

Holy Cross Retreat

<https://holycrosscentre.com/community/>



Letter 287

8th August, 2025

Who is doing what?

Erick has resumed his Master of Counselling studie and has had quite a lot of reading to do. He is also participating in a few athletic events over this month.

Mike has been helping out in St Brigid's Marrickville and came home on Thursday. Today he is heading to Hobart to help out with a Vietnamese community Mass.

JD is undertaking research work which requires a lot of discipline because he has to create and maintain his own study structure.

Chris has had some extra lectures added to his two evening classes at YTU. He is moderator for a Zoom session for four Tuesday evenings and he is keeping his hand in as a practising nurse, in his watchful and caring monitoring of Jerome.

Jerome continues in good spirits despite a much more restricted lifestyle, and foregoing (mostly) tasty sugary snacks!

Tri celebrated his 33rd birthday on Tuesday (see photos on Pg 8). He is not one to sit around waiting for something to do, so he is quite engaged and last Sunday night he hosted his Vietnamese friends ('The Party Boys') from different Congregations or Dioceses. They usually manage to have a very good time!

Speaker for the chapel foyer



Unfortunately there have been some problems with the chapel speakers over the past two weeks. We appreciate that not being able to hear easily is frustrating, so we are taking steps to rectify that. We also need the celebrants to do their best to be heard. We are also going to instal a speaker in the foyer.

People using that area on Sundays or during special events such as funerals, have been unable to hear, because the glass doors are closed. It is a larger job than we had hoped, because of the distance the cable has to go from the originating source, and because the carpet along the wall behind the altar will need to be lifted and re-laid.

Holy Cross Fundraising Event Update

We again extend our thanks to everyone who has contributed so generously to the event this Saturday night. The event is fully booked with 293 attendees, which is an amazing response and testimony to the Committee's great work!

Mention has been made of the auction items available for preview. They are listed below. Persons interested in bidding should contact one of these Committee members.

Tina: 0439 034116

Alida: 0418 535488

Peter: 0413 015061



Event Details: Saturday, 9 August 2025 at the Veneto Club Bulleen

Time: Arrival at 6:00 PM for a 6:30 PM start

Holy Cross Fundraiser 9th August 2025

We express thanks to the generous donors who have assisted us for this fundraising event

Team up with friends and family to make sure you have the best shot to secure these special live auction items!

ITEM 1. GASMATE PORTOFINO 16" GAS PIZZA OVEN

VALUE: \$600 (DONATED BY: SITROGROUP AUSTRALIA)

ITEM2. STIHL CHAINSAW, CARRYCASE AND HELMET

TOTAL VALUE: \$1,084 (DONATED BY: Anonymous)

ITEM3. KIESER(MONTALBERT) 6 MONTH MEMBERSHIP

VALUE: \$1,623 (DONATED BY: KIESER MONTALBERT)

ITEM 4. ESTATE PLANNING GIFT VOUCHER

TOTAL VALUE: \$2,750 (DONATED BY: COSTANZOLAWYERS)

ITEM 5. CHOICES FLOORING DONCASTER GIFT VOUCHER

VALUE: \$500 (DONATED BY: CHOICES FLOORING DONCASTER)

ITEM6. TOSCA SPACEX SET of 3 SUITCASES

TOTAL VALUE: \$1,077 (DONATED BY: HELLO WORLD TRAVEL TEMPLESTOWE)

ITEM7. JOHNNIE WALKER BLUE LABEL KING GEORGE V EDITION

VALUE: \$600-\$1,000 (DONATED BY: Anonymous)

ITEM 8. COLLINGWOOD 2023 PREMIERS TEAM SIGNED GUERNSEY

TOTAL VALUE: \$2,495 RESERVE APPLIES

Newly professed

Five of the men in the photos below have spent time in Holy Cross and have now completed 12 months in the novitiate in the Philippines. They made their first profession of vows on Saturday August 2nd.

From left: [Hau](#) did not come here. [Cu'ong](#), [Hai](#), [Thang](#), [DJ](#) and [Thang \(Vincent\)](#).
[Fr Chris Akiatan](#) was their novice master



Below they are seen relaxing the night before their profession, sharing a coffee overlooking Saigon.



[Hau](#), [Thang](#), [Chris](#), [Cu'ong](#), [Thang](#), [Hai](#), [DJ](#).

[Thang](#), [Cu'ong](#) and [Thang](#) have begun the visa process to return to Holy Cross and complete their theological studies at YTU. Nothing is guaranteed, but we hope their applications are successful. [Hau](#) will undertake studies in Manila.

Two CPE graduates

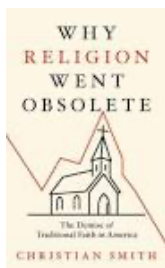


Many will remember **TJ** (talented musician) and **Phuc** (a classmate of Tri).

They have just completed a three month Clinical Pastoral Education programme in Manila from which they benefited greatly. They now are ready for a pastoral appointment. TJ already has final vows and has been appointed to Blenheim, New Zealand. Phuc will take up an appointment and following a positive assessment, he will make final profession. Both men will be ordained deacons during this next appointment.

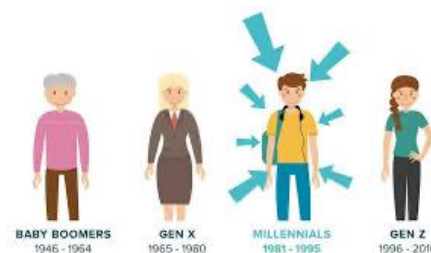
What are people actually seeking from religion?

A response to American sociologist Christian Smith's book reflecting on the demise of traditional religion in America. (Kaya Oakes June 2nd 2025)



Religion is fading away, but faith and belief, somehow, are not. The problem is that how people define faith and belief is just as individualistic as the culture we live in. And the root cause of this drift remains debatable.

Christian Smith brings a sociologist's expertise to the topic. Key to his thesis is the notion in the book's subtitle—what's dying out are “traditional” ideas about religion, not necessarily the idea that God or a higher power exists. In exploring the idea of “religious obsolescence” and pinning its beginnings to the post-Boomer generations—with a particular focus on Millennials—Smith finds that not only are people drifting away from religion, but that religion has given them plenty of reasons to do so: “Something becomes obsolete when most people feel it is no longer useful or needed because something else has superseded it in function, efficiency, value, or interest.” Religion's obsolescence wasn't planned, but is instead the inevitable result of social and cultural structures that have changed over time.



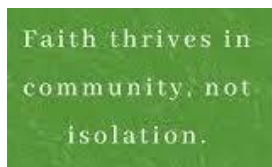
Smith pins this obsolescence on multiple overlapping forces. Some of them include the rise of higher education for the masses, women entering the workforce, the deinstitutionalization of marriage and family, mass consumerism, and individualism. “No cause was sufficient to produce the outcome,” according to Smith. Instead, multiple interacting causes led to larger numbers of young adults disaffiliating from religion.

The nineties, in Smith's accounting, were the fulcrum in the story of religion's decline. For Gen Xers like me, who were just entering the workforce, the social opportunities Boomers took for granted were vanishing before our eyes. Steady



careers, affordable home ownership, and the privilege of staying put in the same community for most of your life were not going to be available. In turn, that made many Gen Xers cynical about the benefits of religion, and seeing the first clergy sex-abuse scandals break into the mainstream accelerated the decline of interest in religion. This

lack of stability only increased with Millennials, and my Gen Z students today are painfully aware that even with a B.A. from Berkeley, a secure home or steady career is not guaranteed.



Religion thrives on community, and due to the forces Smith traces in addition to the more recent outcomes of the pandemic and 2024 presidential election, community is not really available to most younger Americans today. The

problems many of my own interview subjects talked about a decade ago persist. It's hard to settle down and join a church when you have to deliver DoorDash (Uber Eats) orders on weekends to make ends meet.

Climate change and our global political landscape have made many younger adults hesitant to produce the children churches are so eager to catechize. Clergy sex-abuse scandals unfolded just as post-Boomers were coming of age. All of these things, along with resistance to changing ideas about gender and sexuality, have made it difficult for many people to feel like it's even worth trying to participate in organized religion. This scarcity of time and resources isn't new. As Smith says, "it is normal in any religious life to experience much fluidity and the drift in and out." Staying put is a luxury, but for those who enjoy it, it's harder to understand that "the drift" is more typical than digging in.



Culture moves in waves, and the culture of the nineties, when this arc of disaffiliation began, and today's culture have much in common. Nihilism and individualism were commonplace in nineties art, and the rise of the internet meant that people were beginning to spend less time in the face-to-face



communities religion has long depended on. Such is the case with Gen Z today. But what Smith really drills down to as a major factor in religion's decline is how much consumer culture has changed people's relationship to religion.

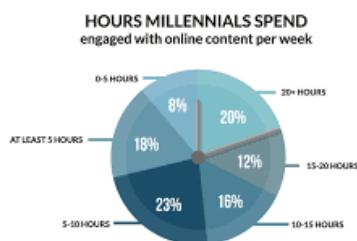
“The more consumerism’s narratives shaped the values, aspirations, and identities of young Americans,” Smith writes, “the more alien and mismatched traditional religious narratives felt.”

The mismatch happens in different ways, but they all point back to the long-gestating notion that what we buy is who we are. As problematic as that idea might be, we have to acknowledge that Target doesn’t offer only one brand of paper towel and Amazon makes billions of dollars because it allows us to find what we want quickly. In contrast, the satisfactions of religion are abstract and time-consuming. The people I interviewed for *The Nones Are Alright* felt religion fails to meet them where they are.



Churches are not places where you can just walk in and start a conversation; they can sometimes even be hostile to the possibility. Churches cannot always provide people with what they want or need or help them shape their identity.

Consumerism, by contrast, is all around us. As much as we might dislike the way consumerism shapes us, no one can demonstrate that consumer culture doesn’t contribute to their identity somehow. When Pope Francis was in the hospital earlier this year, the Vatican used social media to inform people of how he was doing. Social media is about consumption—of products, information, jokes, and even, occasionally, news. But social media long ago also became the means by which many people find the interests that shape their identities. When churches use social media, they can seem to set the bar so high, to demand so much from believers that unless you hope to become a saint, the point of religion can seem unclear.



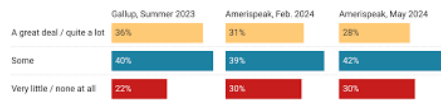
Religion is fading away, but faith and belief, somehow, are not.

There is also the problem of what my students refer to as “cringe” content from religious institutions: priests dancing to Kendrick Lamar’s song “Not Like Us” on TikTok (seemingly oblivious to the fact that it uses the insult “certified paedophile”); the PreachersNSneakers Instagram account showcasing Evangelical youth pastors in \$500 collectible Nikes; the Catholic Answers account creating an AI priest named Fr. Justin that told people it could take their confessions; the Hallow prayer app inviting conspiracy theorist and accused sexual abuser Russell Brand to be a celebrity spokesperson.



If that's what passes for religion, you can see why people have turned away. The Catholic-priest shortage is but one example of this; the number of churches that

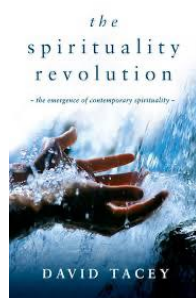
Americans' Confidence in Colleges and Universities Reaches New Lows



Note: Gallup asked about "higher education" and did not include "none at all" as a response option.
Chart: Nathan Honeycutt • Source: FIRE / NORC • Created with Datawrapper

have closed and denominations that have shrunk down to a fraction of their former size is another. It's not just churches that are losing membership. Smith reminds us that "Americans have progressively lost confidence in almost every major social institution over the last half century." The hypocrisy and greed of politicians and corporate leaders is blatant, but so is the hypocrisy and greed of religion. Scandals in just about every creed or denomination have pushed more and more people away, with good reason. An institution that promises moral purity but provides abuse and theft can seem very unworthy of a person's time and investment.

But as Smith explains, and plenty of evidence demonstrates, that doesn't mean people aren't in search of spirituality or belief. Religious decline didn't happen because secularization "won," but because "alternatives that are more like



religion than secularism emerged as cultural options." These cultural options appealed more to post-Boomers than religion did. Coastal states have seen this coming for a while, with ten yoga studios for every church, legalized psychedelics and marijuana, the proliferation of mindfulness apps and wellness, and people more interested in exploring Buddhism or Wicca than in exploring, say, Presbyterianism. Churches often bemoan this shift without asking why it is happening.

The conclusion that Smith and many more of us who've studied these phenomena have drawn is that religion's decline is not going to stop. But a persistent culture of denial seems to remain in religious communities. Every crumb of data that points to a potential resurgence of traditional religion is greeted ecstatically online, like the surge in online church attendance during the pandemic lockdown, which translated into the same empty pews when lockdown ended.

"What will bring people back?" is the wrong question after pervasive abuse scandals in every Christian denomination. It is the wrong question after Covid



exposed our lack of compassion for one another, the wrong question during the horrors of Trump 2.0, and the wrong question when churches refuse to recognize their own decline, insisting that if people just got with the program, we'd return to the glory

days of people lining up for Mass. But one reason people lined up was because they were socially ostracized if they didn't.

We don't want to believe we need to deploy shame as a spiritual tool to make people fall in line, but that is the reality our parents and grandparents lived in. Is that really what we want to go back to just to keep traditional religion alive?

Smith admits that many sociologists have shown religion's "prosocial effects," but he adds that "it would be futile for society to bolster traditional religion just to sustain these benefits." After all, "embracing such instrumentalist ways of legitimizing itself is part of what set religion up for obsolescence in the first place." So, again, "What will bring them back?" is the wrong question. Better ones for religious institutions and clergy might be "What did we do wrong?," "How can we repair the damage we have done?," and "What are people actually seeking?"

ASK BETTER QUESTIONS

Smith's book proves, people have never stopped seeking God, transcendence, spirit, or community. They're just not finding any of those things in church.

This article was published as part of a symposium titled "The Future of American Religion." The other contributions can be found here:

[Peter Steinfels](#), "An Alternative Narrative?"

[Gerardo Martí](#), "Retreat & Resurgence"

[Susan Bigelow Reynolds](#), "Overlooked Treasure"

Note approximate dates: Gen X (1965-1980) Millennials (1981-1996)
Gen Z (1997-2012) Gen Alpha (2012-2024)

Tri's birthday (wearing his birthday shirt)



Changing worldviews

Part 6 finished at the point where we noted that Thomas Berry, an American Passionist suggested that the fourth era of human life was coming to an end because planet earth is being destroyed! He declared that Earth can live without humans, but we cannot live without Earth. He suggested that “our greatest challenge is to discover *the meaning of being human*”.

“Hand in hand with the physical (ecological) loss, is the degradation of the interior world of the human. To lose “the wonder and majesty, the poetry, music, and spiritual exaltation of the deep mysteries of existence is a tragedy.” Environmentalist Paul Hawkins



reminded us that Ralph Waldo posed the question, “What would we do if the stars came out only once every thousand years?” Hawkins said, “In fact we know the stars come out every night and people are

inside watching television!” Any of us could ask, when did we last celebrate the rhythm of nature (e.g. watch a sunrise or mark the arrival of spring etc). Further, have we been captured by the awe of our world and the goodness of the creator? Has our prayer matured to be contemplative? Have we now lost interest?

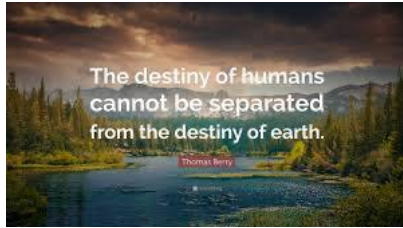


In 1900, 14% of people lived in cities. Today the UN claims that 56% of people in the world live in cities and 50% live in cities or towns with fewer than 500,000 people. Lagos in Nigeria had a population of 290,000 in 1950. It's population is now over 17,000,000! 82% of people in Northern America live in urban areas, while only 43% of people in Africa live in urban areas. 75% of the people in India today live in over 640,000 villages. 86% of Australians and New Zealanders live in urban areas, 40% of Vietnamese and 14% of

Papua New Guineans. In the last century we killed over 100,000,000 other humans and we have accelerated the 6th mass extinction in earth's history. How different life is from the early homo-sapiens days, but what really, have we learned as 'wise humans'?

The coming era, will need to be the **Environmental era**. If we fail, homo sapiens are likely to become extinct, and we may destroy most of the earth's species in the process. Our first reaction to this theory (from our old worldview) is that God would not let humans die out. Remember the Mt Toba volcanic eruption 74,000 years ago! It is estimated that all but one thousand pairs died in that eruption. This experience was not so different from the story of Noah! Such an experience would not be punishment by God. It would be the universe responding to God's ever prompting evolving 'direction'.



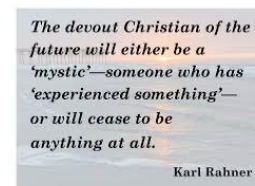


99% of species who have ever lived are now extinct, including all the human species except our own.

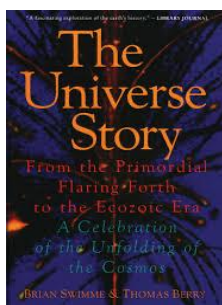
Neanderthal humans became extinct 40,000 years ago. Clearly, we are not the ultimate species! That is clear from our destruction of one another and of other species. Will we learn?. Will we be able to

change?. We have the intelligence, but do we have the will? The earth is not a resource; it is our home! We cannot throw rubbish 'out'. There is no out – there is only our planet! We have dominated the planet and we have to accept responsibility, because every species today lives in (our) human environment.

Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner suggested that every religious person of this 21st century will either be a mystic or nothing. This challenge calls us to live with a sense of awe. The more we know the universe story – our story, the more awe will be a part of our experience.

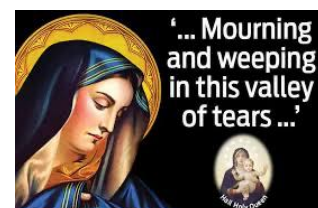


We are blessed to be able to contemplate the vast and increasing diversity of life. We are related to all life because everything is made from stardust. Everything we see around us (animal, tree, insect, fish, human) is related. Everything we see that has been manufactured, or that has life, came out of the earth, including the moon! Our focus on relationships has to include all life forms, not just human relationships. We must promote respect for the inter-relatedness of all life'. In this way, we could make a small but significant contribution to the call of life. The future is dependent on our response.



In the 1980's, Passionist Thomas Berry was critical that Christianity lacked a suitable story that could replace the focus on redemption and atonement, with the unfolding revelation of the divine presence throughout the entire universe. Without such a story and a spiritual awareness of the inter-connectedness of all life, Earth will continue to be plundered for its 'resources' and this risks the future of so many species (perhaps including the human!)

Berry highlighted that the interpretation of the Biblical-Christian story was largely responsible for a culture within which a major disruption to all life forms has, was and will continue to occur. He noted that concern for what is happening to the planet has ranked low in church priorities, although there was a new awakening occurring. This new awakening received great impetus under the pontificate of Pope Francis, but what did Tom Berry mean?





Early Christian tradition recognised two sources of revelation, the divine in the natural world and the divine in the biblical world. However, when printed Bibles became readily available, the book of nature virtually disappeared. Christians were always hearing that they should long for another world exaggerated by the promotion that the world here, is our 'vale of tears'.

Berry said that it is vital for Christians to recognise that the story of the universe, the story of earth, the story of life and the story of the human are one story. To tell part of the story, we must tell the whole story. He wanted us to capture a wonderful sense of the divine because we live in such a magnificent world. That world unfolds even more beautifully for us every year through the discovery of science and photography.



Our imaginations are filled by the beauty of so much variety of life. We are integral to this world which has unfolded over billions of years, not separate from it, nor superior to it. We emerge from within it and are sustained within it. "The universe", Berry said, "is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects". We need a new cosmology that recognizes that each form of life in the universe is a unique manifestation of existence and exists in communion with every other life form. In considering the future, Berry called for us to abandon the extractive economy mentality, developed in the nineteenth century and stop plundering the Earth.



How pleased Tom Berry would have been to know of Pope Francis' first encyclical 'Laudato Si' issued in 2015 which responded to the crisis Berry identified. The central theme is "Care for our Common Home." Drawing on spiritual, ethical, and scientific insights, including Thomas Berry, 'Laudato Si' highlights the urgent need to address climate change,

biodiversity loss, and the exploitation of natural resources. In the encyclical, Francis highlighted the inter-connectedness of all life forms: humans, animals, plants, air, the water, and made clear that the earth itself forms a single, living community.

Francis lamented the incredible environmental degradation and global inequality, whereby the poor are affected most from so many modern industrial practices. The encyclical combines spiritual reflection with practical action, inviting people of all and no belief to live in harmony with creation. The encyclical makes the challenge that caring for nature is inseparable from caring for people, and warns in the words of Chief Seattle, "What we do to the earth, we do to ourselves."

Humour

1. A husband and wife drove for a long time after an argument. Neither would give in. Then the husband pointed to a mule in a paddock.

"Is that a relative of yours?" he asked.

"Yes", she replied, "by marriage"!

2. Karl was keen impress his new girlfriend, so he took her to a very fancy Italian restaurant. After scrolling through the wine list, he returned the menu to the waiter and ordered "Giuseppe Spomdalucci".

The waiter said, "I'm sorry sir, but he is the owner of this restaurant".

3. An elderly priest heard the new deacon deliver a wonderful homily on the influence of mothers on society. It was the introduction that captured the old priest. The deacon began with the stunning admission, "The most wonderful moments of my life have been spent in the arms of another man's wife". Then after a pause, the young deacon added, "and that woman was my mother".

A few weeks later the old priest was driving out to a hall where he had been asked to give a talk to the Catholic Mother's Club. He thought the deacon's story would be a winner, so he began, "The most wonderful times of my life have been spent in the arms of some other man's wife". Then after a pause, he scratched his head and added, "I just can't remember now who she was!"

4, Mildred, the church gossip and self-appointed monitor of the church's morals, kept sticking her nose into other people's business. One day she accused Frank, a new member, of being an alcoholic after she saw his old ute parked in front of a bar one afternoon. She told Frank that everyone who saw his ute there, would know what he was doing. Frank, a man of few words, just turned and walked away. He said nothing.

Later that night, Frank quietly parked his ute in front of Mildred's house, walked home ... and left it there all night!

5. A woman due to give birth started having vigorous contractions at home. Her frantic husband rang triple-0 and shouted, "My wife is pregnant and her contractions are only two minutes apart!"

"Is this her first child?" asks the operator.

"No!" he shouted. "This is her husband!"

**THE INVENTION OF THE
SHOVEL WAS A GROUND
BREAKING DISCOVERY**

UNKNOWN PUNISH ©2017

**BUT THE INVENTION OF THE
BROOM WAS THE ONE THAT
TRULY SWEEPED THE NATION**

**WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN IGNORANCE AND
INDIFFERENCE?**

**I DON'T KNOW
AND I DON'T CARE.**

PHILIP
FESTER

**I DIDN'T THINK
ORTHOPEDIC SHOES
WOULD HELP.**

BUT I STAND CORRECTED.

PHILIP
FESTER

**What do you call a
magician who has
lost his magic?**

Ian.

**A FRIEND SAID SHE
DIDN'T UNDERSTAND
CLONING**

UNKNOWN PUNISH ©2017

**I TOLD HER THAT
MAKES TWO OF US**

**THERE WAS A BIG
PADDLE SALE AT
THE BOAT STORE**

UNKNOWN PUNISH ©2017

IT WAS QUITE AN OAR DEAL

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

10.00am Mass. Sunday August 17th

Prayers

We remember those who have died especially and those whose anniversaries occur at this time, especially

John Lazzari, Jerome Crowe CP, Mark Nugen CP, Dunstan Mellors CP, John Whyte, Alma Hall, Marisa Martin, Gwen Bartlett, and Jean O'Brien.

We pray they have found joy in God's eternal presence.



We ask prayers for the father of our Chinese Passionist John Lin who studied at YTU while living at Holy Cross. He was ordained in April 2019. John's father is clinging to life. He has lost significant weight and is no longer eating, so there is great concern and sadness for him. John would appreciate our prayers.



We pray for members of our Holy Cross family who are coping with illness and all who care for them, especially Anne Woon (her husband Adrian died for months ago, and he was Teresa Lim's nephew), also Gerry Bond, Pam Storey, Noel Smyth, Nello Campomizzi, Denise Egan, Peter Addicoat Dr Peter Heffernan, (Dawn's son), Nancy Reynolds, Anne Burke, Kata Lenic, Treenah Wadham, Caroline Hagedorn, Jenny Wullings, Marilyn Cilmi, Maureen Barns, Lesley Yang, Rex Cambry, Jeanelle Bergin, Fr Brendan Lane, Stephanie Snow, Peter & Bernadette Owen, Peter Barry, Phil Drew, Alexander Lim, Carol Battistella, Zoe & Sophia Chung, Graham Burke, Luke Norden, Pam Gartland, , Doris Castro, Patricia Keeghan, Julia Cantone, Caroline Meade, Rod Gorfine, Greg Agosta, Helen McLean, Bro Jerome, Anne Jenkins and Errol Lovett.

Mass on line

Chris will send the link for Sunday Mass, on Saturday afternoon.

God bless,

Brian