout our community. When 27% of children live in households where food runs out sometimes or often, we're not just talking about statistics — we're talking about children in Canterbury classrooms struggling to concentrate, families in our parishes facing impossible stress and a generation growing up knowing the daily anxiety of scarcity.

Our involvement in this campaign isn't simply about policy advocacy — it flows directly from the foundational tenets of Catholic Social Teaching that have guided our work for decades.

The Dignity of the Human Person, The Common Good, Solidarity, Preferential Option for the Poor, Subsidiarity and Participation.

Every day, CSS puts these principles into practice.

But we also see how inadequate systems create recurring crises. We meet clients who've done everything “right” — found work, managed their budgets carefully, prioritised their children — yet still cannot afford basic necessities. We see the

mental health toll of chronic financial stress. We witness how benefit sanctions push families deeper into hardship without addressing underlying challenges.

This front line experience shapes our policy advocacy. When NZCCSS calls for increased benefit levels, removal of sanctions, improvements to Working for Families and increased social housing, these aren't abstract proposals. They're solutions born from thousands of conversations with real people facing real struggles.

The “Free from Poverty” Campaign: A Path Forward

The NZCCSS campaign presents a comprehensive vision for structural change across six key areas:

- A Poverty Reduction Act to establish accountability and long-term commitment
- Welfare system reforms that lift incomes above the poverty line and eliminate punitive sanctions
- Better recognition for people with health conditions and disabilities
- Reduced financial barriers to work that allow people to transition without losing security
- Working for Families improvements that genuinely support low and middle-income families
- Housing and food security through increased social housing and immediate cost relief

These proposals represent more than incremental adjustments — they offer a pathway to restore dignity and break cycles of generational poverty.

As convener of NZCCSS's Child and Family Policy Group, I help shape policy development, drawing on our local experience to inform national advocacy. But our involvement extends far beyond formal roles.

We're supporting the campaign's emphasis on community groundswell — because lasting change requires not just policy shifts





but a cultural transformation in how we view poverty and our collective responsibility.

We're also exploring how to integrate the campaign's themes into our existing programmes, ensuring that our direct service work connects to broader advocacy for systemic change. When we help an individual family access emergency assistance, we're also gathering evidence about why emergency assistance remains necessary and what structural changes would prevent future crises.

The challenge before us is clear: 485,600 New Zealanders living without basics, including thousands in our own Canterbury communities. The path forward

is also clear: structural changes that boost incomes, improve housing access and treat all people with dignity.

Poverty isn't inevitable. As people of faith, we understand that we can make choices to restore dignity and ensure a future where no child or adult goes hungry. The "Free from Poverty" campaign represents one such choice—a choice to stand in solidarity with those experiencing hardship and to demand better from our political leaders.

CSS is proud to be part of this vital work. Together, grounded in the wisdom of Catholic Social Teaching and united with diverse faith communities throughout Aotearoa, we can create the just and

compassionate society our mission calls us toward.

The question isn't whether we can afford to address poverty. The question is whether we can afford not to.

For more information about CSS work, visit: <https://www.catholicsocialservices.nz/>



To learn more about the NZCCSS "Free from Poverty" campaign, visit

<https://nzccss.org.nz/resource/free-from-poverty-election-2026/>



Thousands united in prayer & praise by Anna Malone

Open Heaven is an ecumenical night of prayer, held annually in venues across the country. In February, thousands gathered at Wolfbrook Arena in Christchurch for Open Heaven Christchurch 2026.

It gave me an overwhelming joy to stand with so many Christians united in prayer and praise as we lifted our hearts and voices to God at Open Heaven. Together, we brought our intentions before the Lord, prayed for the next generation, our nation and our churches. It was powerful to gather with so many Christians from different churches, backgrounds and cultures, all united by our shared love of Jesus. Bishop Michael, together with Bishop Peter Carrell, Anglican Bishop of Christchurch, led a time of prayer for New Zealand. Our bishop shared the prayer of an early Church writer who, when the Church was under persecution from the

Roman Empire, prayed earnestly for his nation. (Click on the QR code to see the video of the bishop's prayer.)

What made the night extraordinary, wasn't the light show, the band and the concert atmosphere. The heart of the evening was so much more than that. It was about uniting as Christians in our shared love of Jesus Christ and together offering our prayers to our Father in heaven. Honestly, words can't describe the sense of God's presence and the awareness that He was at work that night... perhaps you have to experience it at Open Heaven 2027! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Did you attend Open Heaven? Share your experience with us! Email amalone@cdoc.nz.

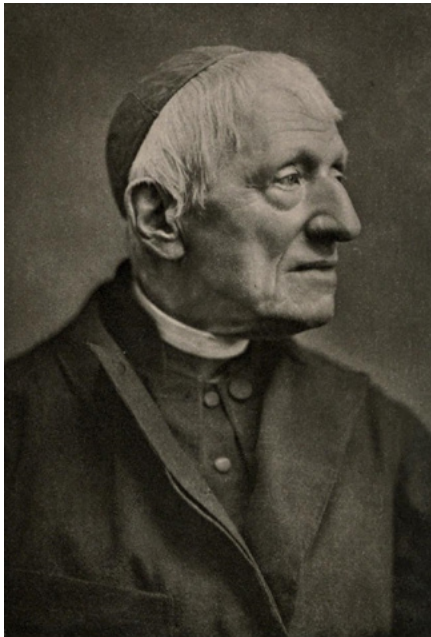


PRaise the LORD ON MY SOUL



St John Henry Newman: A Man of Hope Amid the Encircling Gloom

by Bishop Michael Gielen



“Hope is not the absence of darkness, but the courage to walk through it, guided by divine light.”

In the last issue of *Inform*, I drew your attention to an honour of spiritual significance, bestowed by the Church on St John Henry Newman. On 1 November, the Church recognised him as the 38th Doctor of the Church, a title reserved for a select few, whose lives and writings are proclaimed as especially worthy of study and devotion.

This additional honour bestowed on St John Henry Newman, is significant for the English speaking world as, prior to his conversion to Catholicism, he was and remains revered by the Anglican Communion, as a leading theologian of the Oxford Movement. I am the Catholic bishops' representative on the Anglican Roman Catholic Commission of Aotearoa New Zealand and am grateful that the Church's further recognition of him is another point of unity between ourselves and the Anglican Communion. In offering you this reflection, I am also pleased to join a long line of contributors to the Spirituality section of *Inform*.

Such is the significance of St John Henry Newman as a writer and thinker, there is an enormous amount of information to be found about him, both in books and on the internet. I am focusing here on one of his poems, a treasure held in common between Catholics and Anglicans.

I have always liked his hymn, “Lead, Kindly Light” which features as a suggested hymn for the Night Prayer of the Church in English speaking countries.

While it was written by a man of faith, he felt lost, fearful and far from home. There is something deeply human about his honesty: “The night is dark, and I am far from home; Lead Thou me on.” Each time I hear or sing those words, I am moved by the story of the one who wrote them, a man whose life was marked by adversity, yet whose trust in God's providence continues to shine as a light of hope for us all today.

Who is this spiritual giant? Newman's early years at Oxford were marked by fragility. Though his intellectual gifts were evident, anxiety and self-doubt plagued him. In 1821, his struggles came to a head when he graduated with the lowest possible marks, an outcome that left him deeply despondent. His later writings reveal a man who came to understand that weakness and imperfection are often the very places where God's grace takes root.

Ordained an Anglican priest in 1825, Newman's pastoral ministry was marked by zeal and sincerity. Yet, in 1828, tragedy struck again with the sudden death of his beloved sister, Mary. Her loss deeply wounded him, and the continuing financial difficulties of his family compounded his sorrow. It was in his suffering that he began to seek a deeper grounding in the faith, a faith that would ultimately lead him home to the Catholic Church.

In 1833, when Newman was 33, he was physically and spiritually adrift. He had travelled to Italy in search of rest and renewal, but while ministering to others during an epidemic, he became dangerously ill himself. Weakened and quarantined, Newman faced a crisis of faith. When at last he boarded a ship to return to England, the voyage took a gloomy turn. The vessel was becalmed for days, trapped in treacherous waters, far from home and surrounded by fog.

It was there, amid fear and isolation, that Newman's heart turned again to trust God's providence. Out of that darkness came the hymn to which I referred earlier, *Lead, Kindly Light*.

“Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on!”

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In those lines, Newman gives voice to the universal cry of the human soul in trial, the longing for light when we cannot see the way ahead. He does not demand to know the destination; "I do not ask to see the distant scene, one step enough for me." It is a prayer of surrender, a humble confession that hope is not found in control, but in trust. Newman himself discovered that hope is not the absence of darkness, but the courage to walk through it, guided by divine light. Newman's hymn marked a turning point in his life. The spiritual storm that gave birth to it would, in time, guide him toward the Catholic Church. In 1845, after years of study, prayer and struggle, Newman was received into the Church he had once opposed. His conversion was not triumphal but costly. It brought misunderstanding, isolation and the loss of friends and standing. Yet, it was also an act of deep peace. He had followed the light that had been leading him step by step.

In 1879, Pope Leo XIII created him a Cardinal, honouring both his fidelity and his contribution to the life of the Church. The motto Newman chose for his coat of arms, "Cor ad cor loquitur" ("Heart speaks to heart"), summed up his approach to faith: not as an abstract idea, but as a living relationship between God and the human soul.

Pope Benedict's visit to Scotland and England in 2010 to beatify Newman was a great celebration of our faith with many joining him in Birmingham for the beatification. I well remember Pope Benedict speaking with young people outside Westminster Cathedral, after a beautiful Mass had taken place within its walls, drawing upon the best of the Church's liturgy. He spoke to them of Newman's teaching, that "Heart speaks to heart."

When Pope Francis canonised him in 2019, he called Newman a "prophet for our times", a man who understood both the restlessness of the modern heart and the enduring hope of the Gospel. Newman's life speaks especially to those who face uncertainty, illness or doubt. His was not an easy faith, but a tested one, purified through suffering and surrender.



Doctor of the Church: A Witness for Our Times

To be named a Doctor of the Church is to be recognised not only for theological insight, but for timeless spiritual wisdom. In elevating St John Henry Newman to this rank, the Church acknowledges that his life and thoughts continue to shed light amid our own encircling gloom. But perhaps his greatest gift is not in his scholarship, but in his example, a man who learned that holiness begins in the willingness to be led. His hymn remains a prayer for all who walk by faith, not by sight:

"So long Thy pow'r hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost
awhile!"

Newman's journey from youthful anxiety to spiritual maturity, mirrors the journey of every believer. His legacy stands as an enduring invitation: to let the kindly light of Christ guide us through the shadows of our time, one step, one prayer, one act of hope at a time. St John Henry Newman,
Pray for us.

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| | |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1.30 - 3.00pm | Confessions |
| 2.45pm | Chaplet of Mercy sung/prayed |
| 3.00pm | Holy Mass |

Celebrant: Fr Monty Bamford

Book sales to follow in Narthex.

Note: No parking on Cathedral grounds until after 2.00pm

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Participants of Hearts Aflame Catholic Summer School 2026

Rise up and Rejoice: *Hearts Aflame National Summer School*

by Jess Jackman, Director, Hearts Aflame National Summer School



(above) Benediction at the Eucharistic Healing night;
(below from left) Christchurch representatives;
Beatitudes sisters supervising the small group challenge

If you drive past the Manawatū town of Marton around New Years, you might be surprised by a very unusual sight: 150 young people gathered in a chapel at 7.30am, chanting with all their hearts...!

It is, of course, Hearts Aflame National Catholic Summer School, which brings together young adults from all over the country for ten days of prayer, community and formation in our faith.

Hearts Aflame has run since 1992, the 2026 school being its 33rd. For more than 10 years, it has been held at Nga Tawa Diocesan School in Marton, a town 40 minutes from Palmerston North. The school is still in high demand. When registrations for 2026 opened in July last year, the school sold out in less than 12 hours.

So, what attracted so many young people to spend ten days of their summer learning and praying? The 2026 theme was 'Rise up and Rejoice', and this joy of being with other young Catholics is a huge part of what draws people back to Hearts Aflame year after year. A healthy rhythm of prayer and lectures on theology, spirituality and philosophy, is interspersed with small group chats, shared meals and time to rest and relax with others. Visit

Nga Tawa on a summer afternoon and you will find some competitive games of football, (made more so by some very skillful Dominican and Franciscan brothers and the odd priest, sister or seminarian!), others playing tennis with a Jesuit and still others cooling off in the school pool or just having a good chat in the shade.

This year, we were blessed with the presence of Fr Frank Bird sm, who led the school's opening retreat, challenging us to think deeply about both the desires of our hearts and the hurts we carry and to bring them all to Jesus. Other inspiring moments included our vocations day with testimonies from couples, priests and religious and beautiful moments of prayer and procession with the Blessed Sacrament. Equally encouraging was the large number of attendees who travelled all the way from the Christchurch Diocese: a great sign for the future life and joy of our local Church. They were joined by a number of Christchurch clergy and religious, including the Beatitudes Community, the Brothers of St John and Fr Monty Bamford from our Cathedral Parish.

Tired but inspired, Hearts Aflame 2026 participants returned to their parishes, challenged to bring joy and life to others and to step forward in faith, trusting Jesus to walk with them into the joy of the resurrection.





Youth Ministry Equipping School

by Mark Currie

This school gathered 115 young people from eleven colleges throughout the diocese and beyond for a powerful few days of encounter, formation and community. Students engaged in dynamic sessions, small group discussions, and vibrant praise and worship, creating space to deeply reflect on faith and leadership in their schools. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the concluding Youth Ministry Equipping School (YMES) Mass paced the Eucharist at the heart of their time. A consistent theme throughout YMES was servant leadership, inviting participants to look to Jesus as the model for how they lead, serve and influence others. We look forward to seeing the fruit of this experience lived out in our Catholic school communities.

St Bede's College Chapel

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The Greatest Story Ever Told

Proclaim Camp, Stella Maris

by Janette Bradbrook, Stella Maris Parish Youth Ministry Coordinator

There are moments in youth ministry when you quietly step back and think, "Lord, you are doing something here." Proclaim Camp this year was one of those moments.

Our theme, "The Greatest Story Ever Told," centred on the heart of the Gospel – the Kerygma. Not simply as a teaching, but as an invitation. Over the weekend, our young people journeyed through the story of salvation: created in love, broken by sin, rescued through Christ's death and resurrection and personally invited to respond.

What moved me most was watching our young people realise this is not just the story – it is their story. Camp was full of joy and friendships that only form when young people are given space to be real. Woven through all of it was something deeper: a genuine openness to God. Our Saturday evening was sacred.



The Lord led us deeper, step by step. We began in Adoration, creating space to be still before Jesus. We offered Reconciliation, where many encountered the mercy of God in a powerful way. We celebrated Mass, grounding everything in the Eucharist – the source and summit of our faith. We were blessed by a keynote presentation from Bishop Michael Gielen, who spoke clearly and pastorally to our young people. We heard a courageous and deeply moving testimony from Melevesi. Prayer teams ministered with gentleness and care. Our worship team led the room from reflection into wholehearted surrender. Each moment prepared hearts for the next.

By the end of the night, something had shifted. Walls came down. It wasn't emotional hype – it was grace meeting openness. It was surrender. Here's something I keep coming back to: it has never been about the numbers. In parish ministry, it can be easy to feel discouraged if the room isn't as full as we hoped. Leaders can quietly carry the weight of attendance figures. Parishes can measure fruit by visible growth. The Lord gently reminds us – step aside. Get out of the way. Let Me minister to the ones I have called.

Every young person at camp was not there by accident. If one young person encounters Christ in a real and life-changing way, heaven rejoices. Proclaim Camp is about creating space for encounter. It is about trusting that when we faithfully show up, preach the Gospel clearly and make room for the Holy Spirit – God will do what only He can do.

At Stella Maris Parish, we believe young people are not on the sidelines of the Church – they are central to its heart.

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Stella Maris Parish First Cultural Day 2026

From many Lands, One Home

On Friday 13 February, our Stella Maris parish was transformed into a radiant hub of music, dance and delicious aroma on St Anne's school grounds. What a joy it was to see our community come together in such incredible numbers! Our inaugural Cultural Day was more than just an event; it was a resounding success that wove together the diverse threads of our parish into one vibrant community.

A Celebration of Spirit

Despite early-morning nerves over a few passing clouds, the skies cleared to welcome parishioners of all ages. From the first step of welcome dance, the open stage came alive. We were treated to a spectacular showcase of traditional dances, soulful melodies and a parade of costumes that painted the evening in every hue imaginable. Every performance was a gift of heritage, shared with grace and met with thunderous applause.

A Global Feast

The air was filled with the irresistible scent of "mouth-watering" signature dishes. Each community (Kiwī, Samoan, Filipino, Indian, Tongan, Italian), offered a culinary journey around the world,



inviting us to discover new flavours and share in the stories behind them. To see our parish family breaking bread together – learning, tasting and laughing – was a truly moving sight.

United in Faith

Beyond the spectacle and the feast, the true highlight was the palpable spirit of unity. It was a powerful reminder that while we come from many corners of the globe, we stand together as one family in faith.

St Patrick's Parish Picnic

St Patrick's Parish in Greymouth gathered at Nelson Creek for a joyful parish picnic, where Fr Mathew Siji celebrated a beautiful open-air Mass beneath clear skies. A relaxed Barbecue lunch and lively games followed, bringing parishioners of all ages together in friendship and gratitude. A truly lovely day of faith, fun and community.





Bishops Gielen and Bishop Adams planting two cypress trees



emanating from the wooden interior and stained glass windows. St Brigid's statue and a St Brigid's cross are prominent on the back wall.

A Touchstone of Our Faith

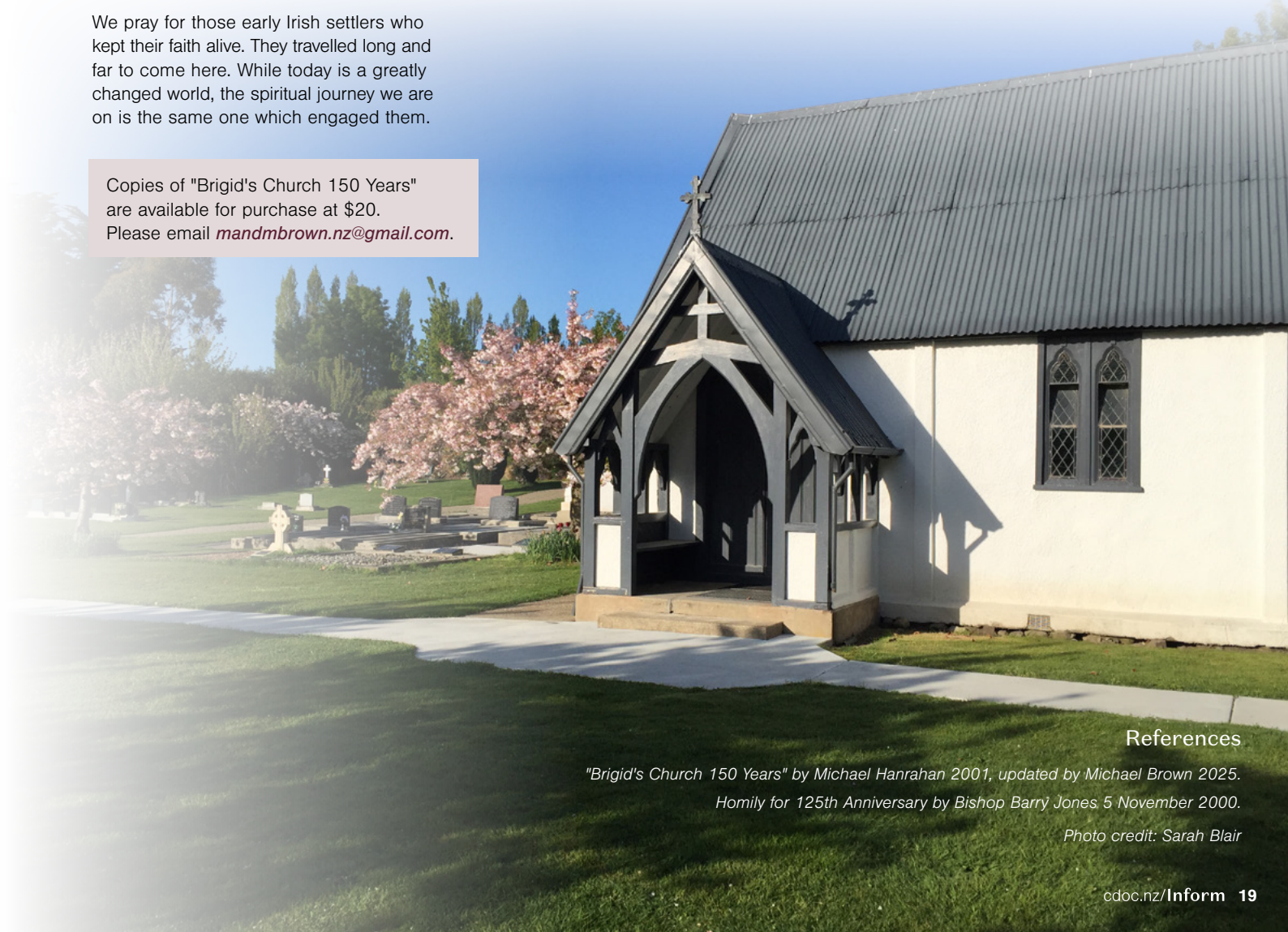
St Brigid's has nurtured the faith of many families and among the descendants are three Bishops: Bishop Edward Joyce, Bishop Brian Ashby and Bishop Barry Jones and several vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Mass is celebrated there twice a year: in March and in November near All Souls Day. Also parishioners and descendants have held weddings, baptisms and funerals there.

We pray for those early Irish settlers who kept their faith alive. They travelled long and far to come here. While today is a greatly changed world, the spiritual journey we are on is the same one which engaged them.

Copies of "Brigid's Church 150 Years" are available for purchase at \$20. Please email mandmbrown.nz@gmail.com.



(From Left) Fr Dan Doyle, Fr Do Nguyen, Bishop John Adams, Bishop Michael Gielen, Fr Allan Jones SM, Fr Denis Nolan



References

*"Brigid's Church 150 Years" by Michael Hanrahan 2001, updated by Michael Brown 2025.
Homily for 125th Anniversary by Bishop Barry Jones 5 November 2000.*

Photo credit: Sarah Blair

Back-to-Back Celebration: Culverden's Investiture and Renewal of Vows of Married Couples

by Alicia Samera

On Valentine's Day, our parish community gathered at Our Lady Help of Christians Church for a meaningful and faith-filled celebration, marked by the investiture of seven young teenage boys as altar servers.

The Holy Mass was celebrated by parish priest, Fr Rex Ramos, who led the congregation in a solemn and heartfelt liturgy. During the ceremony, the young candidates were formally invested, committing themselves to serve at the altar with reverence, humility and dedication.

The occasion highlighted the vital role of altar servers in the life of the Church. As trained lay assistants, they support the priest during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and other liturgical celebrations, helping maintain the dignity and smooth

flow of the liturgy, so that the faithful may focus more deeply on the Eucharist.

The celebration was made even more special as it was held back-to-back with the renewal of vows of married couples, beautifully reflecting themes of commitment, devotion and faithful service. Surrounded by family members and

parishioners, the event became not only a ceremony of service but also a joyful witness of unity and faith within our parish community.

We congratulate our newly invested altar servers and thank all who contributed to making this celebration a memorable and grace-filled occasion.



Fr Rex Ramos with the newly invested altar servers at Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Culverden

70 years ago

by Peter McLaughlin

We recently bought Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Waiau, with the wish to restore it.

While cleaning above the foyer, my wife found the pictured pamphlet display, just as it was when stored away seventy years ago. 1956 was the latest date we could find on any of the material.

Much of the mission material relates to the Little Sisters of the Poor, who I think in times past, had a convent in Hawarden. Other papers are for apostolates that have a much reduced life in the Church now, such as the Holy Name Society and the Association for the Propagation of the Faith. After cleaning away many decades of dust, it is a little time capsule of parish life in the 1950's.

Opihi Parish Farewell to Fr Jolly

by Ann Wilson, Parish Secretary

As the year began, the parish of St Mary MacKillop held a farewell pot luck lunch to honour Fr Jolly for his nine years of dedicated ministry and service to our three Churches of Temuka, Geraldine and Pleasant Point. A most enjoyable function was well attended by Pastoral Council, Finance and Liturgy Committee members and many parishioners.

We wish him God's blessings in his new parish of MacKenzie. We wish Fr Chris Friel a special welcome to Opihi parish.



Pray for our SEMINARIANS



Deacon Linh Cao
(7th year)



Tung Tran
(Ignatius)
(6th year)



Tuong Duong
(3rd year)



Matthew Clark
(3rd year)



Pho Vo
(2nd year)



Thang Pham
(1st year)



Hoa Tran
(1st year)

Vocations Update

by Matt O'Connell - Evangelisation Coordinator, Christchurch Diocese

New Vocations Director

Bishop Gielen recently appointed Fr Monty Bamford as the new Vocations Director for the Christchurch Diocese. The previous director, Fr Tien Cao, was appointed as parish priest of Holy Family in Timaru and is unable to continue in this role. Fr Tien has done a great job in working with potential candidates and raising awareness of vocations throughout the diocese.

Fr Monty Bamford was ordained in 2022 and is Assistant Priest at the Cathedral and Chaplain to the Te Rangimārie Māori Chaplaincy. Before entering the

seminary, he completed a Bachelor of Commerce at Lincoln University and worked for over three years for a rural supplies company.

Fr Bamford's own vocation began when his parish priest asked him if he had ever considered the priesthood. He had never thought about that possibility and the question planted a seed in his heart which blossomed over time. You can watch his full vocation story here:



Christchurch Seminarians

This year, the Christchurch Diocese has seven seminarians at Holy Cross Seminary in Auckland. There are two in first year (Hoa and Thang), Pho is in his second year, Matt and Tuong are in their third year, Ignatius is in his sixth year and Deacon Linh is in his final months as a transitional deacon before being ordained a priest in the middle of the year. Please keep these young men in your prayers and please continue to pray for vocations.

Contact

You can contact Fr Monty Bamford on frmonty@cathedralparish.nz or Matt O'Connell on vocations.chch@gmail.com.

"I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:15)

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A Marriage to Christ: The Vocation of Consecrated Virginity

by Alex Chia and Bernadette Chen

On 13 June, Bishop Michael Gielen will consecrate Katrina de Roo and Jeanette Hancock as brides of our Lord Jesus Christ. This ancient Rite of Consecration of Virgins, celebrated since apostolic times, predates the development of religious and monastic life. This "order" does not refer specifically to a religious order but to a distinct and established group or body in the Church, similar to how we speak of the "order of bishops."

Through the bishop's solemn consecratory prayer, the Holy Spirit unites the virgin to Christ in a true marital bond, making this vocation a marriage with Christ. From this bond, flow her vocational rights and obligations: lifelong virginity for the sake of Christ, a deep life of prayer, penance, works of charity, continual growth in virtue and ongoing formation.

Unlike a religious, a consecrated virgin does not profess vows or make promises; it is the consecration itself that establishes her new state of life. Lastly, as spouses of Christ, consecrated virgins also share in spiritual motherhood toward all the baptised.

Throughout history, several notable saints have belonged to the *ordo virginum*. Among them are St Marcelline, sister of St Ambrose, consecrated by Pope Liberius in 352/353 at St Peter's Basilica and St Geneviève (c. 422-502), patroness of Paris. Some were also nuns, most famously St Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). She is the only consecrated virgin who is a Doctor of the Church and lived this vocation within monastic life.

Today, there are over 5,000 consecrated virgins worldwide and the number continues to grow. With the consecration of Katrina and Jeanette, the Diocese of Christchurch will have six consecrated virgins. This will be the third consecration in the diocese, the first took place in 2011 and the second in 2023.

Katrina de Roo and Jeanette Hancock are parishioners of St Peter Chanel, Waimakariri and Holy Family, Christchurch West respectively. All are warmly invited to the Mass of the Consecration of Virgins on Saturday, 13 June, at 11.00am, in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral.

For more information about this vocation, visit ordovirginum.wordpress.com.

“Through the bishop’s solemn consecratory prayer, the Holy Spirit unites the virgin to Christ in a true marital bond.”



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“Learn from Me”

Sr Mary Judith RSM RIP

Died 13 December 2025, Nazareth House

Adapted from a funeral eulogy given by Kathleen Rushton RSM

Originally from Greymouth, Judith Murphy entered the Sisters of Mercy in Timaru in 1954, aged 16. She was professed on 4 January 1957. For over 65 years, Judith lived her vocation guided by her motto – “Learn from Me” (Mt 11:29). As she engaged in the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, she was open to lifelong learning.

Judith devoted 32 years to effective teaching in primary schools in this diocese. For 11 years, she was principal of St Patrick’s Greymouth, Villa Maria Primary and Our Lady of Victories School.

In 2005, Judith wrote: “Two significant happenings instrumental in challenging and changing my thinking were my year at the National Pastoral Institute in

Melbourne ... in 1977 and the [Sisters of Mercy] Chapter facilitated by John Curnow. John’s challenges lead me to a deeper understanding of our world and its social structures. This led me to become involved with the Network of Religious for Justice and Peace and later in the local Mercy International Justice Network.”

Judith moved to Lyttelton in 1993, where she was involved in the parish and local community, was a member of the Catholic Worker Community, coordinated a food bank and provided hospitality for people and families in need. After the February 2011 earthquake, Judith settled in Woolston. In 2022, she moved to Peer Street. After her health declined, she spent her final years in the care of Nazareth House.

In January 2025, Judith was delighted to see the Memorial Boards which mark the location of St. Joseph the Worker Church, Lyttelton. At Labour weekend, she attended the 160 year celebration.

Mercy and family were integral to Judith’s life. She described her time in Ireland in 2004 as a “coming home” – visiting Catherine McAuley’s house in Dublin, attending the 150 years Celebration of Ennis Community and its link with Hokitika, visiting where her ancestors had lived and meeting living descendants. Judith will be remembered for her gentle, quiet, resolute, steadfast and compassionate presence amongst us. Kia okioki ia i runga i te rangimarie o te Atua. Rest in peace, Judith.

An Impressive Milestone

Sr Betty Dwyer RNDM recently celebrated 75 years since her profession as a Sister of Our Lady of the Missions, a very rare anniversary. Born in Ashburton in 1931, Sr Betty was at first a primary school teacher in Mission Sisters’ schools throughout the South Island. These included Kaikoura, Nelson before finishing her teaching career in her home-town at

St Joseph’s in Ashburton. During that time, she completed a 30 day spiritual renewal programme in Rome.

In 1988, Sr Betty moved into the Mission Sisters Mount St Anne’s convent in Rossmore Terrace, Beckenham and took up the role of full-time parish worker at St Peter’s Parish, Beckenham, now in Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish,

Christchurch South. She joined the St Peter’s Parish Council and was responsible for sacramental programmes, visits to St Peter’s school and taking communion to the sick and housebound. With the closure of Mount St Anne’s convent, Sr Betty continued this role from a community house in the area until her retirement in 2013.

The celebration to mark Sr Betty’s 75 years since her first profession began with a Mass celebrated by Msgr Brendan Daly in Addington. Surrounded by her Mission Sisters’ community, they all renewed their religious vows during the Mass. Then followed a traditional gathering with all her community and friends where Sr Betty cut the cake to mark this impressive milestone.

At 94 years of age, Sr Betty Dwyer is still an active member of her community and a keen gardener. She is well known for her dry sense of humour and common sense approach to all things.



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1.30pm Variety Hour
2.30pm Afternoon Tea

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

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“He humbled himself”

Sr Mary-Ellen McGuinnes RSM RIP

Died 12 February 2026, Nazareth House

Adapted from the funeral eulogy given by Kathleen Rushton RSM

Born in Christchurch in 1940, Mary entered the Sisters of Mercy in Timaru in 1959 and was professed in 1961. For over 64 years, she lived as a professed Sister of Mercy, engaged in the works of mercy and was ever open to life-long learning.

As a gifted and creative teacher, Mary-Ellen devoted over 27 years to teaching in Catholic primary schools in Hokitika, Runanga, Methven, Darfield and Villa Maria. She was principal in Cobden and Hokitika.

Reflecting on the 1970-80s, Mary-Ellen wrote of two areas that were significant for her. The first was of her involvement in the Network of Religious for Justice which she wrote: "was very important to me" as was the influence of Fr John Curnow. She continued "also my work as Mission Person

at St John of God, Hebron ... [working there] revealed to me a shadow side to our city that has educated me in many ways."

In 1985, Mary-Ellen moved to our Inner City Community from where she continued her ministry at Villa until 1988 when she began working with street kids and their families. Mary-Ellen wrote: "As a Sister of Mercy, I see our fourth vow, 'the service of the poor, sick and ignorant' within the context of hospitality." She understood this as "enduring hospitality" and related to Catherine McAuley's "comfortable cup of tea". For Mary-Ellen: "my 'cup of tea' must be inclusive of all I meet and especially those 'marginalised and at risk'.

Mary-Ellen engaged in various ministries: as a woman of prayer and contemplation,

she was highly regarded and sought after in healing prayer ministry; Chaplain to the Christian Family Movement Solo Parents and Mercy Chaplain at Villa Maria. In 2005, Mary-Ellen moved to Greymouth where she combined parish work with supporting John Paul II High School students with their reading skills. In 2022, Mary-Ellen returned to Christchurch. Last year as her health declined she moved to Nazareth House.

Two strands permeated Mary-Ellen. First, creativity – art, painting, needle work, creative writing and poetry which when teaching children with learning disabilities became her strength. Second, she lived with passion for social justice and cosmic spirituality.

Kia okioki ia i runga i te rangimarie o te Atua. May Mary-Ellen rest in peace.

“Serve the Lord with joy”

Sr Kathleen Mary Kilpatrick LCM RIP

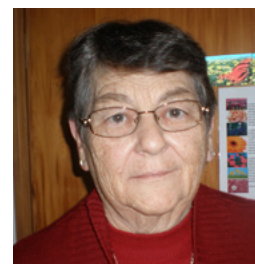
Born in Christchurch in 1941, Kathleen was always interested in nursing. She prayerfully made the decision to enter the Little Company of Mary (LCM) while working for two years at Calvary Hospital with the Sisters. Kathleen travelled by ship to the Novitiate in Lewisham Sydney with two others who were also joining the LCM.

In 1960 when she received the habit, Kathleen was given the name Sr Bede. She was finally Professed in Christchurch in July 1967 and her motto was "Serve the Lord with joy". When name changes were permitted, Bede changed back to Kathleen. Over the years, she was

assigned to LCM communities and hospitals in Wellington, Hawera and Christchurch. For many years, her ministry was mainly in operating theatres, general nursing and geriatric care.

In 1991 a change from nursing beckoned and, for 16 years, Kathleen began assisting the Sisters of Mercy at Star of the Sea Retreat and Conference Centre in Seatoun, Wellington. She then worked as part time archivist for photographic archives at the Mary Potter Community Centre in Christchurch. Kathleen's arrival in Christchurch from Wellington, coincided with our city's catastrophic 2011

earthquake. She was very knowledgeable and meticulous about detail in all her ministries. Gardening and handicrafts were favourite pastimes; she was an accomplished seamstress and knitter. One of Kathleen's favourite quotes was: "Love is the one great power on earth, as well as the joy of Heaven." From "The Spiritual Exercises of Mary" by our Founder Venerable Mary Potter. May she rest in peace.



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A Journey of Faith and Love:

Ten Couples Received the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Traditions of Kasalang Bayan (Mass Wedding)

by Sandy Velmonte

For many Filipino couples, receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony is the ultimate goal of their relationship. Being married in the Catholic Church is more than just a ceremony; it is a way to invite God into the centre of their homes and receive His blessings for a lifetime of love and devotion. This spiritual journey was made possible through the dedicated efforts of Fr Rex Ramos, the parish priest of the Good Shepherd Parish, Hurunui and the chaplain to the Filipino community, whose vision helped these couples formalise their commitment at the altar, ensuring their unions are grounded in faith and the Church's grace.

The celebrations began in October, at the Church of the Holy Passion, Amberley, where two couples from the Couples for Christ (CFC) Christchurch community exchanged their vows in a beautiful, intimate ceremony. After Mass, the two families hosted separate receptions to celebrate with their closest friends and family.

The spirit of community reached its peak in December at Our Lady, Help of Christians in Culverden. Four couples from the CFC Hurunui community were wed in a grand ceremony, followed by a lively joint reception at the Amuri Gym. The entire community worked tirelessly to organise a massive celebration, bringing together nearly 300 guests. The air was filled with excitement as the couples shared one big, festive party, reflecting a true Filipino



Kasalang Bayan (Mass Wedding) at St Peter's Church, Beckenham

"fiesta" with a sumptuous meal, lively games and a sense of oneness only a tight-knit community can provide.

The wedding season continued a week later at St Peter's Church in Beckenham, where another four couples were united in marriage. Following the sacred ceremony, each couple hosted their own separate reception, allowing them to celebrate their unique journeys with specific family members and friends, while remaining part of the larger collective blessing of the Church.

The Filipino tradition of Kasalang Bayan (Mass Wedding) beautifully reflects both culture and faith. In the Philippines, mass weddings are often organised to help couples who have been living together or are civilly married receive the Church's blessing, without incurring a heavy financial burden. These events are characterised by shared joy, the support of godparents (Ninongs and Ninangs), and a strong sense of belonging. This event highlighted the Filipino tradition of bayanihan, where the community comes together to support its neighbours. Through these three events, these ten couples have built their homes on a foundation of faith that, we pray, will endure throughout their lives.



Kasalang Bayan (Mass Wedding) at Our Lady, Help of Christians in Culverden

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Night Masses Held by Filipinos to Prepare for Christmas

by Joyce Roa

From 15 to 22 December, St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, St Anne's Woolston, St Patrick's Lincoln, Holy Name Ashburton, Our Lady Help of Christians Culverden, and St Teresa's Riccarton were filled with mostly Filipino worshippers, as they attended eight Novena Masses at night. These Masses were part of the Filipinos' preparations for Christmas and is called Simbang Gabi (Night Mass).

Many rushed home after work so they could participate in these Masses and the churches attested to their devotion—most nights, many of the parishes were filled with Mass goers. It was the first time in the Diocese of Christchurch, when that many churches held Simbang Gabi Masses simultaneously.

At the culminating Mass on 23 December, held at Haeata Community Campus, Bishop Michael presided over the congregation of around 1,300, together with eight other priests and one deacon. He lightheartedly encouraged the participants that the practice of going to Mass nine nights before Christmas was something else. "My nieces expect church talk and having to go to Mass several times a week when they are with their bishop uncle, but you attend Mass every night for nine nights!" he said.

He exhorted the crowd not to give up because their loved ones, especially the young ones, are looking at them and watching them live out their faith. Bishop Michael told them to be people of hope in 2026, especially in these challenging times. He gave special mention in prayer for the various natural calamities that have beset the Philippines in 2025.



At the end of the Mass, Fr Rex Ramos, chaplain of the Philippine Chaplaincy Christchurch, thanked each of the parish priests that accommodated the Simbang Gabi. He shared that maybe this is the Filipinos' contribution towards inculturating our faith, by getting more people engaged in the real reason for the season. Afterwards, attendees lined up for free dinner while a band entertained the crowd.





Celebrating Faith through the Feast of Santo Niño

by Joyce Roa

To prepare for the Feast of Santo Niño, Filipinos in the Christchurch Diocese attended nine nights of Novena Masses from 8-16 January. They were held at three parishes—Sacred Heart, Our Lady of Victories and St Patrick's in Lincoln.

On 17 January, a fluvial procession was held in Lyttelton Harbour, where 382 participants set sail in three vessels to commemorate the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines, through the Child Jesus—Sto. Niño—who came to the Filipino people by sea. According to Fr Rex Ramos, chaplain to the Filipino community, fluvial parade is history remembered, faith proclaimed and devotion lived.

There was also a vespera (“of the evening”) Mass held at the Sacred Heart church on the night of the tenth of January.

Then on the feastday Sunday, 18 January, more than a thousand Filipinos gathered together to celebrate a Pontifical Mass, presided by Bishop Michael and concelebrated by five priests, hailing from various places around the globe. These included Fr Rex Ramos, Fr Antonio Ricarte (USA), Fr Chris Eaton (Australia), Fr Esmeraldo Reforrial, OCarm (Philippines) and Fr Peter of the Sacred the Sacred Heart (China).

During his homily, Bishop Michael recalled the first occasion when the image of the Sto. Niño was brought to the Filipino people through the explorer, Ferdinand Magellan. The bishop said that the Child Jesus found a home among Filipinos where 500 years later, every country on earth have Filipinos “dancing, boat sailing and locals not understanding” what’s going on.

He added that the Sto. Nino was accepted because He came in the form of a baby. “A baby cannot hurt you. A baby does not have an agenda. A baby does not try to take anything from you.” Bishop Michael further said, “And so Jesus came to the Filipino people as a baby to say, ‘I cannot hurt you. I can only bring love.’”

Referring to the various readings for the Mass, the bishop shared three points that the congregation can take home. One is that “God wants to come as a child to you at the beginning of the year.” The second is, “You are children of God. You are adopted sons and daughters of God.” The third is, “The greatest in heaven is a child”—the weak and the small.” He closed his homily by asking attendees to put their trust in Jesus again.

Dance and Shared Lunch

After the Pontifical Mass, two groups showcased cultural dance presentations to honor the Sto. Niño, which was followed by a mass sinulog dance, a rhythmic backward and forward dance where young and old, priest and laity joined together to honour the Child Jesus. Afterwards, attendees lined up to get a share of free lunch.

Temuka Celebration

Meanwhile in Temuka, where they have been celebrating the Feast of the Sto. Niño for 23 years, host families held a novena for nine days prior to prepare the people in the area. The church was full as more than a hundred Mass goers attended the Feast of the Sto. Niño on 17 January. Fr Lito Quinones celebrated the Mass at St Joseph's Church. Residents from Temuka, Timaru, Oamaru, Christchurch and other areas attended. Then, bring-a-plate lunch was held at the nearby St Joseph's Hall, where more than 300 participants partook of food and fellowship.



The Festival of Lights 2025 – a true Pilgrimage of Hope!

by Michael Loretz, lay member of the Community of the Beatitudes.

On 7 December, the Saturday evening preceding the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, hundreds gathered in Leithfield to celebrate Holy Mass at the Sanctuary of Fourvière with Bishop Michael and the Community of the Beatitudes. Although this was the seventh annual Festival of Lights to be held at the Sanctuary, this year's event held a special significance. At the dawn of 2025, then Pope Francis dedicated the coming year of jubilee for the whole Church to the theme "Pilgrims of Hope",

the Beatitudes – (an ecclesial family of consecrated life with priests, brothers, sisters and lay couples) – for retreats, Mass, Confession, times of prayer, spiritual accompaniment and days of recollection. As the twilight of this jubilee year began to fall, the faithful of the diocese were invited to celebrate in a very special way at the Sanctuary – with Holy Mass, fellowship, a shared picnic, candlelight procession and Eucharistic adoration into the night.

The Marian Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fourvière, with its shrine of Mary, Mother

Fourvière, Lyon, was also the place of the first Catholic Community in France and the first French Martyrs, who were killed by the Roman authorities in the first and second Centuries at the circus in Lyon. These martyrs included St Irenaeus of Lyon (recognised as a doctor of the Church in 2022), who was a disciple of St Polycarp of Smyrna (modern day Turkey), who in turn was a disciple of St John the Evangelist – one of the twelve apostles.

The origin of the Festival of Lights came sixteen years after the Marist Missionaries had left for the Pacific, when on 8 December 1852 (two full years before the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was promulgated), the City of Lyon erected a golden statue of Mary at the top of the Church at Fourvière. As the statue processed through the town and up the hill in torrential rain, the people lit lanterns and placed them in their windows and verandas in honour of Mary. Ever since, a Festival of Lights is held in Mary's honour and many pilgrims attend the celebrations.

The Community of the Beatitudes in Leithfield, erected a replica of the golden statue of Mary on their property in 2019, when Bishop Patrick Le Gal of Lyon and Bishop Paul Martin (then Bishop of Christchurch) opened the shrine of Mary, Mother of the Light.

“ Inviting the faithful to see themselves as pilgrims on a journey of spiritual renewal, mercy and reconciliation ”

inviting the faithful to see themselves as pilgrims on a journey of spiritual renewal, mercy and reconciliation. Bishop Michael immediately designated four official sites of pilgrimage within the Diocese of Christchurch, encouraging the faithful to go to one or more of these holy places, to experience again our journey of Faith and to be reinvigorated and motivated afresh towards its destination – the very joy of heaven! Fourvière was selected as one of the official places of pilgrimage for the Jubilee year.

Throughout the Jubilee year, many groups of pilgrims, families and visitors were welcomed by the Community of

of the Light, was named after the Basilica of Fourvière in Lyon, France – the Marian place of pilgrimage where, in 1836, the first Catholic missionaries to New Zealand and Oceania consecrated themselves and their mission to Oceania. This small band, comprised of just seven missionaries for the whole of the Pacific – Bishop Jean Baptiste Pompallier and six companions, three Marist priests and three Marist brothers. One of the priests, Fr Claude Brett died of disease on the Island of Teneriffe before the group had even left the North Atlantic. Another, Fr Peter Chanel was killed on the island of Futuna and became the first martyr of Oceania.



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Photo credit: Peter Fleming

The Festival of Lights is now an annual event in both Lyon and Leithfield, where many pilgrims celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the light of Christ, reflected in the great “yes” of Mary the Mother of God. In New Zealand, it is also a celebration of the journey of the Gospel to our region and into our hearts. We pray in gratitude for the great gift of faith brought to this land by those first missionaries and martyrs, who showed such heroic love. We pray that we too might become children of a new evangelisation, as we answer God’s special call on our hearts to live and share what we have received with the people of our time.



“Her ‘Yes’ Changed History”

Extracts from a Homily of Bishop Michael Gielen given at Fourvière

"In preparing for this day, for this Festival Mass, I allowed myself to imagine our earliest missionaries from Lyon: Bishop Pompallier, Mother Aubert, St Peter Chanel and the early Marist missionaries, standing in prayer during the Festival of Light, gathering as we do this day, bringing before our blessed mother all their hopes, their dreams and their fears. While history does not record their presence at the festivals, we know their lives were deeply affected, illuminated by the same Marian faith that inspired Lyon's candles in the Festival of Light. Their faith was inspired by the intercession of the Mother of Jesus. It is now our call to celebrate the light that our Blessed Mother brings. A light that shines brightly in this graced season of the Jubilee of Hope.

Light and hope are two themes that radiate from the life of our Blessed Mother and speak deeply to our lives in these times. Mary is the living witness to hope. At every turn in her life, when the path was unclear, she faithfully carried hope in God's promise — Hope at the Annunciation when she did not understand how God would fulfil His word in her. Hope when Simeon foretold a sword would pierce her heart, even as she held her child. Hope when Jesus was misunderstood and rejected by his own townspeople. And hope at the cross when all seemed lost. She believed God's plan was greater!

Her hope was not passive. It was courageous, persevering and rooted in trust. Over the centuries, the Church has learned to place our hope in Mary.

In the face of such a challenging role, I have noted that both Pope Francis and Pope Leo, immediately following their installation, turned to our Blessed Mother, traveling to a Marian shrine, seeking her intercession in dedicating their papacy



to her care. One of Pope Francis's final requests was to be laid to rest under her mantle in the Basilica of St Mary Major, the preeminent shrine to our lady, the oldest Marian shrine in the West.

The Festival of Light traces its heart back to Mary's protection during the dark days of the plague in Lyon. In gratitude, the city crowned its skyline with a golden image of Mary on Fourvière Hill. Each year Lyon celebrates with candles and light, a tradition that has become a beacon of faith and beauty. Through Bishop Pompallier and the Beatitudes Community, we have been invited to share in this story of light, not as mere observers or tourists, but as cooperators in God's plan to lead us from darkness into light.

Mary was the cooperator par excellence. Her 'yes' changed history. She surrendered her own plans and embraced God's mission fully. Her example has inspired countless others to take up the candle, the light of faith.

This sanctuary, this festival, bears witness

to that rich history. Lyon, Holy Cross, Irenaeus, Pompallier, Suzanne Aubert, the Beatitudes Community, are lights of Mary that have lit our pilgrimage of faith in this land. But we know not everyone chooses to cooperate in God's plan. We know this in ourselves. Adam and Eve were called to cooperate, yet they chose against this. They broke the bond.

Today, we risk becoming a world of spectators with devices, in isolation, standing on the sidelines, commenting but not engaging, or even worse, operating alone, insisting on doing things my way. When we do this, we remain in the shadows. We become lost.

In the spirit of gratitude, I invite you now to pray in thanksgiving for the moments of light and faith that have blessed your year. I invite you now to recall those moments, any moment that comes to mind that you want to thank Our Lady for, and for those areas of pain, difficulty and failure. Let's allow our Blessed Mother to bring her light, the light of her Son, into these areas, Mary who never ceases to pray for us.

Our early missionary fathers and mothers, with all their challenges and heartaches, would never have imagined the fruit of their hope. What difference the light of their faith would make in our land. We now stand in that same light of Mary's intercession. She reminds us it is our generation who now carries the light of faith. Let us place our lives, our hopes, our dreams, our families, our parishes, our schools and communities in Mary's care.

Placing our hope in her, asking her to give us enough light and hope for the year ahead. Our Blessed Mother of Fourvière, pray for us. St John the Baptist, pray for us."



Photo credit: Peter Fleming

2026 College Head Students

CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL COLLEGE

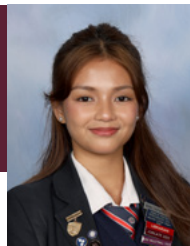


Callum McGirr
Head Boy

'To live by faith' is Catholic Cathedral College's (CCC) school motto and also a strong focus throughout my life. I am an active member of Holy Family Parish, Christchurch West, spent my junior years at Our Lady of Victories School and have been at CCC since year 9.

Our school is special with its strong sense of community. It is a place where faith is not just talked about; it is lived out in how we support one another and take pride in who we are. As Head Boy, my main goal is simple: connection. I want every student to feel seen and valued. Whether that is on retreats, at sports, through Mass, at House events, or just around the school at lunchtime, I aim to be present and approachable.

Leadership, to me, is not about standing in front; it is about standing with. Alongside connection, I believe in setting a standard. Catholic education calls us to be more, not just academically, but in our character as a whole.



Elsen Jane Lising
Head Girl

It is both a great honour and a genuine privilege to serve as one of the Head Students of CCC. Having been part of this kura for three years, I believe that faith shapes the person we are called to be. I once thought that academic success was the greatest measure of achievement, but CCC has shown me that there is far more to education than results alone.

This school has nurtured in me a deep sense of compassion and a call to serve, not only God, but His people. As a leader of 2026, I believe there is space in our hearts for whakapono, manaakitanga, panekiretanga, and whanaungatanga. Being guided by our Catholic values along with the Marist tradition of service, I seek to honour the legacy of those who have come before us — helping this school be grounded in faith, unity and respect.

MARIAN COLLEGE



Seyara De Silva
Head Student

I am blessed to serve as Head Student at Marian College. Marian has nurtured in us our greatest strength: faith — and taught us to carry it wherever we go.

Throughout my time at our beautiful kura, I have been in awe of staff and students choosing Jesus' love above all else. Seeing our girls follow Mary Mackillop and Catherine McAuley through their welcoming smiles, empathy for others and love of service has inspired me. Our charisms and values shape how we learn. As a 4 Greenstar-rated school, we put Laudato Si' into action, honouring our responsibility to creation.

I am deeply grateful for this supportive culture and for the broader perspective I gained as Head of Special Character in 2025. This year, I hope to ensure every girl who calls Marian home, feels that same sense of belonging and finds the courage to sustain and strengthen this culture daily.

VILLA MARIA COLLEGE



Emma O'Connor
Head Student

As I step into the role of Head Girl for Villa Maria College, I feel incredibly aware of the Catholic and Mercy values that have shaped who I am. For me, leadership at Villa is not about a title. It is about serving our community with compassion, courage and heart, just as Catherine McAuley did.

My faith has grown here in everyday moments like House prayers, conversations about justice and the constant support from teachers and friends. I have learned that faith is something we live out by showing up for others and making a difference. Being part of a Catholic school gives us more than an education. It gives us purpose and direction. I feel honoured to lead a college that empowers young women to grow with confidence, knowing we are supported by a strong sisterhood grounded in Mercy, whakaute, manaakitanga and tika.

JOHN PAUL II HIGH SCHOOL



Katie Boddy
Marist Leader

Through my Catholic primary and high school experience, my faith has shaped me into who I am today and inspired me to take initiative, both in and out of school. I am involved in Catholic Character through Mass readings, Eucharistic Ministry and helping lead retreats. I believe that by fostering a strong sense of community and faith, we can create a supportive environment where everyone feels valued and inspired to grow both spiritually and personally.



Sam Bryan
Mercy Leader

Special Character holds a big role in the structure of our school, including Masses, liturgies, youth groups, and many other celebrations. Being privileged to serve as Mercy Leader, I always try my hardest to live out the Mercy charism in everyday life, even in places where it may not seem possible. Alongside this, our school motto, "Christ is the Key", reminds me that God will always be with me, that He has a plan for me, and that no matter what, I will never be alone.



Roshni Francis
Light Leader

Being a Light Leader means trying to reflect the light of Jesus in the way I treat others, encourage people and support my school community. LIGHT stands for Learning, Integrity, Guardianship, Hauora and Truth. Through experiencing how being a Catholic was celebrated in our school, I felt a calling to do more in the school and thereby, grow in my faith. Outreach into the community through our parish, primary schools and retirement homes and beyond, is a really important part of evangelisation for me.

RONCALLI COLLEGE

Reuben Wheeler
Head Boy

I am grateful to have received the position of Head Boy at Roncalli College for 2026. For this year, I'm excited to demonstrate my leadership skills to the College and wider community, by being of service and guidance to others, with the support of my family, friends and peers.

Through experiences interacting with other schools and communities in the Young Marist network, it has helped me to develop my principles as a person, as well as build up my foundation of what it means to be a leader. My vision for the year is to increase participation, inclusion and enthusiasm amongst students at our school by promoting a safe and family-like environment.

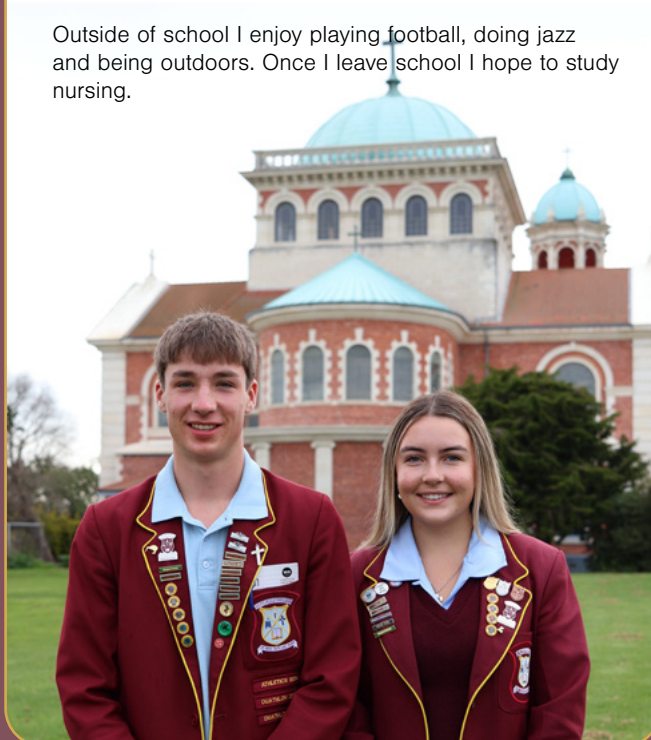
I look forward to seeing what the future holds, and I plan to go to university for a sports related degree.

Millie Humphris
Head Girl

I have the privilege of being head girl at Roncalli College for 2026. Throughout my time at Roncalli I've been surrounded by unwavering support from teachers, friends and whānau, which has shaped me into the leader I am today. The strong sense of faith and belonging at Roncalli is something I deeply value and I am proud to represent our Mercy and Marist values.

As Head Girl, I hope to foster an environment where every student feels supported, included and empowered to make the most of their time at Roncalli.

Outside of school I enjoy playing football, doing jazz and being outdoors. Once I leave school I hope to study nursing.



ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY



Samuel Amaris
Deputy College Captain

Firstly, I thank God, whose grace has guided me through every challenge and opportunity that has led me to this moment. It is a humbling privilege to know that others have placed their trust in me and I do not take that lightly. I am committed to honouring the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice as well as living out the core values that define our school: brotherhood, compassion, manawa and legacy, in everything I do this year.

When I reflect on how I arrived here, I am grateful to be reminded of all the people and values that have shaped me along the way. My Catholic faith has been central to that journey. Through serving at Our Lady of Victories Church and being part of our College's CSYMI Mission Team, I have come to understand leadership as something lived through action, through service, consistency and the way we treat others each day. Through my faith, I have learned that true leadership begins with listening, serving my community and placing the needs of others before my own ambitions.

I owe so much to my family. My parents and my two younger sisters have supported me through every challenge and opportunity, often making sacrifices I only fully appreciate now. As the son of Colombian parents and a second-generation immigrant, I carry a deep pride in where I come from. My heritage keeps me grounded and grateful: being raised in Aotearoa New Zealand has given me opportunities that I never take for granted. Both identities shape who I am and how I hope to lead.

This year our mission is simple, but deeply intentional: Turn Up. Lift Up. Man Up.

Turning up means choosing to be truly present, not only physically, but mentally and spiritually. It is about showing up with purpose, ready to learn, to serve, and to make the most of the gifts God has given us.

Lifting up reflects the brotherhood at the heart of St Thomas'. It calls us to notice those around us, to offer encouragement and support, and to ensure that no one walks alone. Our strength is found in how we uplift one another.

Manning up is about living with Manawa, acting with integrity, and taking responsibility for our choices. It means striving each day to become the best version of ourselves, courageous in doing what is right, even when it is difficult.

Together, these three ideas shape the kind of young men we are called to become at St Thomas': men who are present, who serve others, and who lead with character, not only within our school, but in our families, parishes, and the wider community.

ST BEDES COLLEGE



Gethin Blair
Head Boy

I feel very privileged to be serving as Head Boy for St Bede's College this year. Being a Bedean is something I value deeply and I am proud to belong to a school that stands firmly on Catholic values, as well as a strong sense of faith, service and tradition.

Our school motto, *Fide et Opere* - by faith and by works - is something that continues to guide me. To me, faith is not only what we believe but how we live it through our actions each day. I aim to live this out by supporting younger students and helping create an environment where everyone feels welcome and encouraged to get involved in the opportunities St Bede's offers.

Modelled on Jesus himself, the Marist spirit has shown me that leadership is about putting others first, serving with humility and building a strong community. I am excited for what the year ahead will bring and grateful to be part of the journey alongside the Bedean brotherhood.

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A Profound Celebration of Catholic Identity

The 2025 Secondary Schools National DRS Conference

Christchurch, December 2025

by Thomas Newton, Director of Religious Studies, Villa Maria College

The 2025 Secondary Schools National DRS Conference, held in Ōtautahi Christchurch, was a vibrant and faithfilled gathering, bringing together Catholic leaders from throughout Aotearoa New Zealand to pray, learn, connect and deepen their shared mission. Anchored in the Jubilee Year theme, Pilgrims of Hope, the conference celebrated the rich heritage, living identity and future direction of Catholic education in New Zealand.

From the moment delegates arrived at the Commodore Hotel, hospitality and wairua shaped the experience. A warm mihi whakatau set the tone for two days of encounter, reflection and renewal. Central to the conference was an interfaith experience inspired by Pope Leo XIV's call to "build bridges" through dialogue and understanding. Delegates rotated through

two encounter opportunities: a visit to the Al Noor Mosque, including kōrero with Aya Al-Umari and Farid Ahmed whose stories of grief, love and hope have touched hearts across the nation; and a period of peaceful mindfulness and cultural learning at the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple. These encounters invited DRS and HoF leaders to embody the gospel values of compassion, peace and solidarity.

The conference dinner brought further joy and inspiration, with Fr Michael Pui leading grace and Brendan Malone from LifeNet offering an engaging address that affirmed the vital role of Catholic educators as bearers of Christ's light in our schools.

The second day took delegates on a journey to Akaroa—one of Canterbury's pilgrimage destinations. Stops took in the Catholic cemetery, Takapuneke, Ōnuku and finally St Patrick's Church. The journey invited participants to encounter the stories of the first Marist missionaries, local Māori communities and pioneering Catholic families. Through prayer, reflection, storytelling, and shared kai, delegates were reminded that they stand in a long line of pilgrims who have carried the Church's evangelical mission throughout New Zealand.

In all, the 2025 conference was a profound celebration of Catholic identity—honouring the past, engaging the present, and strengthening the collective mission to accompany young people in faith, hope and love.

(Image 1) Farid Ahmed discusses forgiveness with the Religious Educators.

(Image 2) Tony Mullaly of St Thomas of Canterbury College talks to Abbess Manshin (centre), of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple.



Religious Educators gather around the Britomart Monument in Akaroa, erected in 1898 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Lenten Tradition at Marian

Three purple crosses now stand marking the Lenten season on the fence at Marian College. The tradition of erecting the crosses outside began when the school resided in its temporary location on Barbadoes Street and had no chapel of its own. An outdoor area was created for students to pray and reflect. On Ash Wednesday, Year 13 students were given the honour of walking the three crosses, through the school and to the outdoor chapel where they would remain visible for all to see during Lent.

More than a decade later, and at Marian's new location in Northcote, this Ash Wednesday tradition continues.

"It's about having a visible sign for everyone coming into school to see and remember that we are in the season of Lent," Director of Ministry Myra Fidow said.

This year, the Marian College Special Character Group encouraged students for their fasting to be inspired by St Francis of Assisi. For example, be humble like St Francis and fast from being self centred, trust in God and fast from worry or doubt and fast from division or distress and walk in God's peace.



Our Lady of the Assumption Welcomes New Principal

This year, our school community gathered in faith and unity to celebrate a special Mihi Whakatau, welcoming their new principal, Matt Malone, to Our Lady of the Assumption school in Hoon Hay. Formerly Deputy Principal at St Joseph's School in Rangiora and before that, Director of Religious Studies at St Bede's College, Matt brings with him a deep commitment to Catholic education and faith-filled leadership. In his address, he gave thanks to God for His providence and grace,

acknowledged the love and support of his wife Anna and their daughters, and honoured our mana whenua, those who have gone before and former principal Janet Cummings for her dedicated service.

Entrusting his leadership to Mary, Mother of God, Mary Assumed into Heaven, whose name our school proudly bears, he reminded us that she is our model of courage and faith, always saying "yes" to God. Reflecting on the words of the hymn

Mo Maria, "Kia kaha rā tātou, Kia nui te aroha" he called the staff and students to be strong and to let great love flourish in our school. Encouraging our students to be courageous in their learning, to grow in virtue and character and to be unafraid to take risks, he shared his hope that Our Lady of the Assumption will continue to be a place strong in faith, strong in learning and strong in love, a true school family grounded in the love of God and Mary.





What's Happening at Hurunui Parish

All Saints Day Parish Retreat

Thirty people gathered for Mass, adoration, three talks and a shared lunch at Hawarden. Our parish priest Fr Rex Ramos offered the Mass, after which we had a lovely shared meal under the large tree beside the pastoral centre. Three talks were given by Robert Loretz PhD from Leithfield, based on the Beatitudes All Saints theme. People came from all parts of the Hurunui, Christchurch and the West Coast. The weather was kind, the venue was peaceful and the talks insightful and instructive.

In Nothingness, There Is Everything Women's Retreat

The Hurunui parish women gathered at St John's Hall in Culverden for a retreat focused on stillness, prayer and spiritual renewal. The retreat invited participants to step away from daily distractions and enter a sacred pause in God's presence.

Guided by a Carmelite priest from the Philippines, Fr Esmeraldo Reforial, O'Carm, participants were introduced to the beauty of contemplative prayer rooted in the Carmelite tradition. His reflections gently encouraged women to embrace emptiness, simplicity and surrender, reminding them that God is often found not in striving, but in letting go. Through sharing circles, moments of quiet prayer, and the Sacrament of Confession, women were given the opportunity to reflect, heal and begin anew as the New



Year approached. The retreat became a space where burdens were laid down, hearts were opened and faith was renewed.

"From nothingness, there is everything," Fr Esmeraldo shared—a reminder that when we empty ourselves before God, we create room for grace, healing and transformation. In the stillness, participants encountered a deeper awareness of God's presence and a renewed sense of inner peace. As the retreat came to a close, women departed with lighter hearts and strengthened spirits, carrying with them the quiet truth that in silence, God speaks; in surrender, God provides and in nothingness, there is everything.



In early March, the House Leaders from Sacred Heart Primary School in Timaru were treated to an amazing morning tea at Highfield Lifecare. The children enjoyed chatting to the residents who thanked the students for the cards and letters they received last Christmas.

Inform

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