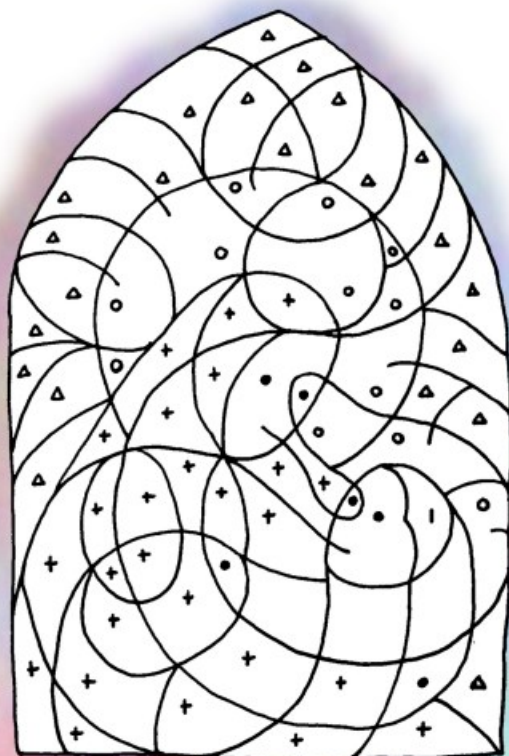


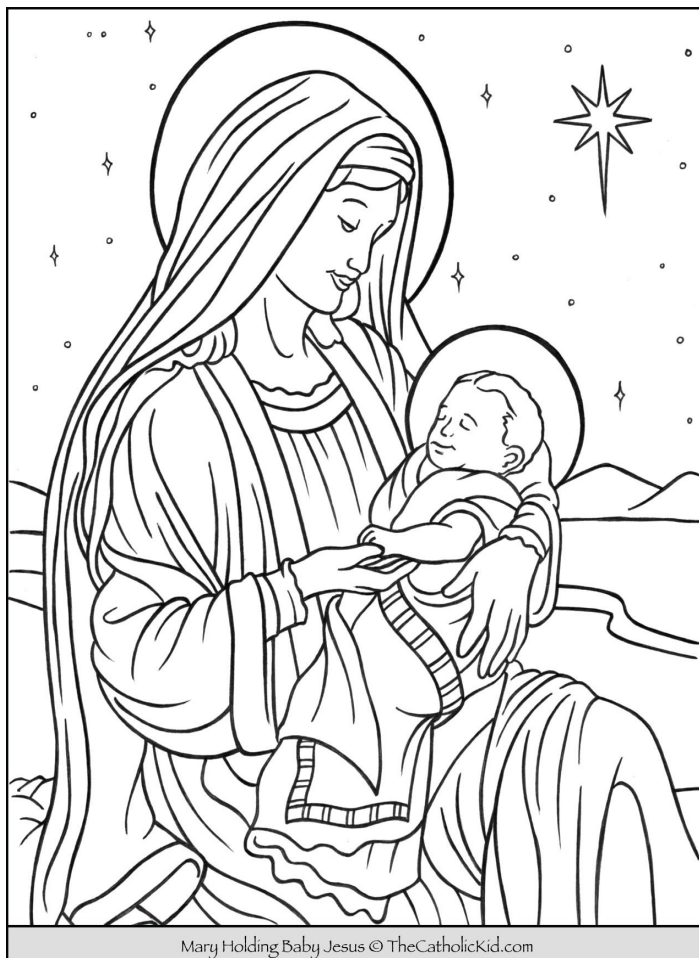
The Kids' Bulletin

Sunday January 1st, 2023
Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God



Whose feast is it on New Year's Day?
Colour in the spaces to see! Here's the code:

+ Blue ▲ Pink ○ Yellow
! Brown • Skin colour



Mary Holding Baby Jesus © TheCatholicKid.com



God's Mother and Our Mother

Today, on the very first day of the new year, we celebrate the feast of the greatest saint in Heaven! Before He even made the world, God knew that He would make Mary to be His mother. When the time came that Jesus should come into the world He sent His angel Gabriel to tell Mary that God wanted her to be His mother. Because Mary was obedient and loved God she said "Yes" to Him.

God gives us mothers to look after us and feed and teach us. He chose Mary, who was the most perfect woman, to look after His Son, Jesus. She loved Him with all her heart and took the best care of Him that any mother ever did for her children.

When Jesus was dying on the cross He gave His mother to us. So now we have His holy mother Mary for our mother in Heaven! Today we thank God for His holy mother. Can you remember to pray to Mary today and every day this year? She loves us because she is our mother and wants to help us every day!



OUR LADY OF LOURDES
PARISH OF SEVEN HILLS
"Still a wonderful place to pray & stay"

7 Grantham Road, Seven Hills. NSW. 2147

Ph. 9622 2920

Email: secretary@olol7hills.com.au

Parish Priest: Fr Henry Huu Duc Tran
Parish Office Team: Jane Letran Kim Dang
Sacrament Co-Ordinator: Artelle Lenthall
Office Hours: Monday-Friday: 9am - 3.00pm
WEEKDAY MASS: Tues, Wed, Fri. 8.00am
Thursday 9.00am
WEEKEND MASS: Saturday Vigil 6pm
Sunday 8am & 9:30am

Parish School: OLOL 8869 6800
Principal: Ms Keiran Byrnes
Reconciliation: Saturday 4:30-5:30pm
Baptism 22nd January 2023
Baptismal Preparation: 15th February 2023
Parish Website: www.olol7hills.com.au
Pastoral Care of the Sick: Bathista Emmanuel
0405 833 655

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/OLOL7Hills/>

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD 1st January 2023



Let us Pray for the Sick

Leonila Ahillon, George Alagiah, Mary Attard, Cynthia Avery, Rosella Booth, Barrie Chamberlain, John Chandler, David Barrow, David Bejamin, Barrie Chamberlain, Myrna G Cruz, Elizabeth Ehsman, Danilo Dolot, Parakramia Diaz, Ruby Rose Chary, Melvyn Fernandes, Jose Garcia, Wendy & Klaus, Anslan Lawrence, Anush Fernando, Alfredo Fernandez, Joseph Franco, Spencer Leon, Anthony Janicska, John Glover, Cynthia Lopez, Gerard Marcello, Marie Marchand, Ananda Nayana, Blago Milicevic, Sr Colleen O'Sullivan RSJ, Wiranjan Peiris, Salome Pillay, Debra Price, Camy Ratnam, Sandra Roseworn, Susantha Seranayake, Bernie Sivapatham, Joan Spillane, Pummalin Sumcad, Sue Tipaldo, Phan Tran, Natalie Woodward.

If you would like to add to our Sick List or know of any Parishioner who is unwell please contact Father Henry or email the Parish office: secretary@olol7hills.com.au We can also arrange for Holy Communion or a visit if required.

Let us Pray for the Deceased

Recently Deceased: Ranjan Fernando, Francisca Garcia, Francis Muscat, Adrian Pereira.

Anniversaries: Carmen Attard, John Azzopardi, Philomena Corera, Silvia & Sam De Batista, Peter Diab, Bebe Diab, Toufic Debe, Rita De Silva, Hansel De Silva, Ivan Elisher, Melvyn Fernandes, M.A Fernando, Sam & Mary Gardia, Enrique Lumagbas, Marcel Mohsen, Felina Cabral Mayuyo, Pauline Meilak, Thelma Morrissey Irene Moroney, Anton Motha, Stephen & Louis Mula, Aurora Nonato, Aurelio Pangininan, Floriano Sernasr, Shane Vaz, Jim Vella.

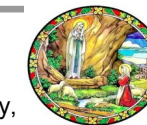
Remembrance: France Angseeing, Roy, Mary & Des Barney, Merlene & Ralph Blackford, Rosario Cabasa, Joseph & Carmena, Dennis Clarke, Cini & Mangion Family, Myrna Cruz, Bonosa Enfesta, Fernandes Family, Charlie Gauci, Gerard Marcello, Pauline Meilak, Mary Mifsud, Lourda Motha, Muscat Family, Josephine & Charles Muscat, Mary Muscat, Jesus Opuencia, John & Rosaline Ratnam, Jose, Laureano & Karen Reryes, John Zarent Williams.

Our Lady of Lourdes

Ever Immaculate Virgin, Mother of mercy,
health of the sick, refuge of sinners,
comfort of the afflicted, you know my needs,
my troubles, my sufferings;
cast on me a look of pity.

By appearing in the grotto of Lourdes,
you were pleased to make it a privileged sanctuary,
from which you dispense your favours,
and already many sufferers have obtained the cure of their
infirmities, both spiritual and physical.

I come, therefore, with the most unbounded confidence
to implore your maternal intercession.
Obtain most loving mother, my requests,
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
Amen.



COVID- 19 UPDATE

• **MASKS:** are no longer mandatory but still **encouraged**

As previously communicated, density limits are no longer applicable for our Churches and other buildings within the Parish since December 2021.

HOWEVER OUR SAFETY PLAN STILL RECOMMENDS SOCIAL DISTANCING WHERE POSSIBLE.

PLEASE DO NOT ATTEND IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ANY FLU LIKE SYMPTOMS.

REGULAR COLLECTIONS - First and Second

* **FIRST COLLECTION** and **Matt's Point** are for the support of Priests throughout the Diocese.

ON-LINE BANK DONATIONS

Account name: Parramatta Diocesan Clergy
BSB: 067 950
ACC: 00 00 4265
Reference: Seven Hills - 6035

* SECOND COLLECTION or Planned Giving Program

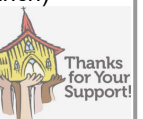
On behalf of the Parish Community, I would like to thank you very much for your ongoing support, which has been absolutely vital in keeping our Parish going strong. Projects completed include the Hall Kitchen renovation, Parish Meeting Room painting, Parish Office and Meeting Room Roof painted, Church roof cleaned and ceiling repaired and painted.

ON-LINE BANK DONATIONS

Account Name: Seven Hills Catholic Church.
BSB: 067 950
ACC: 000552
Reference: (Your Planned Giving envelope number or for a one off donation, 'DONATION')

IN-PERSON BANK DEPOSIT (at a Bank Inst / Branch)

Account Name: Seven Hills Catholic Church
BSB: 062 315
ACC ID # 00901486
AGENT # 660



All are welcome to join us for **Our Lady of Lourdes, Seven Hills, Sydney, NSW, Australia Facebook LIVE-STREAM WEEKEND MASS** celebrated by **Fr. Henry Huu Duc Tran on Saturdays 6PM (Vigil),** <https://www.facebook.com/OLOL7Hills/>

First Reading

A reading from the book of Numbers 6:22-27

The Lord spoke to Moses and said, ‘Say this to Aaron and his sons: “This is how you are to bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover his face and bring you peace.” This is how they are to call down my name on the sons of Israel, and I will bless them.’

The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

(R.) May God bless us in his mercy.

God, be gracious and bless us
and let your face shed its light upon us
So will your ways be known upon earth
and all nations learn your saving help. (R.)

Let the eoples praise you, O God;
Let all the peoples praseie you.
May God still give us his blessing
Till the ends of the earth revere him. (R.)

Let the nations be glad and exult
for your rule the world with justice.
With fairness you rule the peoples,
you guide the nations on earth. (R.)

SECOND READING

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Galatians 4:4-7

When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law and to enable us to be adopted as sons. The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, ‘Abba, Father’, and it is this that makes you a sonn, you are not a slave anymore; and if God has made you son, then he has made you heir.

The Word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets;
Now he speaks to us through his Son.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 2:16-21

The shepherd hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told.

When the eight day came and the child was to be circumcised, they gave him the name Jesus, the name the angel had given him before his conception.

The Gospel of the Lord.



PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL COMMUNION
My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar.
I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen

GENERAL NOTICES...

NEW TO OUR LADY OF LOURDES? HOW CAN WE SERVE YOU?
Welcome. Wherever you are in your faith journey, it is great to have you.
Please visit our website or call the parish office. We’re here to serve you.
www.olol7hills.org.au

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK <https://www.facebook.com/OLOL7Hills/>

SICK AND/OR HOMEBOUND?
Would you like to receive Communion? Or seriously ill or in danger of death? We have dedicated ministers who can visit and bring you communion. Feel free to approach or call Fr Henry for the Holy Anointing of the Sick. Please call the parish office 9622 2920.

FUNERALS
When a funeral is to be celebrated, please contact Fr. Henry before contacting the funeral home. Funerals are not permitted on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation.

BAPTISM
Parents desiring Baptism for their children are encouraged to contact the Parish Office to arrange for the required preparation class for parents.

SCAM ALERT!!
Beware of any suspicious emails or text messages. Call the parish office for verification.

MASS INTENTIONS
All Mass intentions must be submitted to the Parish Office on or before Thursday.

YOUNG ADULTS GROUP
Meet the second Friday of every month in the Parish Hall at 7pm
For more information contact Ian Epondulan: youtholol7h@gmail.com



KEEP UP TO DATE By visiting our parish website with news , the bulletin, prayers and much more - a great way to stay up to date with what’s on in our parish.
Visit www.olol7hills.org.au

LEGION OF MARY
Thursdays at 1.30pm in the Parish Meeting

CHRIST COMMUNITY PRAYER GROUP
weekly prayer group meetings will begin on Thursday 12 January 2023 and held after the 9:30am Mass. All Welcome.

OLOL PARISH CALENDAR		
JANUARY		
8	Baptism	
8	The Epiphany of the Lord	
12	Christ Community Prayer Group	9.30am
26	Australia Day	
31	School Term 1 resumes	

OLOL MINISTRY ROSTER

January 2022		
Acolytes		
Ministers	Please refer to roster at back of Church	
Readers		
Altar Servers		
Morning tea (after 9.30am Mass)		
Flowers		
Church cleaning		
Welcomers		

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION:
THE POPE FRANCIS LIST

1. Don't gossip.
2. Finish your meals.
3. Make time for others.
4. Choose the 'more humble' purchase.
5. Meet the poor 'in the flesh'.
6. Stop judging others.
7. Befriend those who disagree.
8. Make commitments, such as marriage.
9. Make it a habit to 'ask the Lord'.
10. Be happy.

Paradiso

Credit: rappler/nbcnewsdotcom

POPE FRANCIS: ‘MY RESIGNATION LETTER IS READY IN CASE OF HEALTH PROBLEMS’By Salvatore Cernuzio
At the beginning of his pontificate in 2013 when Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone was still Secretary of State, Pope Francis handed in a resignation letter "in case of impediment due to health reasons." Revealing this decision, which Pope Paul VI had also taken during his time, Pope Francis spoke about this matter in a wide-ranging interview granted to the Spanish daily ABC. The full interview appeared on Sunday with previews posted a day earlier.
The Pope met with the newspaper's editor, Julián Quirós, and its Vatican correspondent, Javier Martínez-Brocal, when he addressed numerous topics on current events regarding the life of the Church and the world.
The conversations touched on the war in Ukraine, where the Pope said he does not see "a short-term end to it since it is a world war," the cases of abuse by clergy, the role of women in the Roman Curia (where he says "within two years a woman will head a Dicastery"), Benedict XVI's 2013 resignation, and his own possible resignation.

Resignation letter

The Pope spoke about the existence of his letter of resignation, saying "I have already signed my resignation. It was when Tarcisio Bertone was Secretary of State. I signed the resignation and told him: 'In case of a health impediment or whatever, here is my resignation. You have it'. I don't know who Cardinal Bertone gave it to, but I gave it to him when he was Secretary of State."
The two ABC interviewers asked if the Pope wished this to be known, and the Pope said, "that's why I'm telling you," recalling that Paul VI had also left his resignation in writing in the event of health issues, and Pius XII had probably done so as well. "This is the first time I am saying this," the Pope adds. "Now maybe someone will go and ask Cardinal Bertone to 'give me that letter' (the Pope said jokingly)... surely (Cardinal Bertone) will have given it to the new Secretary of State."

War in Ukraine

The interview also focuses on the ongoing war in Ukraine against which the Pope has spoken out more than a hundred times. He also states bluntly: "What is happening in Ukraine is terrifying. There is enormous cruelty. It is very serious..."
The Pope sees no short-term end to the war on the horizon: "This is a world war. Let us not forget that. There are already several hands involved in the war. It is global. I think a war is fought when an empire starts to weaken, and when there are weapons to use, to sell and to test. It seems to me that there are many interests involved." The Pope has spoken out against the war more than a hundred times, saying, "I do what I can. They don't listen," adding, "What is happening in Ukraine is terrifying. There is enormous cruelty. It is very serious. And this is what I decry continuously." The Pope confirms his openness in receiving and listening to everyone: "Now Volodymyr Zelensky has sent me one of his religious advisors for the third time. I am in contact, I receive people, I help..."

[Photo Embed: Interview of Pope Francis by Spanish daily ABC]

Vatican diplomacy

Pope Francis own outreach goes hand in hand with the Holy See's diplomatic efforts. On this topic, the ABC interviewers asked why the Vatican is so cautious in speaking out against totalitarian regimes. "The Holy See always tries to safeguard peoples...through dialogue and diplomacy," Pope Francis replies. "The Holy See never goes it alone...It always tries to safeguard diplomatic relations and to save what can be saved with patience and dialogue."

Abuse cases

Answering a question on the cases of sexual abuse by the clergy, the Pope says, "it is very painful, very painful," when referring to his meetings with victims that have taken place during his pontificate. "These are people who have been destroyed by those who should have helped them mature and grow up. This is very difficult. Even if there were only one case, it is horrendous, and that a person who should lead you to God destroys you on this path."

Role of women

The ABC interview then focuses on topics of a more 'ecclesial' nature, starting with possible leadership roles for women in the Roman Curia. "There will be," Francis says assuredly. "I have someone in mind for a Dicastery where a position will be available in two years. There is no obstacle to a woman leading a Dicastery where a lay person can be prefect. If it is a Dicastery of a sacramental nature, it must be presided over by a priest or a bishop," the Pope explained.

Future Conclaves

The Pope then addressed the debate over how the work of future Conclaves could be made difficult given that the new cardinals he has created do not know each other well and come from different and distant places. The Pope said it is true that there could be issues "from the human point of view", but "it is the Holy Spirit who is at work in the conclave." The Pope then recalled a proposal of a German cardinal during the August meetings on Praedicate Evangelium "that in the election of a new Pope, only cardinals living in Rome should participate". The Pope then asked rhetorically, "is this the universality of the Church?"

Benedict XVI: a saint, a great man

Speaking on the relationship with his predecessor Benedict XVI, Pope Francis described him as "a saint" and "a man of great spiritual life", revealing that he visits with him often and always feels "edified" by his transparent gaze. "He has a good sense of humour, he is lucid, very alive, he speaks softly but follows the conversation. I admire his lucidity. He is a great man'. Pope Francis, on the other hand, says he has no intention of defining the juridical status of Pope emeritus: "I have the feeling that the Holy Spirit does not have interest that I deal with these matters."

Church in Germany

Regarding the Church in Germany, grappling with the synodal process that has generated and still generates various reactions, even negative ones, Pope Francis recalls the "very clear" letter he wrote in June 2019: "I wrote it on my own. It took me a month. It was a letter as if to say: 'Brothers, reflect on this'.

Visit to Marseilles

During the interview conversations, the Pope mentioned that he has a journey planned to Marseilles for the 'Mediterranean Encounter', noting that it is not a trip to France per se and that the priority for his apostolic journeys has been to visit the smaller countries of Europe.

Asked about the issue of Catalonia, the Pope said that "each country must find its own historical path to solve these problems. There is no single solution." He then cites the case of North Macedonia or South Tyrol, in Italy, with its own status. As for the role that the Church should maintain in this matter, he emphasises instead: "What the Church cannot do is to be a propaganda voice for one side or the other, but yes to accompany the people so that they can find a definitive solution." In the same vein, the Pope recalls that: "When a priest meddles in politics, it is not good.... The priest is a pastor. He must help people to make good choices. Accompany them. But not to be a politician. If you want to be a politician, leave the priesthood and become a politician."

Motu Proprio on Opus Dei

In conclusion, when asked about last July's Motu Proprio Ad Charisma tuendum on Opus Dei, the Pope said that the document addressed an area that needed to be redefined and resolved. It was not a disciplinary measure or takeover, as some have claimed. "Please. I am a great friend of Opus Dei, I love the people of Opus Dei very much and they work well in the Church. The good they do is very great."



FROM FR. HENRY DUC

Dear Friends,
Welcome to our very first bulletin of this New Year 2023, and as usual we kick off the year with a significant feast day called, Mother of God or Theotokos in Greek, meaning ‘God-bearer’.
With this feast day celebration, the Church invites us all to entrust all the days ahead throughout this year in the motherly hand of Our Lady, and we trust that she will remain our powerful intercessor for us before her divine Son Jesus.
From a historical perspective, this Marian title was first applied to Mary by the Council of Ephesus in 431 as a response to Nestorius’ claim that was two persons, one divine and the other human, and thus Mary was not properly to be called Mother of God (Theotokos), but rather Mother of Christ (Christotokos). Under the leadership of Cyril of Alexandria, the fathers of Ephesus rejected Nestorius’ stand and claimed that Jesus. Although fully human in nature, was a divine person. Therefore, Mary truly the Mother of God, and the title then was upheld by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Gospel story we have today is a continuation of the Gospel due for the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in which Luke recounted the account of how Joseph and Mary had to take Jesus from Nazareth to Bethlehem and Mary gave birth to him at a stable, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger. The angel then proclaimed the great news of his birth and invited the shepherds to come to see him.
In this account, the evangelist tells us what happened when the shepherds arrived at the scene of Jesus’ birthplace. They encountered Mary, Joseph and the baby lying in the manger and they filled them with what the angel of God had told them. With a simple phrase ‘she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart’, Luke is able to highlight two inspiring virtues from Mary worth for us to admire and learn from her: number one, it’s her keenness to appreciate all the grace and blessings from God, and number two, her willingness to reflect deeper upon the good things God has done for her. Let us ask for the grace to help us be inspired by and put into practice these two beautiful qualities of the Mother of God, and pray that we may be able to treasure and reflect upon every good thing we will receive and keep on glorifying and praising God for his goodness throughout this year.

Happy New Year and have a grace-filled days ahead,
Fr Henry

PARISH NEWS...

PARISH OFFICE HOURS

Our Parish Office will be closed during January 2023, consequently there will be no weekly bulletins during the period. We are sorry for any inconvenience.

PIETY SHOP

2023 Religious calendars are available from the piety shop.

CHRIST COMMUNITY PRAYER GROUP

weekly prayer group meetings will begin on Thursday 12 January 2023 and held after the 9:30am Mass.
All Welcome.



FREE ZUMBA CLASSES

Every Tuesday and Thursday 6-7pm in the Hall. Everyone Welcome!

PARISH DIRECTORY 2023

Our annual parish directory is a very useful source of information for anyone new to our parish or for those who are parishioners and would like to stay informed with important information and events. Pick up your copy from one of the doors of the church today!

LOURDES OVER 50s GROUP-

Come and make new friends and enjoy social activities. Meetings are at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish Hall from 10.30am to 1pm once a month. Tea and coffee supplied. Contact the parish office for more information; secretary@olol7hills.com.au

CHURCH VACUUMING

We urgently need extra people to do the church vacuuming once a month for about one hour mostly on a Wednesday after the 8.00 am Mass or on a Thursday after the 9.00 am Mass. If you can help either phone the **Parish Office 9622 2920 or Mary on 0447 676 371.**



LITURGICAL MINISTRY FORMATION COURSES 2023

The Liturgical Ministry Formation Courses will recommence next year in February. This is formation for anyone interested in serving within the Liturgical Ministries either as Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, Communion to the Sick and Dying and Ministers at the Altar. If you are interested or would like more information, please contact the Office for Worship on 0460 037 795 or mary.gale@parracatholic.org or visit our website to download an enrolment form at <https://officeforworship.org.au/>

SAVE THE DATE – Parish of Richmond St Paul's Feast:

21 January Plans are underway for the Parish of Richmond's 2023 Annual St Paul's Feast. Please save the date and spread the word. More information to come soon. The Parish relies on the hands of many to continue the St Paul's Feast tradition. If you are able to assist in any way, please contact Vicki on 0410 545 783.

PARRAMATTA PONGAL TAMIL HARVEST FESTIVAL: 21 January

The Community Migrant Resource Centre invites you to celebrate the annual Tamil Farmers' Festival (Thai Pongal), signifying the end of the traditional farming season on Saturday 21 January from 11am to 2pm at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta. Bishop Vincent will celebrate Mass, followed by entertainment and lunch. Entry is free and all are welcome. For enquiries, please contact James Atanasious from the Mission Enhancement Team on 047 873 519.

VINNIES SUPPORT CENTRES ARE STILL AVAILABLE TO THOSE IN NEED

St Vincent de Paul Support Centres across Greater Sydney are still available and taking calls to arrange for food vouchers or other items to be provided to those in need. If you need assistance, call the Support Centres in Blacktown on (02) 8861 9777, Harris Park on (02) 8861 9757 and Penrith on (02) 8861 9770. To find out more about what support is available, visit <http://vinnies.org.au/covidsupportnsw>

SUMMER SCHOOL OF EVANGELISATION

Sydney: 8 – 15 January

Summer School is a week-long, live in life-changing retreat featuring live music, incredible worship, inspiring talks, engaging liturgy, time to chill & learn...and more...in the midst of a community of 150+ young people aged 16-35. Summer School will be held at the Mt Carmel Retreat Centre, Varroville NSW from 8 to 15 January. More info & bookings: summerschool.org.au

WILLOUGHBY ANIOCH 40 YEAr REUNION : 21 January

Former members of the Willoughby Antioch community are invited to a 40-year reunion on Saturday 21 January 2023 at St Thomas' Church, Willoughby. For more information and to RSVP, please email willoughbyantioch@gmail.com

SACRED CONNECTIONS RETREAT:

Beginning 12 February Jamberoo Abbey are hosting a series of online retreats pondering the values of Silence/ Listening, Reverence and Community, which are integral to both Aboriginal and Benedictine Spirituality. All videos and texts from the retreat sessions will be available on the Jamberoo Abbey website. The cost of the retreat is \$300. Register online today at jamberooabbey.org.au/retreats/online-retreats. For enquiries and registration, contact online retreat@jamberooabbey.org.au.

POPE FRANCIS 'URBI ET ORBI' MESSAGE 2022

Dear brothers and sisters in Rome and throughout the world, happy Christmas!

May the Lord Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, bring to all of you the love of God, wellspring of confidence and hope, together with the gift of the peace proclaimed by the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those whom he favours" (Lk 2:14).

On this festive day, we turn our gaze to Bethlehem. The Lord comes to the world in a stable and is laid in a manger for animals, since his parents could find no room in the inn, even though the time had come for Mary to give birth. He comes among us in silence and in the dark of night, because the word of God needs no spotlights or loud human voices. He is himself the Word that gives life its meaning, he is the Light that brightens our path. "The true light, which enlightens everyone" – the Gospel tells us – "was coming into the world" (Jn 1:9).

Jesus is born in our midst; he is *God with us*. He comes to accompany our daily lives, to share with us in all things: our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears. He comes as a helpless child. He is born in the cold night, poor among the poor. In need of everything, he knocks at the door of our heart to find warmth and shelter.

Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, surrounded by light, may we set out to see the sign that God has given us. May we overcome our spiritual drowsiness and the shallow holiday glitter that makes us forget the One whose birth we are celebrating. Let us leave behind the hue and din that deadens our hearts and makes us spend more time in preparing decorations and gifts than in contemplating the great event: the Son of God born for us.

Brothers and sisters, let us turn our eyes to Bethlehem, and listen to the first faint cries of the Prince of Peace. For truly Jesus is *our peace*. The peace that the world cannot give, the peace that God the Father has bestowed on humanity by sending his Son into the world. Saint Leo the Great summed up the message of this day in a concise Latin phrase: *Natalis Domini, natalis est pacis*: "the Lord's birth is the birth of peace" (Sermon 26, 5).

Jesus Christ is also *the way of peace*. By his incarnation, passion, death and resurrection, he has opened the way that leads from a world closed in on itself and oppressed by the dark shadows of enmity and war, to a world that is open and free to live in fraternity and peace. Brothers and sisters, let us follow that road! Yet in order to do so, to be able to walk behind Jesus, we must divest ourselves of the burdens that weigh us down and block our way.

What are those burdens? What is that dead weight? The same negative forces that prevented King Herod and his court from acknowledging and welcoming the birth of Jesus: attachment to power and money, pride, hypocrisy, falsehood. These forces hold us back from going to Bethlehem; they exclude us from the grace of Christmas and they block the entrance to the path of peace. Indeed, we must acknowledge with sorrow that, even as the Prince of Peace is given to us, the icy winds of war continue to buffet humanity.

If we want it to be Christmas, the Birth of Jesus and of peace, let us look to Bethlehem and contemplate the face of the Child who is born for us! And in that small and innocent face, let us see the faces of all those children who, everywhere in the world, long for peace.

Let us also see the faces of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters who are experiencing this Christmas in the dark and cold, far from their homes due to the devastation caused by ten months of war. May the Lord inspire us to offer concrete gestures of solidarity to assist all those who are suffering, and may he enlighten the minds of those who have the power to silence the thunder of weapons and put an immediate end to this senseless war! Tragically, we prefer to heed other counsels, dictated by worldly ways of thinking. Yet who is listening to the voice of the Child?

Our time is experiencing a grave *famine of peace* also in other regions and other theatres of this third world war. Let us think of Syria, still scarred by a conflict that has receded into the background but has not ended. Let us think too of the Holy Land, where in recent months violence and confrontations have increased, bringing death and injury in their wake. Let us beseech the Lord that there, in the land that witnessed his birth, dialogue and efforts to build mutual trust between Palestinians and Israelis may resume. May the Child Jesus sustain the Christian communities living in the Middle East, so that each of those countries can experience the beauty of fraternal coexistence between individuals of different faiths. May the Christ Child help Lebanon in particular, so that it can finally rebound with the help of the international community and with the strength born of fraternity and solidarity. May the light of Christ illumine the region of the Sahel, where peaceful coexistence between peoples and traditions is disrupted by conflict and acts of violence. May that light lead to a lasting truce in Yemen and to reconciliation in Myanmar and Iran, and an end to all bloodshed. May it inspire the political authorities and all people of good will in the Americas to attempt to calm the political and social tensions experienced by various countries; I think in particular of the people of Haiti who have been suffering for a long time.

On this day, as we sit around a well-spread table, may we not avert our gaze from Bethlehem, a town whose name means "house of bread, but think of all those, especially children, who go hungry while huge amounts of food daily go to waste and resources are being spent on weapons. The war in Ukraine has further aggravated this situation, putting entire peoples at risk of famine, especially in Afghanistan and in the countries of the Horn of Africa. We know that every war causes hunger and exploits food as a weapon, hindering its distribution to people already suffering. On this day, let us learn from the Prince of Peace and, starting with those who hold political responsibilities, commit ourselves to making food solely an instrument of peace. And as we enjoy gathering with our loved ones, let us think of families that experience great hardship and those that, in this time of economic crisis, are struggling as a result of unemployment and lacking in the necessities of life.

Dear brothers and sisters, today as then, Jesus, the true light, comes into a world severely sick with indifference, a world that does not welcome him (cf. Jn 1:11) and indeed rejects him, as it does with many foreigners, or ignores him, as we all too often do with the poor. Today may we not forget the many displaced persons and refugees who knock at our door in search of some comfort, warmth and food. Let us not forget the marginalized, those living alone, the orphans, the elderly – who are wisdom for their people – who risk being set aside, and prisoners, whom we regard solely for the mistakes they have made and not as our fellow men and women.

Brothers and sisters, Bethlehem shows us the simplicity of God, who reveals himself not to the wise and the intelligent but to the little ones, to those with a pure and open heart (cf. Mt 11:25). Like the shepherds, let us too set out in haste and allow ourselves to be amazed by the unthinkable event of God who becomes man for our salvation. He, the source of all good, makes himself poor, [1] asking as alms our own poor humanity. Let us allow ourselves to be deeply moved by the love of God. And let us follow Jesus, who stripped himself of his glory in order to give us a share in his fullness. [2]



World Day of the Sick Mass

including the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

11am | Saturday 11 February 2023

Mary Queen of the Family Parish, Blacktown

DIOCESAN WORLD DAY OF THE SICK MASS:

11 February 2023 A Mass for the World Day of the Sick, including the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, will be held at 11am on Saturday 11 February 2023 at St Patrick's Church, Mary, Queen of the Family Parish, Blacktown. All are welcome, including those who may be sick, and those who care for the sick and dying and health care professionals. RSVPs are required by: 6 February 2022 to han.nah.portelli@parracatholic.org

