



December 2015 – February 2016  
Pastoral Care Newsletter

Paulineke Nolan  
Pastoral Care Coordinator  
St Declan's Parish, Penshurst  
9580 1310  
www.stdeclanspenshurst.org

Hello! I hope this newsletter finds you well.

## THANK YOU

I do this every year, thank all the wonderful people who are involved in the various pastoral roles within the parish, our ministers and leaders, facilitators, those who support others, carers, people we visit, aged care facility staff and so on. It's important to acknowledge and thank you and others for your time, your gifts and the quiet unobtrusive way in which you minister and care, not for acclaim but to walk the steps of Christ and be of service to others; even during difficult times. We also acknowledge the people who are now resting in God's loving care.

Thank you to all the **wonderful parishioners of St Declan's** and those who support and care within this community.

The **visitation ministers** and **bereavement group** who quietly give so much of their time. Without your involvement many people would feel isolated from the church and lose their connection to a community of faith. Your presence, support and the offering of prayer gives hope, affirmation and love. This is also evident at our Anointing Masses and Remembrance Mass each year – thank you for your prayers and involvement.

To the staff and residents of the six nursing homes and aged care facilities who open their doors to us; thank you for giving us the opportunity to share the good news and the sacraments of our faith.

Over 2014 and 2015 pastoral care took on a special project – **Days for Girls**. The response from parishioners has been absolutely amazing and I thank God for the overwhelming generosity from the parish and the 75 people involved!

In total we've made 179 kits; 167 of these were given to Libby for Timor. Jim (a parishioner) took 12 kits for his trip to Timor to give to friends to pass onto those in need.

We've sewn over 1,410 sanitary items; over 1,430 items were donated or purchased from donations; we've received \$1,455.00 from parishioners. All money was used to purchase material and kit items. A truly fantastic effort by all those involved in the various aspects of this project. If you would like to continue with or get involved in DfG project, please contact Beverley De Meur on 9594 4898. Thank you Beverley for your support, generosity, friendship and energy!!!

Special thanks to Libby for giving us a focus and a face to the girls and women who we lovingly made these kits for.

Once again, thank you personally for making this project an enjoyable and memorable journey.



Police women from the Timor districts receive their kits, October 2015

## Joy...

*As we approach 2016 – the centenary of our parish...  
May we be mindful of our past, those who planted the various seeds in creating a 'faith' community,  
May we celebrate the present with those we are in communion with and,  
May we continue to move forwards as a community of love, joy, hope, commitment and trust. AMEN.*



Due to DfG, **DECLANCRAFT** took a bit of a back seat with only holding three activities during this year. *Crochet* was extremely popular and so much fun; we'll definitely see a return of Crochet next year. *Jewellery Making* saw some creative designs. Stay tuned for a lot more activities in 2016.

A note of thanks goes to Gail and Brad who undertook the task of **Gardening** in the Church grounds, what an amazing transformation there has been over the last year. Keep up the great work!

Thank you to the **Hospital Visiting Group** and **Friendship Club**, for your enthusiasm and activities, not to mention fun! A special thank you for organising and participating in the masses at each of the care facilities four times a year – always a life-giving experience!

Thank you to the **parish staff** for their continued support, love, friendship, guidance and assistance towards pastoral initiatives and events throughout the year; you enrich pastoral ministry and the life of this parish!

A special note of thanks goes to those who, after some discernment, have retired from the various ministries. We wish you God's continuous love and strength.

I'd like to thank the **school community** from St Declan's Primary School and Marist College. May God continue to enrich your leadership, teaching and support roles within the parish community.

To those who offer continued support, love and commitment; who continue to sustain the parish, our parishioners and those who need extra love... thank you!

May God continue to bless us all within our life, our families, our ministry, our work, our play, our dark moments, our joy, our sorrow, our travels...

## 2016 DATES

### Ash Wednesday

- Wednesday, 10 February 2016

For those who wish to distribute the ashes to the care facilities (Fairlea, Ferndale Gardens, Gannon Gardens, Shangri-La, and Nunyara) and to home visits on Ash Wednesday, please let me know by Wednesday, 3 February. Ashes, prayers and lists of residents will be provided and ready for **pick-up on Ash Wednesday from 6.45am Mass** onwards in the sacristy. Thank you to those who assist with these visits, your service is inspiring!

### Anointing Mass

- Saturday, 19 March at 10.30am. Followed by a cuppa.

## **Aged Care/Nursing Home Masses**

**Ferndale Gardens:** 33 Jersey Ave, Mortdale

**Shangri-la:** 107 Carrington Ave, Hurstville

**Fairlea:** 11 Hawk St, Penshurst

**Gannon Gardens:** 53 Gloucester Rd, Hurstville

- Tuesday, 8 March – Ferndale Gardens
- Tuesday, 15 March – Shangri-la
- Wednesday, 16 March – Fairlea
- Tuesday, 22 March – Gannon Gardens

**Nunyarra:** 8 – 12 Neilson Avenue, Peakhurst

- First Tuesday of the month at 11am in the chapel

Visitors *MUST* sign in/out when visiting a care facility.

## **PASTORAL CARE RECORDS**

### **Visitation ministers & bereavement group...**

Please contact me if there are changes within your ministry, if you require information, support or if your visit situation has changed. Pastoral Records and updates are necessary and always appreciated.

## **REFLECTION**

### **Faith, doubt, dark nights and maturity**

**Ron Rolheiser omi, 9 November 2015**

“In one of his books on contemplative prayer, Thomas Keating shares with us a line that he occasionally uses in spiritual direction. People come to him, sharing how they used to have a warm and solid sense of God in their lives but now complain that all that warmth and confidence have disappeared and they’re left struggling with belief and struggling to pray as they used to. They feel a deep sense of loss and invariably this is their question: “What’s wrong with me?” Keating’s answer: *God is wrong with you!*

His answer, in essence, says this: Despite your pain, there is something very right with you. You have moved past being a religious neophyte (a beginner), past an initiatory stage of religious growth, which was right for you for its time, and are now being led into a deeper, not lesser, faith. Moreover, that loss of fervor has brought you to a deeper maturity. So, in effect, what you’re asking is this: I used to be quite sure of myself religiously and, no doubt, probably somewhat arrogant and judgmental. I felt I understood God and religion and I looked with some disdain at the world. Then the bottom fell out of my faith and my certainty and I’m now finding myself a lot less sure of myself, considerably more humble, more empathetic, and less judgmental. What’s wrong with me?

Asked in this way, the question answers itself. Clearly that person is growing, not regressing.

Lost is a place too! Christina Crawford wrote those words, describing her own painful journey through darkness into a deeper maturity. To be saved, we have to first realize that we’re lost, and usually some kind of bottom has to fall out of our lives for us to come to that realization. Sometimes there’s no other cure for arrogance and presumption than a painful loss of certitude about our own ideas about God, faith, and religion. John of the Cross suggests that a deeper religious faith begins when, as he puts it, we are forced to understand more by not understanding than by understanding. But that can be a very confusing and painful experience that precisely prompts the feeling: What’s wrong with me?

A curious, paradoxical dynamic lies behind this: We tend to

confuse faith with our capacity on any given day to conjure up a concept of God and imagine God’s existence. Moreover we think our faith is strongest at those times when we have affective and emotive feelings attached to our imaginations about God. Our faith feels strongest when bolstered by and inflamed by feelings of fervor. Great spiritual writers will tell us that this stage of fervor is a good stage in our faith, but an initiatory one, one more commonly experienced when we are neophytes. Experience tends to support this. In the earlier stages of a religious journey it is common to possess strong, affective images and feelings about God. At this stage, our relationship with God parallels the relationship between a couple on their honeymoon. On your honeymoon you have strong emotions and possess a certain certainty about your love, but it’s a place you come home from. A honeymoon is an initiatory stage in love, a valuable gift, but something that disappears after it has done its work. A honeymoon is not a marriage, though often confused with one. It’s the same with faith; strong imaginative images of God are not faith, though they’re often confused with it.

Strong imaginative images and strong feelings about God are, in the end, just that, images. Wonderful, but images nonetheless, icons. An image is not the reality. An icon can be beautiful and helpful and point us in the right direction, but when mistaken for the reality it becomes an idol. For this reason, the great spiritual writers tell us that God at certain moments of our spiritual journey “takes away” our certainty and deprives us of all warm, felt feelings in faith. God does this precisely so that we cannot turn our icons into idols, so that we cannot let the experience of faith get in the way of the end of faith itself, namely, an encounter the reality and person of God.

Mystics such as John of the Cross call this experience of seemingly losing our faith, “a dark night of the soul”. This describes the experience where we used to feel God’s presence with a certain warmth and solidity, but now we feel like God is non-existent and we are left in doubt. This is what Jesus experienced on the cross and this is what Mother Teresa wrote about in her journals.

And while that darkness can be confusing, it can also be maturing: It can help move us from being arrogant, judgmental, religious neophytes to being humble, empathic men and women, living inside a cloud of unknowing, understanding more by not understanding than by understanding, helpfully lost in a darkness we cannot manipulate or control, so as to finally be pushed into genuine faith, hope, and charity.”

Visit Ron’s website on [www.ronrolheiser.com/index.php](http://www.ronrolheiser.com/index.php)

## **PRAYER**

### **Blessings and joy**

May the closing of 2015 bring us the consolation of a life well spent;  
May 2016 bring us the opportunity of renewed love, hope and spirit;  
May God continue to bless us and those special to us.

Yours faithfully,

*Paulineke*

[wpnolan@internode.on.net](mailto:wpnolan@internode.on.net); 0419 426 123



### ***Pastoral Care... responding to the needs of St Declan’s Parish***

**Pastoral Care aims to provide spiritual nourishment, social interaction and support to parishioners who are bereaved, lonely, aged, infirmed, sick, disabled and are unable to take part in parish Eucharistic celebrations by:**

- involving parishioners to minister to others & share their faith
- creating a community of care
- developing a strong parish network.