

Holy Cross Retreat



Letter 327

22nd May, 2026

Greetings,

Tri's ordination: A gentle reminder that you are all invited to Tri's ordination next Saturday at **10am** (not 11am as one of my recent newsletters got it wrong) and to his Mass of Thanksgiving on the following day. Tri has completed his retreat and is now ready for the ordination. His parents will arrive some few days before the ordination. Brian will also be back by then. We are all excited for this important occasion for the Passionists and for the Church at large. **Ordination Livestream link:**



<https://youtube.com/live/eKBnEWI6NvU?feature=share>



Passionists of the Holy Spirit Province

warmly invite you

to the Ordination to Priesthood of
Dcn. Cao Van Tri, CP

by Most Rev. Bishop Thinh Nguyen, DD.
Auxiliary Bishop of Archdiocese of Melbourne

At 10:00 AM, Saturday 30th May 2026

Mass of Thanksgiving of
the Newly Ordained Priest

Fr. Cao Van Tri CP

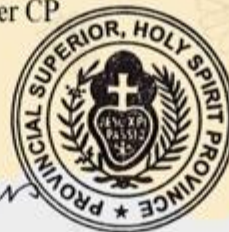
At 10:00 AM, Sunday 31st May 2026



Holy Cross Retreat, 207 Serpells road, Templestowe, VIC 3106

Refreshments to follow in the dining hall

Rev. Denis Traver CP
Provincial



D. Traver

RSVP for catering purposes by 15th May 2026



f.xcaovantri@gmail.com



0468865574

Joseph: Last week Joseph spent the whole day mowing the lawn, making it look nice and welcoming for the up-coming busy period of groups and Tri's ordination.



A-team: the chapel has now been fully repainted.



Some of the painting included climbing up the ceiling as you can see on the photo, at the top right hand.

The photo directly on the left was taken before the painting. You can see how dirty it looked.

We now have a freshly painted chapel with no much distractions when we are in meditation and when celebrating the Eucharist. Thank you A-Team!

What childhood trauma does to the brain (Brian)

Jo Skinner 26th March 2026

There are some patients that stay with you forever. I was a young registrar when I met Abby, who came in distraught on behalf of her husband Adam. 'He was always a fun, family man who worked hard and adored his two sons. Six months ago, he seemed to change overnight. I just don't know him anymore. He's lost his job and developed a serious cannabis habit. He's never done drugs before, I mean he barely drank alcohol.'

Abby brought a couple of photographs to show me. There was one of a smiling Adam on a camping trip with his sons and another where he was receiving an award for a research project he'd undertaken. Adam agreed to come and see me. I would not have recognised him from the photographs, as he was dishevelled, with a shaggy beard, and wouldn't look me in the eye. He was not very communicative.

I considered a diagnosis of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder and sought advice from colleagues. He declined psychiatric assessment. It was a few months before I thought to ask him about his family growing up. They lived remotely, so he went to boarding school from a young age. He confided that he had been sexually assaulted by one of the staff from the age of ten to sixteen years, but never told anybody as he was filled with shame. When his eldest son turned ten, he found he couldn't face himself anymore and considered ending his life several times. 'They'd be better off without me.'

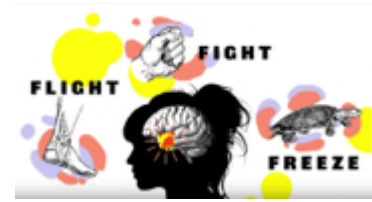
It is only recently that we have understood the lasting impacts of trauma on the



brain and how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) affect the endocrine and immune systems. A landmark prospective study of 17,000 middle-class Californians was published in 1998 and examined the impact of childhood adversity on long-term health outcomes. An ACE includes physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect, and/or family dysfunction. The findings were startling, with a dose-related effect depending on how many ACEs were experienced. Those with four or more had a twenty-year reduction in life expectancy, with a much higher risk of many chronic diseases and up to a twelve-fold increase in suicide. This study demonstrated how our present is shaped by our past, with our childhood experiences a very significant factor in health outcomes.

Trauma-informed care is a relatively new area of health care. We now understand that ACEs have a profound impact on brain development, resulting in dysregulation of the normal stress response. There is a fascinating TED talk with paediatrician Dr Nadine Burke Harris, who explains how the repeated stress of childhood trauma has lifelong impacts.

When we find ourselves in a stressful situation, the hypothalamus in the brain sends a message to the pituitary gland, which communicates with the adrenal gland, resulting in a surge of cortisol and adrenaline, preparing us physically and emotionally for the fight-or-flight response.



This is an important survival response, but if a child experiences chronic stress, it becomes maladaptive. The body doesn't differentiate between physical or emotional distress, and if the stress response is sustained, there are changes in the neurobiological settings in our endocrine and immune systems, resulting in a higher risk of chronic disease and premature death.

Grace grew up in a highly dysfunctional household and was not only moved multiple times with her siblings but had multiple name changes. Her parents joined a cult where, from ten years of age, Grace was required to get up at four every morning and help prepare breakfast for the entire group. She was rarely in bed before eleven at night, cleaning, cooking, and clearing up. When she eventually left at fifteen, she had limited education and few skills but was determined to study. She worked long hours in a retail job and attempted to complete her Year Eleven and Twelve studies at a TAFE college but struggled to focus and found it challenging to get her work in on time. A diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (ADHD) was made at a youth mental health service, and she was medicated but continued to struggle.

It is common for trauma to be labelled with a psychiatric diagnosis. Depression, ADHD, substance use disorder or schizoaffective disorder are labels that become hard to shift and form part of the patient's sense of self. It reinforces their sense of failure, that even with treatment they don't get better. Patients like Grace find themselves recurrently moving between mental health services, with their traumatic childhood histories too complex for the simple diagnostic labels used to define their symptoms.



“When we experience trauma, especially as a child, the brain is unable to convert that experience into language. The trauma is reduced to smells, sounds and visual images that recur, infiltrate dreams, and are relived again and again.”

In the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, published in 2023, an extraordinary forty percent of the eight thousand responders had been exposed to domestic violence and thirty percent to physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. The figures are likely higher, as emotional abuse is usually under-reported. This has enormous implications for our health budget. Childhood or complex trauma is very common and not isolated to any socioeconomic group. This new understanding of the impact of ACEs provides a tremendous opportunity for developing early recognition and intervention programs to prevent the inevitable long-term adverse physical and

mental health outcomes. Adam and Grace are not isolated cases but reflect the lived experience of a large cohort of the population.



Phoebe, eight years old, was brought in to see me by her mother, Jenna, soon after they moved to Australia to be closer to family. While Jenna and her husband were house-hunting and looking for work, her in-laws cared for Phoebe and most days picked her up from school. She began to lose weight and became withdrawn, and Jenna was concerned that the move had distressed her daughter. I arranged

a referral to a child psychologist, but there was an inevitable delay in getting an appointment.

A few months later, I learned that Phoebe's teacher had reported abnormal sexualised behaviour. The family response was swift. Phoebe was removed from the school. Jenna took Phoebe to see the psychologist without her husband knowing and learned that her father-in-law had sexually assaulted her young daughter. When she confronted him, the family closed ranks. It resulted in a messy divorce and significant financial hardship and distress, as Jenna had no close friends in Australia.

When we experience trauma, especially as a child, the brain is unable to convert that experience into language. The trauma is reduced to smells, sounds and visual images that recur, infiltrate dreams, and are relived again and again. The trauma feels immediate even years later but often remains difficult to express in words. This silence metastasises and has lasting impacts on the body's ability to function normally.

When I saw Adam, trauma-informed care was not recognised and, unfortunately, he was lost to follow-up. My hope is that he found the support and care he needed to confront his past, enabling him to discard the shame that has clouded his life. There is now a support group for male survivors of child sexual abuse – Survivors and Mates Support Network (SAMSN) – which prioritises their wellbeing as well as providing resources and support for free. It is life-changing for many men knowing that they are not alone.



Grace was under significant financial stress and did not complete her studies. She did do an online assessment with a trauma therapist who diagnosed complex trauma resulting from childhood abuse and neglect. Grace ceased taking her stimulant medications. Soon afterwards, she moved to a regional town due to cheaper rental accommodation and is working full-time in a retail job. I am hopeful that she moves beyond survival mode, does get to do the tertiary study she dreams of and can slowly rebuild her life.

Phoebe lives with her mother and finished school last year after taking a year off. She developed an eating disorder but is engaging with supports and doing well.

Jenna considered laying charges, but her father-in-law died suddenly a year after his predatory behaviour was exposed. She blames herself for what happened to Phoebe and is also seeking psychological support.

Increasingly, we are understanding how taking a comprehensive history is fundamental to how we understand disease and the impacts of childhood stress on our long-term health outcomes. It will require a change to the way we deliver health care, with a shift towards narrative medicine where context becomes central to understanding disease. Study continues in this fascinating area, but it will take a radical shift in how we train health care workers to have a significant impact before distress translates to disease.



[Jo Skinner](#) is a Brisbane-based GP, women’s fiction author, freelance health writer and distance runner.

Pope Leo XIV and Marco Rubio’s “Western Hemisphere” (Brian)

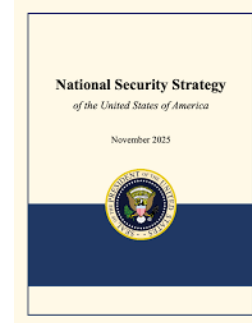
(Massimo Faggioli May 14, 2026)



One year after the election of Pope Leo XIV, it has become clear that — in ways that differ from those of his predecessor, Pope Francis — the centrality of the question of the relationship between global Catholicism and the West is essential to understanding this pontificate and its relationship with the USA. The tensions of the last few weeks between the Vatican and Washington are much more than a lack of chemistry between two world leaders, Pope Leo and President Trump, both from the USA. It’s a clash between two distinctly different views of how Christianity is mapped onto the world stage. A single expression summarizes this tension: “Western hemisphere”.

This expression has been used in various statements by the US Department of State to describe the content of the exchange between US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio (a Catholic) and Pope Leo and the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, on May 7. “Western hemisphere” is often used by Rubio and the Trump administration interchangeably with ‘our hemisphere’.

It did not originate with the tensions stemming from the Vatican’s reaction to the war in Iran. This identification of the Western Hemisphere as “our hemisphere” was also evident in the “national Security Strategy of the United States of America, November 2025’ released by the White House in December 2025. That policy statement has two primary goals: “Our goals for the Western Hemisphere can be summarized as ‘Enlist and Expand.’ We will enlist established friends in the Hemisphere to control migration, stop drug flows, and strengthen stability and security on land and at sea. We will expand by cultivating and strengthening new partners while bolstering our nation’s appeal as the Hemisphere’s economic and security partner of choice.”



Also very instructive was [the speech delivered by Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference](#) on February 14, 2026: “We [USA and Europe] are part of one civilization – Western civilization. We are bound to one another by the deepest bonds that nations could share, forged by centuries of shared history, Christian faith, culture, heritage, language, ancestry, and the sacrifices our forefathers made together for the common civilization to which we have fallen heir.”

This is not just Secretary Rubio’s personal idea. It suffices to look at the content shared on the social media accounts of various departments within the Trump administration. It also shapes the Vatican policy of the current US administration.



A few days after Rubio’s speech in Munich, the US Ambassador to the Holy See, Brian Burch, while discussing possible common ground between the Holy See and the USA, talked about “a Western-civilization-modelled AI, and AI that’s worth pursuing and that’s good for the world. In the last sixty years, the Western powers already had an idea of how uncomfortably the Vatican sits when they try to box it within the “Western hemisphere.” This became evident during the Cold War, as the nervous reactions of Western diplomats to Pope John XXIII’s last encyclical, [Pacem in Terris](#), show. It became even more evident during Pope Francis’ pontificate, given his “Global South” background and his message on the environment and on international social and economic justice. Now, some thought that this distancing of the Vatican from absorption into the US-dominated hemisphere could change after Francis’s death, in a succession that some wanted to rebalance or reverse his predecessor’s policies.



Expectations for a less global and more “Western” Vatican rose even higher when the conclave elected the first pope from the USA. But the first Pan-American pope, Leo, did not deliver the re-Westernization of the papacy. In the major foreign

policy address given by the pope during his first year of pontificate, the Jan. 9 speech to the Diplomatic Corps, Leo mentioned the West only twice (and “Europe and the Americas” only once).

The first mention occurs when he quotes Benedict XVI, who references Saint Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* (*The City of God*): “one of the most powerful of his theological, philosophical and literary works. As Pope Benedict XVI observed, it is an ‘impressive work crucial to the development of Western political thought and the Christian theology of history.’”



What follows that sentence is Pope Leo’s strong reminder of the fragility of all political constructs, even those that were proclaimed to be protected by God: “In the days of the pagan gods, Rome was *caput mundi*, the great capital, and no one could have imagined that it would fall into the hands of its enemies. Now, with the God of the Christians, this great city no longer seemed secure.”



In a second passage, Leo discusses the reversal of the West’s role in protecting freedom of expression: “It is painful to see how, especially in the West, the space for genuine freedom of expression is rapidly shrinking. At the same time, a new Orwellian-style language is developing, which, in an attempt to be increasingly inclusive, ends up excluding those who do not conform to the ideologies that are fuelling it.”

The distance between the geopolitical worldviews of the USA and the Vatican has widened during his first year of pontificate, not because of any distinct choice made by the new pope. Actually, the Augustinian Robert F. Prevost, Pope Leo, articulates a classical, Atlanticist geopolitical vision that is closer to mainstream post-1945 American and European Catholicism than to that of the Jesuit from Argentina, Francis.

But Leo’s world map is also distant from that of the Trump administration, which emphasizes and forces the identification of Christianity, the West, and world civilization. This distance between the Vatican and Washington has widened, thanks to the hardening of the ideological narrative animating the Trump administration’s foreign policy, especially since January 2026. It’s a geopolitical civilizational narrative that has overshadowed the other issues that had created the alignment between conservative Catholicism and the Republican Party.

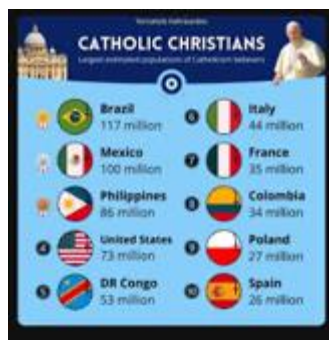


This ideological narrative, which identifies the Western Hemisphere with



Christianity, is paradoxically helping the Vatican craft a response that is as political as it is theological to the signs of our times. One of these signs is that “the West” is increasingly identified with the alliance between the United States and Israel, which is increasingly a personal pact between President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu. This happens at a time when both Christianity and Judaism are less identified with Europe and the West, theologically and culturally.

These US-Vatican tensions might also shape Leo’s pontificate and his relationship with European Catholicism, which now feels like an orphan in many respects: of the mission of the European Union, of the security guaranteed by NATO, and of America. We will probably see this during Pope Leo’s upcoming trip to Spain in early June.



For the Church, the question of the Western hemisphere is a political one, but also one regarding the future of the magisterial and theological tradition, and of new ecclesial identities emerging in global Catholicism. These non-Western identities are no longer a modicum of diversity within a Catholicism dominated by Europe and the West, but stand strong as part of the new face of global Catholicism, each with its own unique identity.

The only chance to maintain the credibility of “the European” and “the Western” in the global Catholic Church is in a regime of freedom and autonomy from the geopolitical designs of strong-powers – especially those who boast of speaking in the name of God.

Jerome’s story part 4: working with refugees

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWcwL7-Fm7s>

Quote of the day: “You cannot preach the love of God to starving people. Hungry people don’t know god loves them. First you make sure they have food and care.”

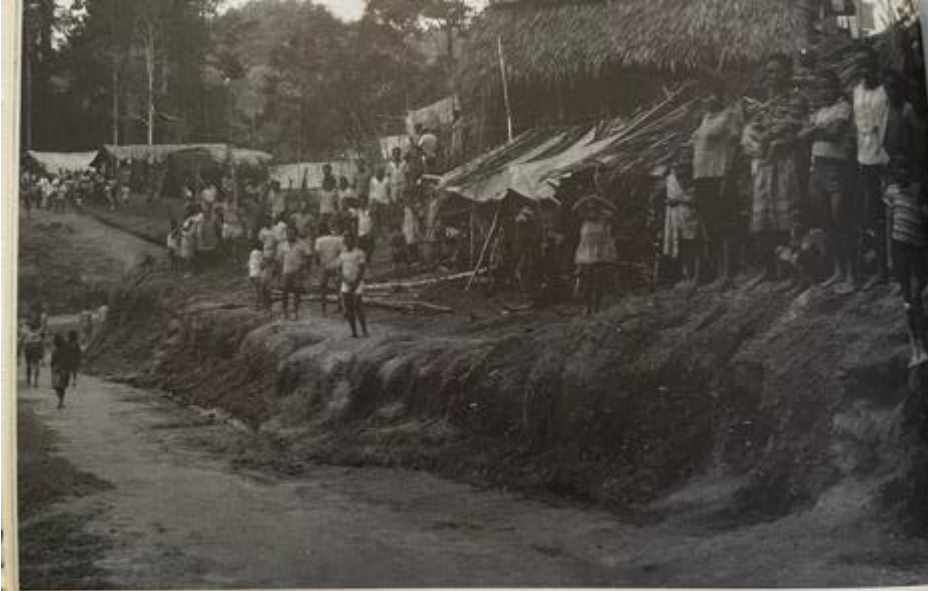


You worked with refugees for many years. How did that situation begin?

Refugees were crossing the border from what was then West Irian, now part of Indonesia. There were really two forces causing problems. The Indonesian military created difficulties, but so did the OPM - the independence guerrilla movement. Both sides contributed to instability, and ordinary people were caught in the middle.

Politics and conflict were making international news, and many families were forced to flee.

That must have been difficult to witness. How many refugees arrived where you were?



Some of the Kamberatoro refugees in their camp on the mission station. Earlier hurriedly erected shelters were covered with tarpaulins rather like the structures in the distance. As time passed the refugees built village style houses.

The first major group was around 1,500 people. Trying to feed 1,500 refugees was no easy task.

How did the local people respond?

The people of Cambra Toro were extraordinary. Villages from all around helped. They shared food and resources so generously that by

the time many refugees moved on, some of the local people had little food left for themselves. They had given almost everything away.

Did the refugees share language or culture with the local communities?

Mostly, yes. Many spoke related languages from across the border, sometimes with different dialects. That made acceptance easier because they were seen as kin rather than strangers.

What were living conditions like for the refugees?

Very basic. They largely had to provide for themselves. Food was the greatest problem. The Papua New Guinea government did not want involvement, and Australia also stayed away because of political sensitivities around Indonesia. In the end, the Bishop of Vanimo, Bishop John Etheridge, carried much of the responsibility.

Tell us about Bishop John Etheridge.

Bishop John Etheridge was a Passionist bishop and a remarkable man. He made sure refugees were fed, clothed, and defended politically. He fought for them when few others would. The stress of carrying that burden probably contributed to his poor health and early death. He eventually returned to Australia, where he passed away.

What was your own role during this refugee crisis?

We were the people on the front line. Refugees arrived at all hours, sometimes late at night after crossing the border. Suddenly you might have two or three hundred exhausted and starving people at the mission. Before anyone could sleep, you had to organise food and shelter. It became almost a twenty-four-hour ministry.

Did that ever create tensions with authorities?

Mostly with governments. The Australian government was not impressed, and the Papua New Guinea government preferred not to become involved. Once politics enters a humanitarian situation, things become messy. But we survived and kept doing what needed to be done.

Did refugees remember that support later on?

Very much so. Years later in Port Moresby I would be walking through Boroko and suddenly hear someone yell, "Brother!" Before I knew it, I was wrapped in a huge hug. They were refugees we had helped years before.

Were many able to rebuild their lives?

Most eventually settled around Port Moresby, where there were Indonesian-speaking communities. They found work and some stability. They did not become wealthy, but at least they were safe and looked after.

Besides refugee work, what other ministries were you involved in?

Medical work was central. Every missionary needed some medical training, even if basic. I gave hundreds of injections and learned quickly.

I was certainly not trained for it, but sometimes there was no one else. We had some rough beginnings, but thankfully we did not lose any babies.



So health care came before preaching?

Absolutely. You cannot preach the love of God to starving people. Hungry people don't know god loves them. First you make sure they have food and care. Only then can you speak about faith. Looking after people came first.

Refugees must have brought many health issues with them.

Every disease under the sun. Many had been hiding from soldiers or living without medical care. Once they crossed the border, we first fed them and then treated whatever illnesses they carried. That kept us very busy.

You also worked with Dr Elizabeth Lewis. Who was she?



© Australian Federation of Medical Women
Dr Elizabeth Lewis AM, FRACS, FRCS (Eng ...

Dr Elizabeth Lewis was a paediatric neurosurgeon from the Mater Medical Centre. She fell in love with Papua New Guinea and supported our work for years. She organised medical treatment in Australia for children needing specialist care, often at no cost. She should have been a missionary, really.

Were there any priests with you to help with sacraments?

In Cambra Toro we rarely had priests. There were more mission stations than clergy, and many priests did not return after their first term because life was so difficult.

So what could you do as a brother?

Everything except celebrate Mass and hear confessions. I baptised many people, married many couples, and buried many people. You did what was necessary. One bishop used to say, "Do it and don't tell me about it." There was often no other way.

If you had to guess, how many baptisms did you perform?

Hundreds. In Wewak Hospital the nurses often called me to baptise dying infants. Many parents had not yet chosen names, so they would say, "Use your name." There are probably many little Jeromes in heaven.

Your religious name was Dominic. Why not use that?

I usually used Jerome, I had gone to Papua New Guinea as Jerome, and suddenly returning with a different religious name felt strange. People there often changed names after sickness as a traditional practice, hoping illness would not return. We found that confusing, so I was never enthusiastic about changing my own name. Before long, I was Jerome again.

So name-changing was common?

Very common. If someone became sick, they might change their name to avoid future sickness. Keeping track of people could be quite a challenge.

Humour

While setting up a voice recognition password on my new phone, a dog barked nearby and ran away. Now I'm looking for that dog to unlock my phone...

It's almost October, which means all of the cobwebs and dust in my house will soon become Halloween decorations.

Remember when you could refer to your knees as right and left instead of good and bad?
Good times.

I was at a job interview today when the manager handed me a laptop: "I want you to try to sell this to me." I put it under my arm, left the building and went home. He called me and said: "Bring my laptop back now." I said: "\$200 and it's yours."

A lot of women say their husband never listens to them.
I am proud to say I have never heard my wife say that.

I'm a huge fan of saying, "YOU'RE WELCOME" really loudly when people don't say thank you.

I gave my wife a glue stick instead of lipstick by accident. She's still not talking to me.

Someone tried to sell me a coffin today. I said that's the last thing I need.

The best way to save money is to go in the house and lay down.

My child asked me what I use to play on the iPad as a kid. I told her I use to talk into a fan to sound like a robot.

I asked my mom if she can pick me up because I don't like this sleepover and she said, "No, you're 47 and that's your wife and kids."

When your wife starts a sentence with "When you get a chance..." just go ahead and start putting your shoes on. She means now.

The best way to save money is to go in the house and lay down.

If you ever think English is not a weird language just remember that read and lead rhyme and read and lead rhyme. But read and lead don't rhyme, and neither do read and lead.

I just paid my taxes. The roads should be fixed any day now.

Crossing things off my to-do list... I haven't done any of them, I just don't want them on my list anymore.

**Remember when you could refer to your knees as right and left instead of good and bad?
Good times.**

One spelling mistake can ruin your marriage. I accidentally texted my wife: "I'm having a great time. I wish you were her."

I HAVEN'T TRIED YOGA, BUT I HAVE TRIED BENDING OVER TO PICK UP MY KEYS, SO I'M PRETTY SURE I'D HATE YOGA.

If laziness were an Olympic sport, I'd make sure to come in 4th place... just so I wouldn't have to walk up to the podium.

Prayers

I thank my God
every time I
remember you.
In all of my prayers
for all of you,
I always pray with joy.

Philippians E3-4

We remember those who have died recently as well as those whose anniversaries occur at this time, especially [Kevin Byrne](#), [Maria Calvisi](#), [Simon Kearney](#), [Bev O'Loughlin](#), [Geoffrey Ward](#), [Maureen Whyte](#). 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:

[Mary Cogle](#), [Stephen Cogle](#), [David Chai](#), [Fr Chris Mithen](#), [Paul Fitzgerald](#), [Pam Storey](#), [Joan O'Callaghan](#), [Kate Dunn](#), [Lucia Isgro](#), [Marie Spowart](#), [Nina Conti](#), [Max McMahon](#), [Kate Lenic](#), [Cate Sweeney](#), [Carol Battistella](#), [Bob Hallam](#), [Lisa Iverach](#), [Anne Woon](#), [Gerry Bond](#), [Dr Peter Heffernan](#), [Greg Agosta](#), [Nancy Reynolds](#), [Luke Norden](#), [Jeanelle Bergin](#), [Caroline Hagedorn](#), [Bernadette Owen](#), [Doris Castro](#), [Marilyn Cilmi](#), [Maureen Barns](#), [Denise Egan](#), [Alexander Lim](#), [Caroline Meade](#), [Rex & Jan Cambrey](#), [Phil Drew](#), [Patricia Keeghan](#), [Zoe & Sophia Chung](#), [Graham Burke](#), [Rod Gorfine](#), [Pam Gartland](#), [Lesley Yang](#), [Anne Jenkins](#). [Julia Cantone](#), [Peter Barry](#), [Helen McLean](#), [Jeff Foale CP](#), [Errol Lovett](#), [Arthur Reuss](#), [Lily Hayes](#), and [Jeremiah](#).

SATURDAY
RECORDED MASS

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

Brian / Erick

