

Holy Cross Retreat

Letter 346

2nd October 2026



Greetings,



It's time to think about moving forward – that's what we need to do with our clocks early on Sunday morning.

Spring cleaning in the grounds



With Erick and Joseph having a break from school counselling ([Erick](#)) and spirituality classes ([Joseph](#)) last week they set about a very big clean up around the grounds.

Erick was involved in offering a retreat so he did not have as much time as Joseph, who put in many hours of hard work. The photo here shows Joseph pruning trees around the Stations of the Cross. The area alongside the fences as well as the steep slopes are in great shape after their hard work. Given the size of the property, it would be a huge financial cost if we had to employ a groundsman. We are greatly helped by the huge amount of work that [Peter Norman](#) and [Peter Day](#) do, backed up by [Maurice Molan's](#) generous work as

well. Erick, Joseph and sometimes JD contribute with the mowing that needs to be done.

We looked forward to celebrating [Jerome's](#) 87th birthday the day after (on Sunday) but he advised us half an hour before dinner that he was unwell and needed to go to



bed. We had our meal without the main person and then on Monday night, although Chris, Joseph and JD were not here, Erick and I celebrated with Jerome. He was in good form.

Joseph drove Jerome up to Benalla on Tuesday, to see his sister, Kate.

It was timely this week to acknowledge the constant and generous work that [Chris](#) does in monitoring Jerome's health.

'Living water' creates a path of destruction

Good Samaritan Congregational leader Sr Catherine McCahill SGS



On the morning of August 26th, as everyone was going about their normal day along the Trishuli River in Tibet and Nepal (children, students, workers, parents, pilgrims, tourists, engineers, hikers, everyone), part of a Himalayan glacier melted enough to break free and plummet down the river. As it went, friction melted the ice. The resulting high energy, rapidly moving water

crashed down the river valley taking everyone and everything in its path – people, buildings, plants, earth and rocks.

Most of us have seen the horror in video clips and watched amazed as people have been rescued from rooftops, from high banks of the river, or pulled from the mud under rubble, or from the underground hydro tunnels. We have gasped in horror at the suddenness and hopelessness faced by so many as the tsunami of water and debris swept them down the river.

On 8 September, the ABC reported at least 1399 people were killed and more than 5400 were still missing in Nepal and Tibet. In Australia, home to 35 of those missing and home to many residents from Nepal and Tibet, we have offered our concern and our prayers.



Media reports about this event, its aftermath and the stories of searching, finding and rescuing continued in Australia for nearly three weeks. During this time, many

associated reflections have held my attention. Firstly, I know that we, in Australia, stand by and with our fellow residents. When one of 'our own' is impacted, especially in another country, all of us seem to know that one is one of us. There is something good and noble in that loyalty and neighbourliness. I wonder, however, why we are less concerned about other persons similarly impacted.



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), from 1998-2017 landslides affected an estimated 4.8 million people and caused more than 18,000 deaths. These statistics have not featured as prominently in our news feeds. Secondly, I wonder, and I really do hope this might be correct, that perhaps we are finally

becoming aware of more consequences of climate change. No doubt the heating of the world's glaciers will lead to more of these natural disasters.

There are more glaciers on the Himalayan mountains than anywhere else on the earth, and that part of the planet is heating faster than anywhere else.



Understandably, this is a 'health issue' for the WHO. On 1 September, Christians around the world began the Season of Creation until the feast of St Francis of Assisi on 4 October. This year's theme, 'Living Water', is poignant, given what happened in the Trishuli Valley. It "explores *Ezekiel* 47:9 and 12 as a powerful biblical vision of hope and ecological healing. Set amid exile and loss, the image of living

water flowing from God's sanctuary reveals divine healing that renews land, water, biodiversity, and human responsibility towards the whole creation."

Lack of water, the degradation of water supplies and the consequent effect on human communities and whole ecosystems is evident in so many part of our common home. the call to ecological conversion is strong from the leaders of Christian Churches. I quote just a few snippets: "Environmental justice – implicitly proclaimed by the prophets – can no longer be regarded as an abstract concept or a distant goal. It is an urgent need that involves much more than simply protecting the environment. For it is a matter of justice – social, economic and human.



For believers it is also a duty born of faith, since the universe reflects the face of Jesus Christ, in whom all things were created and redeemed.” (Pope Leo XIV)

“Creation care is a collective mandate and responsibility.” (Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople)



“Ezekiel’s vision of Living Water ... is not one of despair but of hope for all creation. Even the Dead Sea — a symbol of a devastated ecosystem such as we see today — is healed by the Living Water... [It] inspire[s] ecological metanoia and faith-rooted actions for ecological restoration as part of our common Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity.” (Rev Prof Jerry Pillay, World Council of Churches General Secretary)

Yes, I hear myself ruminate, ‘living’ water is life-giving. However, we all know how destructive water is when it comes too fast or in too much volume or at the wrong time. The fact of climate change is that all of these destructive events are becoming more likely. So, the very gift of God – water – becomes a curse. Our call to ecological conversion becomes more urgent.



Thirdly, the tragedy for some families still searching for missing persons is that their loved ones were on the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage, the pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, a sacred mountain for Hindus. There is something unnerving for all of us when a religious event ends tragically. What is meant to bring peace, inner strength, contact with the divine, and from all reports was that for this

group. Photos of the group, having completed the pilgrimage, testify to this fact.



Whatever the reason, this tragedy and the amazing rescue efforts have stayed at the forefront of so many media outlets, we know that thousands of people in Tibet and Nepal and in many other countries have been impacted and, collectively, we bear witness to their grief and their courage. I hope that when the media loses interest, we will not.

The words of Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah have been much quoted. I finish with them because, for me, they speak strongly of being neighbour: "We know our responsibility and its sensitivity. We are translating the humanitarian spirit of the Nepali people into practice through the search and rescue operation."

Water shortages and challenges in Israel & Gaza

Lorenzo Tondo in Jerusalem and Seham Tantesh in Gaza (24th Sep 2026)



Israel is facing weeks of water shortages after an exceptional algae bloom crippled much of its desalination capacity, in a crisis scientists say was triggered when Israeli attacks destroyed much of Gaza's wastewater infrastructure, causing a massive discharge of untreated sewage. "Pollution does not recognise political borders," said the Zalul Environmental Association, an Israeli NGO

dedicated to protecting the country's seas and shores. "The discharge of untreated sewage from the Gaza Strip into the sea is contributing to the worsening crisis affecting the Israeli desalination facilities. The wastewater contains nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, which feed microalgae and cyanobacteria and may intensify their blooms."

Despite last year's US-brokered ceasefire, Gaza remains gripped by a severe water and sanitation crisis. The Palestinian territory is plagued by rodents, and sewage floods its coastline after Israel destroyed its wastewater treatment plants. Just across the border, a vast bloom of microalgae stretching up to 100 kilometres long has clogged filters at five of Israel's six main desalination plants, which were shut down for days and have since been operating at a reduced level.



Experts say that after nearly three years of war, the environmental consequences of the destruction in Gaza are now spilling back into Israel. "The discharge of untreated



sewage from Gaza into the sea increases risks to Israel's water production infrastructure along the southern Mediterranean coast," said Jack Gilron, a professor emeritus and desalination expert at Ben-Gurion University's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research. "The current incident reinforces the need to prepare against threats to one of Israel's main sources of drinking water."

Since 7 October 2023, Israeli bombardment has destroyed 90% of Gaza's water and sanitation infrastructure, according to a report by Doctors Without Borders. Direct

strikes have been carried out on wells, carrier lines, reservoirs and desalination units. Gaza's water crisis remains severe. Before the war, 80% the territory's supply came from an aquifer under the coastal strip, but that supply is now contaminated by seawater and wastewater and unfit for human consumption.



Most of Gaza's drinking water came from desalination plants and three pipelines controlled by the Israeli water authority, but those pipelines were cut at the start of the war and have only partially reopened. In Gaza City, a reservoir has become a sewage collection pool after the destruction of local wastewater infrastructure and pumping stations. Meanwhile, damaged or destroyed distribution networks have left much of the population reliant on water trucks.

For many, this means a stark choice between drinking an extra cup of water or saving it to wash their hands and prevent disease, with acute diarrhoea among the leading causes of illness. "We carry water in jerry cans," said Nas al-Barawi, 34, a mother of five from Beit Lahia. "We walk with heavy containers or wait for hours in queues. Much of the water is unsafe, and children suffer recurring stomach infections, diarrhoea and skin rashes. Damaged sewage networks and failed pumps have also left wastewater flowing between tents and through residential areas."



Omar Shatat, the deputy executive director of the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility in Gaza, said all five of the territory's wastewater treatment plants were out of



service, leaving an estimated 45,000 cubic metres of untreated sewage to flow into the Mediterranean every day. In addition, about 15,000 cubic metres of untreated waste a day seeps into the groundwater from soakaway pits, particularly in the informal camps in al-Mawasi. "This is a catastrophic situation environmentally and from a public-health perspective," Shatat said. "The sea is heavily

polluted, and the first people affected are Gaza's residents and displaced people because they are in direct contact with the highest concentrations of sewage."

Pat Griffiths, the International Committee of the Red Cross's spokesperson in Gaza City, said the situation was only likely to get worse with the onset of winter.

"Palestinians live surrounded by wastewater. It's all around them. It's where they eat, where they get water, where they walk," he said. Shaimaa al-Katari, 37, who has been displaced to al-Mawasi, said: "We have nowhere to dispose of the water from

washing dishes and clothes. We have to let it run into the street, which causes pools of stagnant water to form.



Algae and mosquitoes then spread around them and the streets become dirty. We suffer from foul smells, mosquitoes at night and flies during the day, as well as rodents.” Rats have infested parts of Gaza for months, thriving amid raw sewage and piles of rubbish accumulating around overcrowded camps for displaced people.

Israeli communities near the Gaza border have also been grappling with an unprecedented rats infestation with rodents swarming homes and gardens. In some communities, up to one hundred rats and mice have been caught in some homes “The consequences [of the war] do not stop at the border,” said Nada Majdalani, the Palestine director of EcoPeace Middle East, an environmental peacebuilding organisation. “We are already seeing an increase in hepatitis A in Gaza. I believe we are on the verge of a catastrophe. And a serious outbreak in Gaza would not necessarily remain within Gaza’s borders.”



In Israel, authorities are urging people to use water

‘judiciously’ until the system is fully restored. Water supplies have been reduced in the south of the country, and farmers have been instructed to halt irrigation, which economists say will cause food prices to rise. Zalul and EcoPeace urged Cogat, the Israeli agency charged with administration of Gaza, to help restore the territory’s sewage system and allow wastewater to be treated in Israeli-controlled areas. Cogat did not respond to a request for comment. Zalul said: “If the pollution continues, its impact could eventually be felt throughout the country. When the marine environment is contaminated, both people and nature suffer. Regardless of which side of the border they are on.”



What AI is doing to the way we think

Tom Keating (Eureka Street) 2nd September, 2026



Debate about artificial intelligence has, by now, settled into two established grooves. The first is economic, concerning which jobs will go, which will change, and what the productivity dividend might be. The second is environmental, concerning the electricity that

data centres draw, the water that cools them, and the minerals dug up to build them. Both of these matter, and both deserve the scrutiny they receive. But they share an assumption: each approach treats artificial intelligence as a new input into a world whose purposes are already fixed, and considers only what it will cost us to run.

There is a third question, which is harder to see and, I believe, more consequential than either. It is not what these systems will do to the labour market or the power grid, but what they will do to us as knowers: to how we come to believe things, what we accept as understanding, whom we trust, and whether we keep the habits of mind on which a thinking society depends. Call it the epistemological question. A society can restructure employment and can, with effort, find the energy. A society that loses its grip on the difference between information and understanding has lost something far harder to recover, not least because it may lose the very means of noticing the loss.



In Plato's *Phaedrus*, the god Theuth offers the Egyptian king the gift of writing, praising it as a remedy for memory and wisdom. The king is unpersuaded. Writing, he



says, will breed forgetfulness because people will trust in marks on a page instead of exercising memory; and it will give the appearance of wisdom in place of its reality because readers will take in a great deal while understanding little. Every technology of the word since has drawn the same complaint, and in each case the alarm was partly

overdone because each of those tools passed on, stored or pointed to words that some human being had written and could, in principle, answer for.

Generative AI is different in kind. It does not fetch an existing text. It composes one, fresh and fluent, in response to a prompt, and no one has written it. This is the first and least noticed of its effects. When a person tells you something, they are staking a claim: they represent themselves as knowing it, you

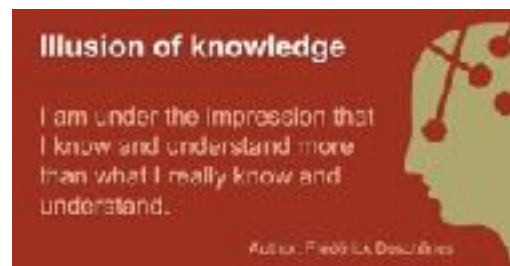


can ask them how they know, and they can be believed or doubted according to their honesty and their record. Almost everything we know about the wider world reaches us this way, through the testimony of others, held together by that thread of accountability. A

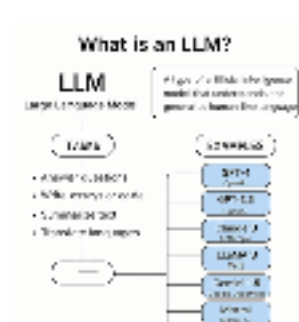
machine's output wears the grammar of testimony while lacking its substance. The sentence has the shape of a claim, but no one is making it. There is no knower behind it, no one to ask for grounds, no reputation on the line. We receive assertion without an asserter, and we are tempted to extend to it the trust we reserve for a candid and competent informant. That is a mistake, and a natural one.

It is made worse by a second effect, in which fluency has been cut loose from truth. The philosopher John Searle once imagined a person locked in a room, shuffling Chinese symbols according to a rulebook and producing flawless Chinese without understanding a word. A large language model is something like that room on an enormous scale, arranging language by statistical pattern, with no purchase on what the words are about. Some philosophers have argued, borrowing Harry Frankfurt's precise use of the term, that its output is best understood as 'b.....t', not lies.

Lying requires caring about the truth in order to conceal it, but speech produced with no concern for the truth at all is properly described as 'b.....t'. The hazard is subtle. In ordinary life, we treat fluency, confidence and coherence as signs that some one knows what they are talking about. These systems produce all three in abundance, whether or not the underlying claims are sound, because they are built to imitate the form of a good answer rather than to reach a true one. The polish is mistaken for knowledge, and there is no knowledge beneath it. Researchers have begun to call this the illusion of understanding.



Here, the older tradition earns its keep because knowing was never one thing. Aristotle distinguished several kinds, and the most human of them he called *phronesis*, practical wisdom: the judgement that reads a particular situation for what matters in it, formed slowly through experience by someone who must live with the consequences. Thomas Aquinas drew a further line between reasoning, the step-by-step movement from premise to conclusion, and understanding, the mind's of what is true, which reasoning merely serves. On this old and durable now something is to stand in a relation to reality through meaning.



A language model stands in no such relation. It works on the outward signs of words, never on the things they name. It can imitate the motions of reasoning with uncanny skill while grasping nothing. The danger is not that the imitation is poor. It is that the imitation is superb, that we mistake it for the real thing, and that we hand over to it the very work that understanding is.

That handing over is the third effect, and the one that should trouble anyone concerned with public life. Offloading mental labour is neither new nor bad in itself; we have always used notebooks, maps and calculators to extend what our minds can do. But there is a line between delegating a defined task while keeping hold of the thinking and surrendering the thinking itself, accepting the machine's answer as one's own with barely a glance.

Early studies, which should be read with care, point in the wrong direction, indicating that heavier reliance on these tools tracks with weaker critical thinking and that people who lean on them to complete work often do worse once the crutch is removed. Intellectual capacities are habits. They are kept alive only by use, and they waste away without it. The philosopher of technology Shannon Vallor calls AI a mirror that reflects our own intelligence back at us, and warns that a mirror can flatter and distort as readily as it can inform.



This has real-world implications for policy and the professions. Medicine, law, social work and public administration all turn on practical wisdom, on the seasoned reading of the particular case. Consider the experienced clinician who senses that a patient's account does not quite fit the obvious diagnosis, or the caseworker who judges that



a struggling family needs support rather than surveillance. That perception is not a rule that can be written down and handed to a machine; it is wisdom, built case by case, and it is answerable to the person in front of you. Automated decision support can offer a recommendation, but not the deliberative judgement that ought to sit beneath it. A

practitioner who defers to the system by habit may find, in time, that the judgement the institution exists to provide has quietly thinned. The deskilling of the hands is visible. The deskilling of judgement is not, until the moment it is needed and found missing.

There is, finally, the shared environment in which all of this happens. As generated text floods in, it grows harder to tell human testimony from machine composition, and the models themselves degrade as they feed on their own output.

When no one can be sure whether a photograph, a document or a quotation is genuine, the default trust on which public conversation runs begins to fray. The common ground of public knowledge, like any commons, can be fouled and depleted. Meanwhile, the tools that appear to democratise knowledge concentrate real power in a handful of firms, on whose private choices the terms of public reasoning increasingly depend.

None of this is an argument for refusal. These systems are genuinely useful for retrieval, drafting and exploration, and pretending otherwise would persuade no one. But it is an argument for using them in a way that guards the thing they can quietly erode: treating their output as a prompt for inquiry, provisional and to be checked, rather than as a verdict to be accepted; keeping human judgement where practical wisdom is required; and



designing institutions that resist lazy deference. Teach the young, above all, to notice the gap between plausibility and truth. And recover, in ourselves, the plain distinction between having information and understanding something, on which the whole matter turns.

The measure of these machines is not only what they can produce, but what they do to our capacity to understand. That measure belongs at the centre of the debate about artificial intelligence, not at its edge.

Last week's puzzle answers



Answers

1. Six people each took an egg from a basket. How was there one left?
The last person took the basket with the egg in it.
2. How did the police know who to arrest?
All the other card players were women.
3. How could six glasses be re-aligned?
Pour the juice from the second glass into the fifth.
4. How did a recluse cause the death of so many people?
The recluse lived in a lighthouse (and he had turned off all the lights).

Humour

- Q. What did Alexander the Great and Winnie the Pooh have in common?
A. The same middle name.





ATTORNEY: How was your first marriage terminated?

WITNESS: By death.

ATTORNEY: And by whose death was it terminated?

WITNESS: Take a guess!

Prayers – Dawn Heffernan

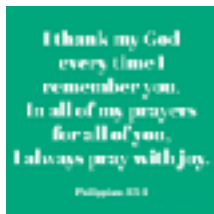


Dawn has taught at five U3A locations, including at U3A Manningham concurrently with U3A Box Hill for 21 years and U3A Deepdene for 11 years. Not surprisingly, ten years ago Dawn was presented with the Medal of the Order of Australia for 35 years of dedicated teaching. I think Dawn must now be around 92, but she is still teaching.

Unfortunately, Dawn will be undergoing surgery in a couple of weeks following the return of throat cancer. She faces a challenging and demanding period of recovery. She kindly invited me to present on two occasions and I was amazed that there were over a hundred participants, including several from our Holy Cross family).

One of her class has put together a video clip that captures Dawn's charm and devotion. https://youtube.com/watch?v=kTmJY_NRIRU&feature=shared

We hold Dawn in our prayers as well as her doctor son, Peter who is also battling cancer.



We remember that those who have died recently, especially **Denis Sweeney**, as well as **Mario Molinaro** and **Kelly Curmi** and others whose anniversaries occur at this time.

We pray also 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...

Dawn Heffernan, Daphne Chamberlain, Christine Storey, Kathy Shady, Nada Atme, Anthony Wright, Marie Spowart, Paul Fitzgerald, Stephen Cougle, Joan O'Callaghan, Teresa Lim, Pam Storey, Peter Heffernan, Carol Battistella, Bernadette Owen, George Hall, Graham Burke, George Ryan, David Chai, Lucia Isgro, Fr. Brendan Lane, Beth Scott, Max McMahon, Edward Atme, Rod Gorfine, Maureen Barns, Kate Lenic, Nina Conti, Luke Norden, Doris Castro, Alexander Lim, Anne Woon, Denise Egan, Marilyn Cilmi, Julia Cantone, Pam Gartland, Anne Jenkins and Helen McLean.



Chris will send the link for this Sunday's Mass on Saturday afternoon.

Brian

Coffee Cart

There was a good turnout for the Coffee Cart on Sunday and many generous donations of cakes and biscuits.





