

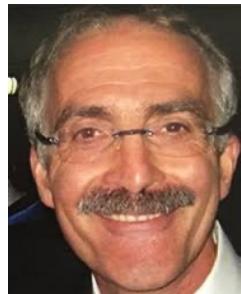
Holy Cross Retreat

Letter 310

23rd January, 2025



Coming up



Chris returned on Friday and cooked dinner for the community. On Saturday we held a low key celebration his 50th anniversary of profession as a Passionist. We will celebrate with him tomorrow night. Chris will celebrate 10.00am Mass this Sunday. He did not want a 'big show', so the "Coffee Cart" after Mass will be an opportunity to celebrate with him. I'm sure we'll have a cake for the occasion.

Ordination



Tri is returning from his brief holiday today. He has been as far as Brisbane. It was a good opportunity to see a bit more of Australia. We have received confirmation that he will be ordained a priest at Holy Cross at 10.00am on Saturday May 30th. He will celebrate the 10.00am Mass the following day.

Bro Martin Lusk CP



We were fortunate to have Scottish born Martin stay with us for a few days last week, before he returned to Marrickville after his holiday which had included time in Adelaide. Martin is one of our skilled brothers (carpenter-builder) and he was delighted to spend time with Jerome and share photographs of changes to Vanimo town in recent years. It is amazing that they now have streetlights in town, thanks to solar power.

Martin spent many years in PNG with Jerome and one amusing story he shared of a time when they were together in Iran Jaya ("which we loved visiting"). Jerome awoke in terrible pain and with constant loud screaming. For those who know Jerome, this was Martin telling the story, not Jerome! Martin got him into the long queue at the hospital and the loud screaming was off putting to some patients, but it was successful in Jerome being advanced in the queue!

Eventually he got to see a female Canadian doctor. She tested and tried a number of things but told Martin, "I don't know what the problem is. Then she asked, "are you his brother?" Martin said "Yes".

She continued, I have medication here that I can give him, and all I can say is that it will either cure or kill him!" Martin said, "We'd better ask him". When advised by

Martin that this could “cure or kill you”, Jerome said, “Give it to me”. Obviously we know the outcome! Martin said that the story did not end with the cure. When he came back to check on Jerome, he was quietly and happily inhaling on a cigarette!

‘A’ Team

Most of the ‘A’ Team made a premature return to work last Friday, in order to clean up the work-shed for the year ahead. They will be back in force today. [John Stretch](#) will undergo long overdue surgery for a knee replacement, next Wednesday. [Peter Day](#) was missing. He was attending the funeral of Bro Doug Walsh SM. Peter has been up most days for the past week attending to various small jobs and was up again this week.

Large tree



[Maurice Molan](#) and [Andrew Concannon](#) arrived last Friday to act as tree doctors. This was easier for Maurice to do than Andrew! We had a large tree very close to the side fence lose a large branch which had split and fortunately had just missed the fence. The next door neighbour was concerned that his two small children might not be safe from the higher branches of the tree, so Maurice

who is very experienced with a chain saw (not in use in his medical practice), arranged with Andrew’s help, to have the tree fall inwards. The ‘A’ Team moved most of the bushy branches to the usual pyre and on Sunday afternoon the ‘doctors’ returned to remove the remaining larger timber to be used for firewood.

Maurice shared a beautiful story of a conversation he had with an arborist about a particular tree on his property. He wanted some branches removed, but he asked, “please be careful and before removing any branches, ensure there are no koalas in that part of the tree, because they love these trees”. Just as he finished saying this, a koala scaled down the tree, casually walked past them and climbed another tree. “It was”, Maurice said, “as if he had been to Sr Margaret’s English classes and had developed an excellent comprehension of the English language!”

Old bollards and old hands at work

As previously advised, we gained almost 90 bollards from the Council when they were removed from along the frontage of Serpells Road. Several of our regular helpers identified that they would be helpful in the car park for protecting the fence from over-enthusiastic drivers!



This photo shows Bruno holding one bollard while Frank Mignani with the aid of a jack-hammer, removed the concrete from the bottom of the bollard. The concrete around the logs was very hard, thick and difficult to remove carefully from the logs. The jack-hammer was about 25kg and it shook Frank and on Vince who worked on it for 2.5 hours and on Bruno's whole body, when drilling. We could hear the rumble from 150 metres away. This prompted Erick to take some cold water to the workers.



After three hours work on a hot morning, the task was completed. This would be a great achievement for young men, but Bruno is 84! Frank and Vince are both 82. Vince of course, continuing his many hours of work on the carpark

Christmas 2025

Erick took some photographs at our Christmas dinner. We had a bit of fun with Kris Kringle gifts. Below left, is a photo of Tri wearing one of his gifts, and one of Erick's sisters, Mediatrice, who joined us and had a ball. You can notice she is wearing a veil which was a premature hint given by a Kris Kringle giver. Also below is the happy masked JD with a classy bowtie.



Srs Brigid and Karen, Fr Tuan Paul (Endeavour Hills) Mediatrice and Fr Jose Matthew joined us for the meal (Erick took the photo and set up the decorations).



Brigid shows her surprise at being given handcuffs! (KK is a mystery!)
An introverted Tri was strutting his stuff.

Cobwebs



Last Friday morning, Tri and JD were cleaning cobwebs around the downstairs kitchen. When I went outside, Erick asked, "What actually is a cobweb?" I could only answer, that is a good question. We agreed that we

normally spoke about spiderwebs, but what actually is a cob? Our learned 'A' Team, even with the help of Doctor Google could not provide much help, but they did suggest that a spider web has a spider living in the web, whereas a dusty abandoned web, is a cobweb. That was confirmed in the evening table discussion.

Since he was freshly back from a week's holiday at Marlowe, we asked Chris. He told us that *coppe* was an old English word for a spider and that the word *tarantular* comes from the Italian word *Taranto*. This he said is an example of how a word can change from its original meaning. The word *nice* derived from the Latin '*nescius*' which meant foolish. Over time it has developed to mean kind or pleasant. That was interesting it didn't help us with 'cob'. Chris then suggested that cobweb might have come from the German word 'cob' meaning 'round'. That seemed to fit too, with 'corn on the cob'.



Next was another referral to Dr Google. Chris added that the old English word *coppe* had meant 'spider', and over time *atorcoppe* (poison head) evolved into *copweb* (the head of the web) - and then into cobweb.

By this time, Erick and JD and well and truly put away their cobweb brushes!



'Gateway to hell': young reporter's harrowing two years in besieged Gaza

Malak A Tantesh



This report provides a personal insight into the experience of so many innocent Palestinian people following the callous and horrific Hamas attack on innocent Israelis. Of course, the personal trauma of so many innocent Jewish people would harrowing accounts to read. In any war, those mostly responsible are exempt from the suffering it causes their

citizens, especially the elderly, women and children and the men called to take up arms.

It is six o'clock in the morning on Saturday 7 October 2023. Half awake, I call out in a hoarse voice to my two sisters who are sleeping on their beds next to me: "Enas, Remas, wake up – you have school." We were not to know it yet, but this was the day when everything would change. The day when horrific events across the border in Israel would lead to a war that became a gateway to hell itself. I went back to sleep, not caring much whether my sisters woke up or not.



My university classes started a little later at eight in the morning. Then suddenly came the sound of rockets firing. I could not tell if I was still dreaming. But soon my sisters and I were wide awake, and at first we told ourselves they were test rockets and would fall into the sea, so we didn't care much, until the sound grew so loud it was impossible to ignore.

Rumours started spreading – "maybe one of Hamas's top leaders was assassinated, maybe Hamas was attacking Israel", but everyone was guessing. Not comprehending what was happening, we waited for any confirmed piece of news. My uncle and his family came, still in their sleepwear and extremely agitated, since they live near the Israeli border. They were in a state of terror, their clothes messy, the interrupted sleep and their panicked departure visible on their faces.

Some videos began to appear on social media showing Hamas storming into Israel and capturing dozens of people and taking them back to [Gaza](#). We could not grasp the scale of what had just happened. And then, the Israeli response began: a lot of bombing in all directions, the windows of the house trembling, and with them our hearts trembling, the sound of ambulances, all kinds of aircraft, and the cries of children. We have become used to war, and as in every war we have experienced, we started packing some of our belongings.

We did not expect to be gone for long, so we only



took the clothes we were wearing and one extra change, and gathered up the most important documents, putting them in school bags. On Friday 13 October, the pace of bombing on Beit Lahia increased. Leaflets were dropped telling us to evacuate. At that time we were afraid and reluctant to comply, but later that day, when we were making Thai food for dinner, the Israeli army started dropping smoke bombs on our houses until the city was covered with smoke. A state of terror broke out among our neighbours and everyone started running out of their homes, leaving everything behind. As for us, we left in our car, taking with us my grandfather and grandmother and our family of seven, and headed south for the first time.



We did not expect that we would face dozens of wars instead of one. The second war we faced was finding a place to stay. We didn't know where to go, we just kept moving south with no specific destination, our feelings swinging between fear, loss and hesitation. We ended up in an apartment in Deir, where we lived for three months, sleeping on the cold floor with no blankets or bed clothes.

And there were the other wars, such as getting water and food, and the short life of the tents we had to live in.

Despite obeying evacuation orders and heading south, we found nowhere was safe. Not a day passed without the sounds of explosions, the roar of warplanes, shells and bullets fired by Israeli naval boats. We always imagined waking up to find the wall of the apartment falling on us. I had visions of remaining alive, alone amid rubble, screaming for my family but getting no response. We wrote our names on paper and put it in our pockets in case the house was bombed and we all died, so that paper would serve as an identity card if our faces were erased.

We did not know what was waiting for us. We thought we would stay for two or three weeks and then return. When we felt the danger getting closer, we decided to go and live in tents in Rafah. The situation was a little better than living in an apartment, and at least those nightmares stopped. In the first week we were very happy, imagining it was our first camping trip in rainy winter weather, but what we didn't know the challenge we would face in getting water and food, and in contending with the punishing, severe cold. We were constantly falling ill.



My younger brother Ibrahim and I were infected with Hepatitis A, suffering so much that sometimes we felt as though we were dying. There was no medicine. All we could do was take strict safety and hygiene measures so that the rest of the family wouldn't get infected.



When the ground invasion of Rafah began, we moved many times from one place to another, living in tents. It is hard to describe the feeling of being forced to live in this way. Only those who have experienced it can fully understand it. Faced with a lack of clean and safe food and water, we had to stand for hours and walk long distances to get them. We endured extreme heat in summer, turning to bitter cold in winter.

On top of that were the insects, rats and stray animals. Our education and healthcare, our simplest rights, simply evaporated. During our displacement in Khan Younis, my grandmother fell ill. She struggled with the illness for weeks until it overcame her. She stayed in the hospital for a week, receiving treatment that was not sufficient due to the large number of cases, which caused dozens to die weekly, and then my grandmother was among them. The pain of losing her was very hard. She was a second mother to me. She had lived with us since I was born and took care of us while my mother was busy with her studies.



After my grandmother's death, we started trying to build a life in the south since hope of returning to the north had vanished. My father and uncles started planting some crops to make us feel like we were back home in Beit Lahia, and this indeed



helped us move forward and gave us a little sense of security. Then came the ceasefire in January 2025. I still remember the joy of the residents returning to the north, where almost all of them returned on the first day without taking much with them. Others, out of excitement, burned their tents thinking that the suffering in the south had ended.

We returned to Beit Lahia. Sadness engulfed its corners, its destroyed houses and its dry fields, the silence hanging over its streets serving to tell its returning residents what had happened after they were forced to leave. We began trying to rebuild, clearing the rubble and stones, putting up tents next to the destroyed houses and planting some new plants to break the grey colour and give everyone hope that life could bloom again. But that hope vanished. The war came back to burn everything once more. Fear and anxiety returned as we once more moved from one place to another, amid explosion after explosion, death after death. I lost my dear uncle Bahjat, killed by a tank shell while he and my father were collecting some of our possessions from an old shelter. Two weeks later, we were displaced yet again and rented an apartment in Gaza City.



This was a bigger and worse siege than the one before, and we started suffering from hunger, which caused the death of hundreds – children and the elderly. We would share one loaf of bread between us all, and sometimes, when we couldn't find any bread to eat, we went to sleep

hungry, trying to stave it off by drinking water, which often came to us contaminated.

Then, out of nowhere, came the plan to occupy Gaza City, and we were forced to evacuate to the south yet again. This week, when the ceasefire deal was announced, the streets filled with whistling and cheering and everyone started jumping and dancing with joy, hoping that this time the war would end for ever. But they remain afraid it might fail at the last moment, preparing themselves for the worst, so they are not struck down with despair if it does collapse.



I look back on how my life was the day before 7

**'What's the point of the war?
Why, oh why can't people live together peacefully?
Why all this destruction?'**

Anne Frank, 3 May 1944

October: going to work to teach girls swimming, then celebrating my cousin's wedding, where we had all gathered happily, wearing dresses and putting on lots of makeup. I remember my university, where I only stayed for one month. I remember my grandmother and my uncle Bahjat, whose death we sometimes envied. I am sure all the people of Gaza have such memories dancing in their minds: family meals, friends – many now dead – the normal and everyday. We all wonder if we will ever get the chance to live such lives again.



Hate speech



There is a lot of current political challenge to define 'hate speech'. As social views become polarized, and issues reduced to black or white (right or left), venom is introduced into language, and great harm is inflicted on individuals or groups who dare to express an opinion on almost any issue. While the

greatest concern is referred to as anti-semitic, that term itself is too narrowly defined. In essence, a "Semite" is not a single monolithic people but natural speakers of a Semitic language, encompassing vast cultural and ethnic diversity from North Africa to Western Asia. The Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are considered Semitic religions. Jesus was a Semite.

Maybe the attention to 'hate' speech has to begin with each and every one of us being kind when we speak, and especially when we find ourselves in disagreement with others. We can disagree with respect and we can repair relationships if we make an effort. Feuds do not have to be everlasting.

Florence Littauer was a well-known American public speaker. On one Sunday morning she was asked 'off the cuff' to give the children's sermon? She quickly thought of a verse of scripture (Ephesians 4:29) and announced it to the children. The verse she quoted was from St Paul, "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear



Florence asked what this verse meant. First, she asked 'let no evil talk come out of your mouths'. Quickly she was advised by one of the children that this meant 'don't use bad words'. When asked 'like what', one boy began to give examples! Florence quickly said she didn't want to hear the words, she just wanted to know what kind of things were bad words. Swearing, nasty, vulgar, criticising, hurtful and loud, were all examples she was given. Florence agreed that these words were 'bad' words.

Next she asked 'how could you 'build up' and one boy said 'it's like when you're playing with building blocks; you shouldn't knock down other people's building blocks'. Florence was able to get the children to explain to her that words could be like this. They could knock down other people's building blocks, but they should not do this, instead they should build up by using good words.



Then Florence asked the children, 'what about the end part of St Paul's words. He says 'speak as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.' One girl suggested this meant when you speak you should give a present to the other person. Florence quickly



agreed and asked the girl 'what sort of present'? The girl said when you talk you should think of giving a present like a silver box with a bow on top.'

At a Conference the following day. Florence told the audience about the silver box. One day later, a woman spoke to Florence and explained that when she went home she thought about the silver box and reflected that she had not spoken nicely to her teenage son in quite a long time, and in fact she hadn't spoken too nicely to her husband in recent days. She said "I made some silver boxes with bows on top and I put one outside my son's room, one outside our bedroom and one in the kitchen and lounge, and I explained to my son and husband why. It is amazing just in that one day what a difference it has made".



Florence share this story on her speaking circuit and she received thousands of letters from people who have said what a difference it has made in their home, workplace or school when they have made silver boxes and put them in places to remind them to speak good words to others. She reflected that her father had always encouraged her and spoken to her positively and that he used to sing to



her '*Home, home on the range; where the deer and the antelope play. Where never is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day*'. What a different world it would be, if 'never was heard a discouraging word'. What if people spoke to others as if they were presenting them with

a silver box with a bow on top.

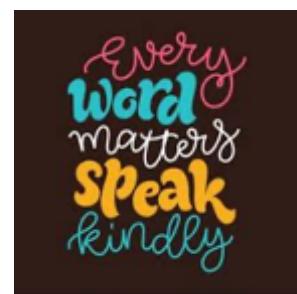
That would be the end of hate speech!

My father used often quote a saying of his grandmother: "There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it ill behoves the best of us to speak about the worst of us".

[Florence Littauer wrote this poem.](#)

My words were harsh & hasty, and they came without a thought.

Then I saw the pain & anguish, that my bitter words had brought.
Bitter words that I had spoken, made me think back through the past;
Of how many times I'd uttered biting words, whose pain would forever last.
Then I wondered of the people I had hurt by things I'd said;
All the ones I had discouraged, when I didn't use my head.
Then I thought about my own life, of painful words I've heard;
And of the times I'd been discouraged, by a sharp and cruel word.



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And now clearly I remember, all the things I might have done;
But, by a word I was discouraged, and they never were begun.

So, help my words be silver boxes, neatly wrapped up with a bow;
That I give to all so freely, as through each day I gladly go.

Silver boxes full of treasure, precious gifts from above;
That all the people I encounter, might have a box of love

Buddhist walk for peace



A group of eighteen Buddhist monks who began on October 26th have passed the halfway mark on a 3,700 kilometre 'Walk for Peace', as they seek to raise awareness of "peace, loving kindness and compassion" in the US and the world. Two of the monks are following a Buddhist practice of never lying down during the three-month journey, and their spiritual leader is conducting the walk

barefoot!

There is a beautiful song connected to the walk.

Where the World Learns to Walk Again

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qx0H8smyOBc>

Veronica



An Austrian cow named Veronika, has surprised scientists with her ability to scratch herself using sticks, rakes, and brooms and at times using different ends of the implements for different purposes. This behaviour has previously been understood to only occur in humans and chimpanzees. It is amazing that cows have been domesticated for 10,000 years and a discovery such as this may be unique. What unknown capacities do many animals have?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj0n127y74go>

Mike - driver

Yesterday (Thursday), Mike secured his driving licence. He has spent quite some time, with Peter Norman and Joe Senzo as his instructors. Peter, in particular has continued since Joe's retirement from the role, and yesterday marked Peter's retirement after helping a number of our men (including JD and Tri) to gain a driving licence. It has required a lot of time, patience and putting himself in the face of danger, and we are



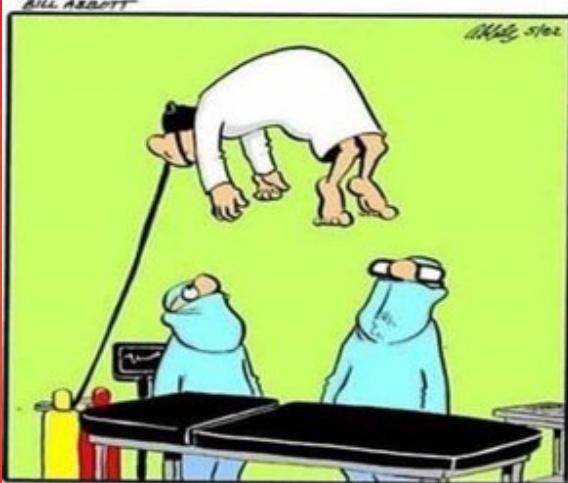
extremely thankful to Peter and Joe for this. Peter Day has also conducted a few lessons. Finally, congratulations to Mike.

Bread

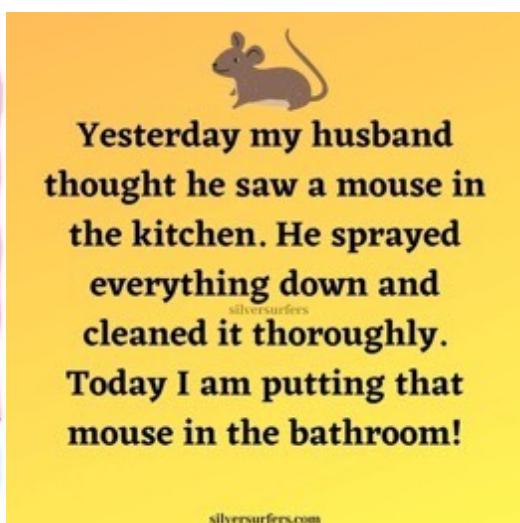
The bakery where we collect bread each week was affected by a fire on Tuesday night (presumed arson) two doors away, so there will be limited bread available on Sunday. Remember please that this Sunday, the **Coffee Cart** will be here and we want to gather and celebrate **Chris' 50th profession** of vows as a Passionist.

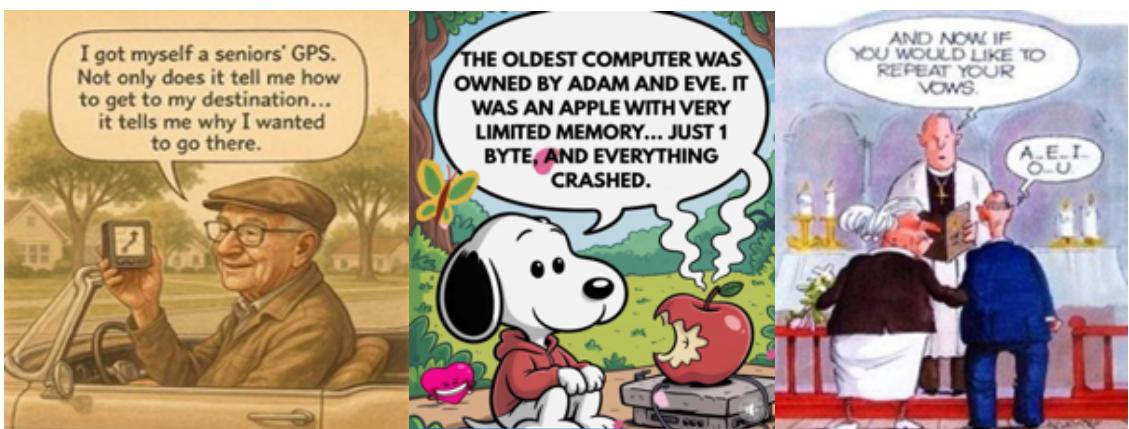
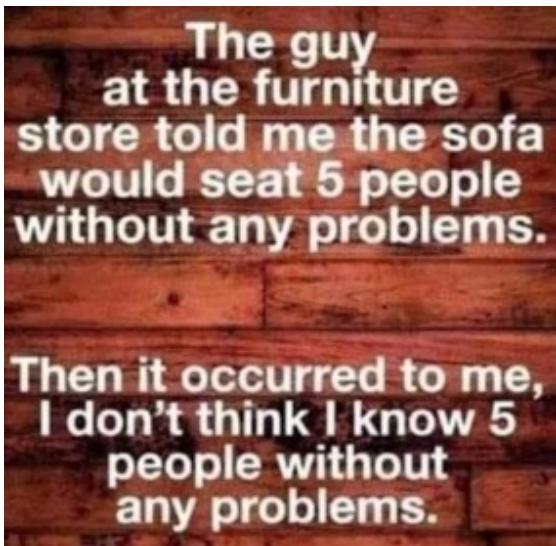
Humour





"Mental note, the yellow tank is helium."





Prayers



We remember those who have died recently especially **Angelo Maloni** (brother-in-law of Fedora Vasarelli) especially as well as those whose anniversaries occur at this time, especially **Bernard Charnley, George Bennett** and **Marie Mears**. We pray that all who have died, have found joy in God's eternal presence.

We also pray for members of our Holy Cross family who are coping with illness and all who care for them: **Monica Sleeman** (Kevin Hennesy's sister), **Mary Cougle**, **Dennis Cougle**, **Pam Storey**, **Bronwyn Ure**, **David Chai**, **Lucia Isgro**, **Gladys Bardini**, **Marie Spowart**, **Nina Conti**, **Max McMahon**, **Fergus Ryan**, **Maria Di Giantomasso**, **Bob Hallam**, **Lisa Iverach**, **Anne Woon**, **Kate Lenic**, **Cate Sweeney**, **Greg Agosta**, **Denise Egan**, **Carol Battistella**, **Dr Peter Heffernan**, **Anne Burke**, **Nancy Reynolds**, **Luke Norden**, **Jeanelle Bergin**, **Caroline Hagedorn**, **Doris Castro**, **Gerry Bond**, **Marilyn Cilmi**, **Maureen Barns**, **Bernadette Owen**, **Alexander Lim**, **Caroline Meade**, **Rex and Jan Cambry**, **Patricia Keeghan**, **Graham Burke**, **Zoe & Sophia Chung**, **Rod Gorfine**, **Pam Gartland**, **Peter Barry**, **Julia Cantone**, **Helen McLean**, **Phil Drew**, **Bro Jerome CP**, **Lesley Yang**, **Anne Jenkins**, and **Errol Lovett**.

We remember others who are unwell and ask for our prayers.



Chris will send the link for next Sunday's Mass, on Saturday

Brian