

Holy Cross Retreat



Letter 335

24th July, 2026

Greetings,

I am in Saigon this week and Tri is assisting with the preparation for delivery to those without internet access. JD usually delivers copies each week to Fr Chris Mithen and Fr Gerald Quinn at Nazareth House. Two copies of the newsletter are printed and posted and thirteen other copies are printed and put into addressed envelopes for personal delivery. Teresa Lim has been looking after the delivery each week for more than four years.

Joseph has left Rabaul. He has spent a few days in Madang before heading to Port Moresby where several of his siblings live. He will be back on Tuesday.

Erick and **Chris** have returned from attending the formation seminar in Malang, Indonesia. Chris will look forward to a less demanding schedule after having had to present so many sessions. Erick is back for less than a week before he heads off for a three week holiday which will include two of his sisters being married.

Tri returned from Vietnam exhausted. He has been sensible in taking it easy, while continuing his regular commitments. Sadly, this coming week will be his final week at Holy Cross. He will move to Endeavour Hills next Thursday.

Clean up



Vince Celestino very generously and attentively tidied up the area near our neighbour's fence and burned the fallen branches. We are very grateful to Vince for his attention to this.

Synodal discussion on the family

Pope Leo XIV has convened the presidents of the world's 115 episcopal conferences, to gather at the Vatican in Rome from October 7 to 14, 2026. This summit will focus on new pastoral methods and the impact of rapid changes on families worldwide. It will consider how to support families facing contemporary challenges in light of the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

In the light of this upcoming meeting, it might help to have some 'background' on *Amoris Laetitia*.

Plans for 'Amoris Laetitia' meeting (Sean Winter)



We learned more about how Pope Leo XIV intends to implement the reforms his predecessor introduced when the Vatican released a "[thematic framework](#)" for the meeting this autumn of the presidents of the world's episcopal conferences, as well as their Eastern rite counterparts. They will discuss the reception of Pope Francis' 2016 post-synodal exhortation, [Amoris Laetitia](#).

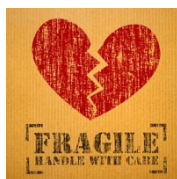
Three things about the framework and this forthcoming meeting stand out: the priority afforded pastoral experience; the absence of any reference to the hostility with which *Amoris Laetitia* was greeted in certain sectors of the church; and the underlying assumption of a synodal church that is shaping this meeting and, indeed, the life of the universal church.

"The starting point of the meeting is a gaze upon reality enlightened by the Gospel and rooted in Christ," the document states. "Following the path traced by *Amoris Laetitia*, it becomes essential to appreciate 'those signs of love which in some way reflect God's own love', accompanying persons 'patiently and discreetly' (AL 294). This calls for attentive listening to the concrete lives of families and to the experience of those who accompany them, recognizing together both the beauty of love as it takes shape in daily life and the fragilities that often affect it, including precarious employment and housing, illness, the challenges of raising children, emotional loneliness, and the care of family members with disabilities, the elderly, or those who are not self-sufficient."



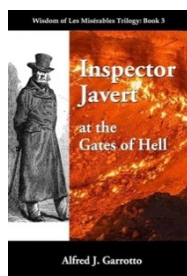
This framing highlights the ascent of pastoral theology in the life of the church. We need to move past the idea of two camps, one that insists the church begins its teaching with transcendent and unchangeable norms versus the other that begins with the lived reality of the people we serve. The church attends to the "signs of the times" not as sociologists but as evangelists looking for signs of God's grace in the lived circumstances of the Christian faithful. It is not an either/or but a both/and: We look at reality, but we do so through the lens of the Gospel and the teachings of the church.

The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, which worked on this framework, has been highlighting pastoral theology since Cardinal Kevin Farrell took its helm in 2016 and this approach is on display here. The document has a section on the special need to accompany married couples in their first few years of marriage. The document attends to the need to reach young people, asking: "What language, experiences, and educational and spiritual pathways help children, adolescents and young people today to recognize the value of marriage?"



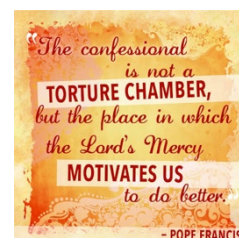
The document, like *Amoris Laetitia*, does not give up on those whose marriages have failed. "Failure, fragility, the gap between the ideal and reality, and the complexity of life situations also become places in which the work of God's grace may be recognized and where persons can be accompanied with respect, patience and hope," it states.

The second thing that jumps out about the preparatory framework is the absence of any reference to the controversy that surrounded *Amoris Laetitia* and the two synods on the family, in 2014 and 2015 that led to it. It was at those synods that the opposition to Francis took shape. Some bishops, Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput most prominent among them, complained that the pope was sowing confusion by suggesting the divorced and remarried might be admitted to the sacraments under certain circumstances.



Chaput told the audience at a First Things' symposium what he thought of the 2014 synod: "I think confusion is of the devil, and I think the public image that came across was one of confusion." As I noted at the time, "When Chaput detects 'confusion' in the synod, I detect an agenda in Chaput." Chaput was the leader of Team Javert at the synods, and his agenda was to make sure that "those who falter and those who fall, must pay the price" (*Les Miserables*)

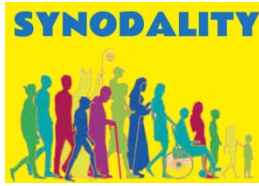
Now, that opposition does not merit so much as a footnote in the preparatory framework document. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Francis included a single footnote about the subject of Communion for the divorced and remarried: "In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments. Hence, 'I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber, but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy.' ... I would also point out that the Eucharist 'is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.' " The stars did not fall from the sky. The Catholic Church was not consumed by relativism nor were the people of God confused.



The last aspect of the new framework that jumps out is the degree to which synodality is now simply assumed in ecclesial proceedings. The text begins by quoting Pope Leo XIV's message announcing the meeting which he said was intended "to proceed, in mutual listening, to a synodal discernment on the steps to be taken in order to proclaim the Gospel to families today, in light of *Amoris Laetitia* and taking into account what is currently being done in the local Churches."



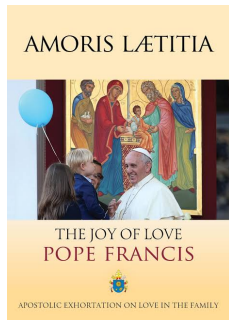
The General Secretariat of the Synod helped draft this thematic framework, which itself indicates the role of synodality in the life of the Curia. But the days when synods were rubber stamps, and the pope presiding over them could read a book while others gave canned speeches, are over.



Whether the meeting is a consistory of cardinals or, now, a gathering of the presidents of the world's bishops' conferences, mutual listening and discernment are how those meetings operate. And while we can expect the laity to be involved in the general synods in the upcoming years, Leo is not afraid to hold a meeting of clerics so long as the meeting is synodal in approach.

Pastoral theology, moving on from the feeble opposition to Francis, and comprehensive synodality. That is what the cardinals voted for last year in the conclave. It is what Leo is delivering now.

Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love)



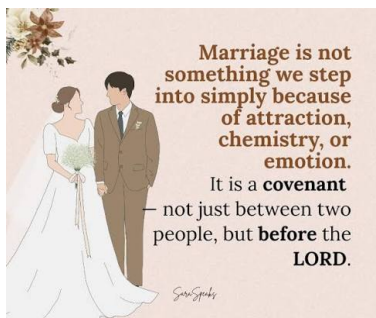
Pope Francis' issued Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love) in April 2016. It is a letter written for families—especially those living the daily complexity of marriage and love. Rather than offering abstract principles, the document looks at how God meets people inside ordinary human circumstances: joys and failures, faith and fatigue, stability and change. Its central conviction is simple and pastoral: the family is both a gift and a journey, and the Church accompanies couples with mercy, truth, and hope.

A key starting point is that Christian marriage is not merely an ideal to admire; it is a vocation. Love is meant to be faithful, fruitful, and founded in God's covenant. At the same time, Francis acknowledges that real marriages often include wounds: loneliness, misunderstandings, infidelity, economic stress, addiction, mental health struggles, and times when people do not know how to begin again.

Some wounds in marriage are not physical. They are words—carelessly spoken, never forgotten.

The Pope insists that these difficulties do not cancel God's presence or the dignity of each person. The Church's mission is not to stand at a distance as a judge, but to approach as a mother—inviting people back into the life of grace whenever possible.

The document also emphasizes that love grows through time. Couples learn by

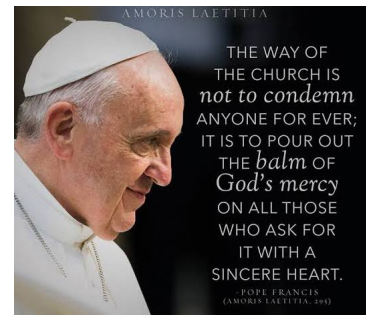


practicing patience, forgiveness, and communication. Francis encourages spouses to cultivate small daily acts of care—kindness at home, respect during conflict, and prayer that turns the heart toward God.

He teaches that the goal of marriage is not perfection, but a persevering commitment to love, even when that love must be repaired and renewed. In this way, the

letter highlights the difference between an emotion that comes and goes and a covenant love that can learn and heal.

Amoris Laetitia confronts the reality of brokenness. Francis called the Church to be especially attentive to those who are divorced and remarried, recognizing that not all situations are the same. Some people enter a new union with full awareness and responsibility; others experience painful circumstances where separation was not freely chosen, or where maintaining a stable home and caring for children becomes a serious moral and human question. The Pope urged pastors to avoid “one-size-fits-all” reasoning and instead to engage people personally, with discernment and compassion.

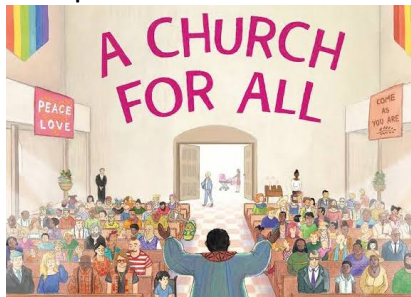


He proposes that individual circumstances be considered in the light of conscience, church teaching, and the possible paths toward grace. This pastoral approach is grounded in discernment. Francis encouraged couples and individuals to examine honestly what is happening in their lives, to seek help, and to take responsibility before God. He calls clergy and lay leaders to accompany people through concrete steps—sometimes through counselling, sometimes through renewed commitment to the good, sometimes through efforts to repair relationships and live more fully in the truth.

Ultimately, Amoris Laetitia is a message of hope. The joy of love is not the denial of suffering; it is the promise that God continues working within imperfect lives. By forming the Church to speak with both truth and mercy, Francis invited families to become environment where faith is lived, where forgiveness is possible, and where Jesus’ mercy reaches people at the exact point of their struggle.

The Ecclesiology OF Amoris Laetitia (Massimo Faggioli)...MAY 2016

The apostolic exhortation on love in the family, Amoris Laetitia is a landmark



document not only for the pontificate of Francis, but also in the history of modern papal teaching. This is not simply because of its approach to the hot-button issues of marriage and sexuality, but especially because of its vision of the Church. First, *Amoris Laetitia's* view of the Church is *collegial* and *synodal*. Francis quotes his first exhortation *Evangelii*

Gaudium seventeen times, Vatican II's constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes* nineteen times, but also ten documents of national bishops' conferences (Spain, Korea, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Australia, the council of the Latin American bishops CELAM, Italy and Kenya).

This is consistent with Francis's ecclesiology before *Amoris Laetitia*, but it is also a genuine development of the Bishops' Synod itself. What this new exhortation adds is the extensive use of the documents of the Bishops' Synod of 2014 and 2015. There



are 136 quotations in total. To be sure, Francis's predecessors used to quote from synodal documents, but in order to confirm what they wanted the Synod to say: that was part of most bishops' frustration with the Bishops' Synod as an institution. Francis' Synods of 2014 and 2015 were for the first time, a real expression of a

Church where "episcopal collegiality" is not just in books or the documents of Vatican 2, but where the bishops and the pope cooperate together to the maturation of the discernment of the Church over a particular issue.

This is new because the "synodal process" of Francis is something that never happened before: a synod with a real freedom of debate. Moreover, the ecclesiology of Francis is not just limited to episcopal collegiality, but it is trying to expand towards *synodality*: participation in the Church decision-making process cannot be limited to the gathering of the bishops in the Synod only. The laity must be involved in some way, as the Synods of 2014 and 2015 tried to do (with mixed results) by sending questionnaires to the Catholic faithful all over the world.

Finally, the ecclesiology of *Amoris Laetitia* and of the synodal process also entails a radically new understanding of the role of the bishop of Rome, as he suggests in the opening of the exhortation (3): "I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it."



This is very important because ever since Vatican II, the issue of collegiality in the Church had largely been addressed as an issue of participation of the lower level (the bishops) to the upper level (the papacy). But Francis makes clear that collegiality and synodality in the Church also entails a certain measure of withdrawal of the papacy from the

role of primary and unique "maker" of the Catholic tradition. There are other levels where some issues can and must be addressed.

Second, *Amoris Laetitia's* ecclesiology is *historical* and *existential*. Francis quotes several times from *Evangelii Gaudium* in order to remind us that "time is greater than space," in an approach that invites us all to take a close look at reality. In paragraph 6 of *Amoris Laetitia* Francis proposes to "examine the actual situation of families, in order to keep firmly grounded in reality"; in paragraph 7 he invites all of us to see ourselves in the weaknesses of families: "everyone should feel challenged by Chapter Eight".

The historical and existential ecclesiology of Francis is clear also in the key paragraphs 35-38: the Church cannot try to "impose rules by sheer authority"

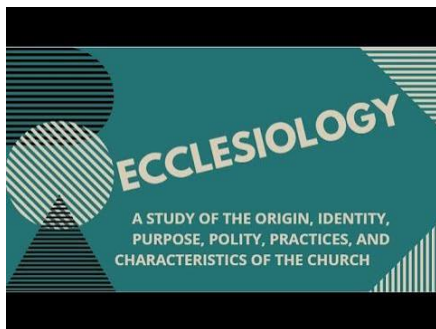
(35); it is a Church that is "humble and realistic" (36); a Church "called to form

consciences, not to replace them" (37); a Church that cannot be "defensive, wasting pastoral energy on denouncing a decadent world without being proactive in proposing ways of finding true happiness" (38).

Communion

in fact, is not the result of strategies and programmes, but is built in **mutual listening between brothers and sisters.**

This is the ecclesiology of Vatican II, but also an ecclesiology humbled by the fifty



years of post-Vatican II: humbled by a radical change in the role of religion and the Church in society, and by its own tragic mistakes, such as the sex abuse scandal, which is mentioned in *Amoris Laetitia* in the paragraph on the sexual exploitation of children (45): "The sexual abuse of children is all the more scandalous when it occurs in places where they ought to be most safe, particularly in families, schools, communities and Christian institutions."

It is a Catholic Church that in dealing with marriage and family understands that the defining issue for the Church today is not a matter of *who*, but a matter of *where* - or, in other words, it is the *where* the Church stands that defines the *who* of the Church: it is what already at Vatican II, in 1965, the Church magisterium said when it opened to a more historical and existential idea of the Church.

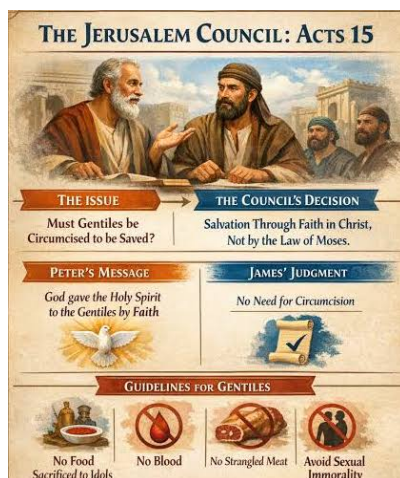
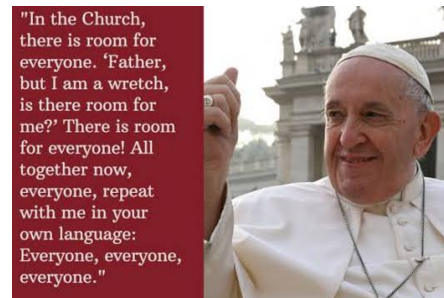


Pope Francis has thus brought back to the magisterium Vatican II and particularly the document *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the modern world - a document that Benedict XVI had always viewed with scepticism.



Third, Francis's ecclesiology in *Amoris Laetitia* is an ecclesiology that sees the Church and society in constant dialogue and communication. It is an *inclusive, radically non-sectarian ecclesiology*. Church and people tend to be one in Francis's experience: in global Catholicism today the relationship between Church and people is often very different from that in Argentina. His experience in Argentina is not normative but formative for Francis and inclines him toward an inclusive ecclesiology.

Francis thus invited families to be part of a larger society (182) and to reject all forms of exclusion (186). It is a Church that integrates all people. It is a Church like a field hospital (an image he first used in the interview with the editor of *Civiltà Cattolica*, Antonio Spadaro S.J., in September 2013) and "like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm" (291). It is an ecclesiology of the parable of "the shepherd of the hundred, not just of the ninety-nine" (309).



Francis was blunt in acknowledging the temptations of an exclusive ecclesiology (296):

"There are two ways of thinking which recur throughout the Church's history: casting off and reinstating. The Church's way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement ..." The reference to the Council of Jerusalem, when the early Christian community chose the path of inclusion of gentile believers in Jesus Christ (*Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 15), here constitutes an implicit statement about the kind of situation the Church lives in today

and about the need for a change of paradigm.

Francis understood that to make the Church more inclusive it is necessary to get rid of the ideologization of Catholicism. Francis's emphasis on mercy, on the other hand, has violated the "law and order" mentality of the self-appointed guardians of Catholic orthodoxy. For them Catholicism is unchangeable doctrine that cannot be contaminated by theological developments and by the idea of the pastorality of doctrine. Francis responded to this kind of criticism with one of his most impressive speeches, delivered on 24 October 2015 at the end of the Synod.

The Synod, said Francis: "was about bearing witness to everyone that, for the Church, the Gospel continues to be a vital source of eternal newness, against all those who would 'indoctrinate' it in dead stones to be hurled at others. It was also about laying closed hearts, which bare the closed hearts which frequently hide even behind the Church's teachings or good intentions, in order to sit in the chair of Moses and judge, sometimes with superiority and superficiality, difficult cases and wounded families."



Amoris Laetitia is a document whose outcomes in the real life of the Catholic people will largely depend on the clergy - bishops and priests. This "Catch22" is something that is probably beyond the reach of anybody - the pope included - in the Catholic Church of today. But *Amoris Laetitia* is a document that challenges the *status quo Ecclesiae* not only in its moral theology, provoking a change in the way the Church thinks of itself and operates. The emphasis on mercy answers the question of whether Christianity is an abstract intellectual truth or a form of life, and *Amoris Laetitia* offers an even clearer response to that question.

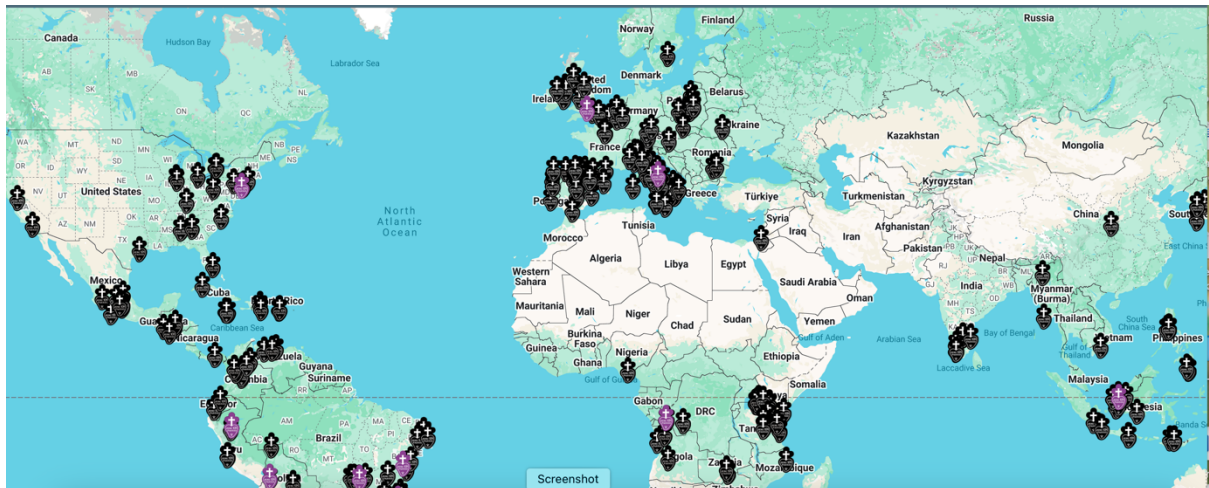
The name
of God
is Mercy

Amoris Laetitia is not a missed opportunity: it can be perceived as such by those who underestimate the importance of the learning process for the Church Pope Francis wanted, or by those who cannot see the important differences in emphasis and orientation between Francis's teaching and that of his predecessors. Catholic culture proceeds, not by replacement or substitution of previous theological models, but by adding layer upon layer. There will always be some visible traces of the Constantinian period, the Gregorian revolution of the eleventh century, medieval Scholasticism, early modern Tridentinism, and even nineteenth-century ultramontanism.



Francis's pontificate can be seen as a reality check for a Church that for quite some time believed in a flawless, philosophical view of itself as well as of love and sexuality. It is a reality check to which real families are more accustomed than the clergy. After all, Francis's view of the family reveals many things about his view of the Church.

Where are the Passionists north and west of PNG and Australia



Humour

In a country hospital relatives gathered in the waiting room, where a family member lay gravely ill.

Finally, the doctor came in looking tired and sombre.

“I'm afraid I'm the bearer of bad news,” he said as he surveyed the worried faces.

“The only hope left for your loved one at this time is a brain transplant. It's an experimental procedure, very risky, but it is the only hope. Insurance will cover the procedure, but you will have to pay for the BRAIN”.

The family members sat silent as they absorbed the news. After some time, someone asked, 'How much will a brain cost?'

The doctor quickly responded, '\$5,000 for a male brain; \$200 for a female brain.' The moment turned awkward.

Some of the men actually had to 'try' not to smile, avoiding eye contact with the women. One man unable to control his curiosity, finally blurted out the question everyone wanted to ask, 'Why is the male brain so much more than a female brain?' The doctor smiled at the childish innocence and explained to the entire group, 'It's just standard pricing procedure. We have to price the female brains much lower because they've been used.'

A retired man who volunteered to entertain patients went to a hospital and began playing the piano. He told some jokes and sang some funny songs for those in attendance. When he finished he said, in farewell, “I hope you get better.” One elderly gentleman replied, “I hope you get better, too.”

- A school is trying to organize a hide and seek tournament, but good players are really hard to find.

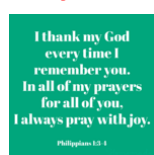
When Bess told the contractor “No carpet steps”, they gave her a blank stare.

-Bono and The Edge walked into a Dublin bar and the bartender says, “Oh no, not U2 again.”

- Scientists got together to study the effects of alcohol on a person’s gait, and the result was staggering.

- What do you call a volunteer bricklayer? A freemason.
- Bill volunteers as a part time as a joustier at the renaissance fair. He is a free lancer.
- Maree loves volunteering so much she does it for free
- Dave joined a volunteer group to help stab victims
- He didn’t have a sharp knife, so he had his work cut out
- Alice once worked at a cheap pizza shop to get by. She kneaded the dough.
- Some friends have named their band ‘Duvet’. It’s a cover band.
- Adam lost his girlfriend’s audiobook, and now I’ll never hear the end of it.
- Why is ‘dark’ spelled with a k and not c? Because you can’t see in the dark.
- Why is it unwise to share your secrets with a clock? Well, time will tell.
- Prison may be just one word to you, but for some people, it’s a whole sentence.

Prayers



We remember that those who have died recently especially We also remember those whose anniversaries occur at this time, especially [Rosa Rao \(Mirella’s mother\)](#) [Patrick De Leo](#), [Tomasso Forlano](#), [Robert Johnson](#), and [Gerald Uniacke](#).

We pray too for members of our Holy Cross family who are coping with illness including many not listed here, and all who care for them: We remember...

[Nada Atme \(Liz Atme’s sister -n-law\)](#), [Stephen Cogle](#), [Paul Fitzgerald](#), [Pam Storey](#), [Greg Turney](#), [Dr Peter Heffernan](#), [Fr Brendan Lane](#), [Nicki Di Giantomasso](#), [Beth Scott](#), [Carol Battistella](#), [Fr Chris Mithen](#), [Max McMahon](#), [Lucia Isgro](#), [Bernadette Owen](#), [Edward Atme](#), [Marie Spowart](#), [Jan Cambrey](#), [Bob Hallam](#), [Alexander Lim](#), [Nina Conti](#), [Greg Agosta](#), [David Chai](#), [Anne Woon](#), [Lisa Iverach](#), [Marilyn Cilmi](#), [Doris Castro](#), [Caroline Hagedorn](#), [Jeanelle Bergin](#), [Maureen Barns](#), [Caroline Meade](#), [Denise Egan](#), [Luke Norden](#), [Rod Gorfine](#), [Nancy Reynolds](#), [Patricia Keeghan](#), [Graham Burke](#), [Kate Lenic](#), [Pam Gartland](#), [Phil Drew](#), [Peter Barry](#), [Lesley Yang](#), [Anne Jenkins](#), [Julia Cantone](#), [Helen McLean](#), and [Errol Lovett](#).



[Chris](#) will record this Sunday’s Mass early and he will send the link.

Brian