

# NZ Catholic

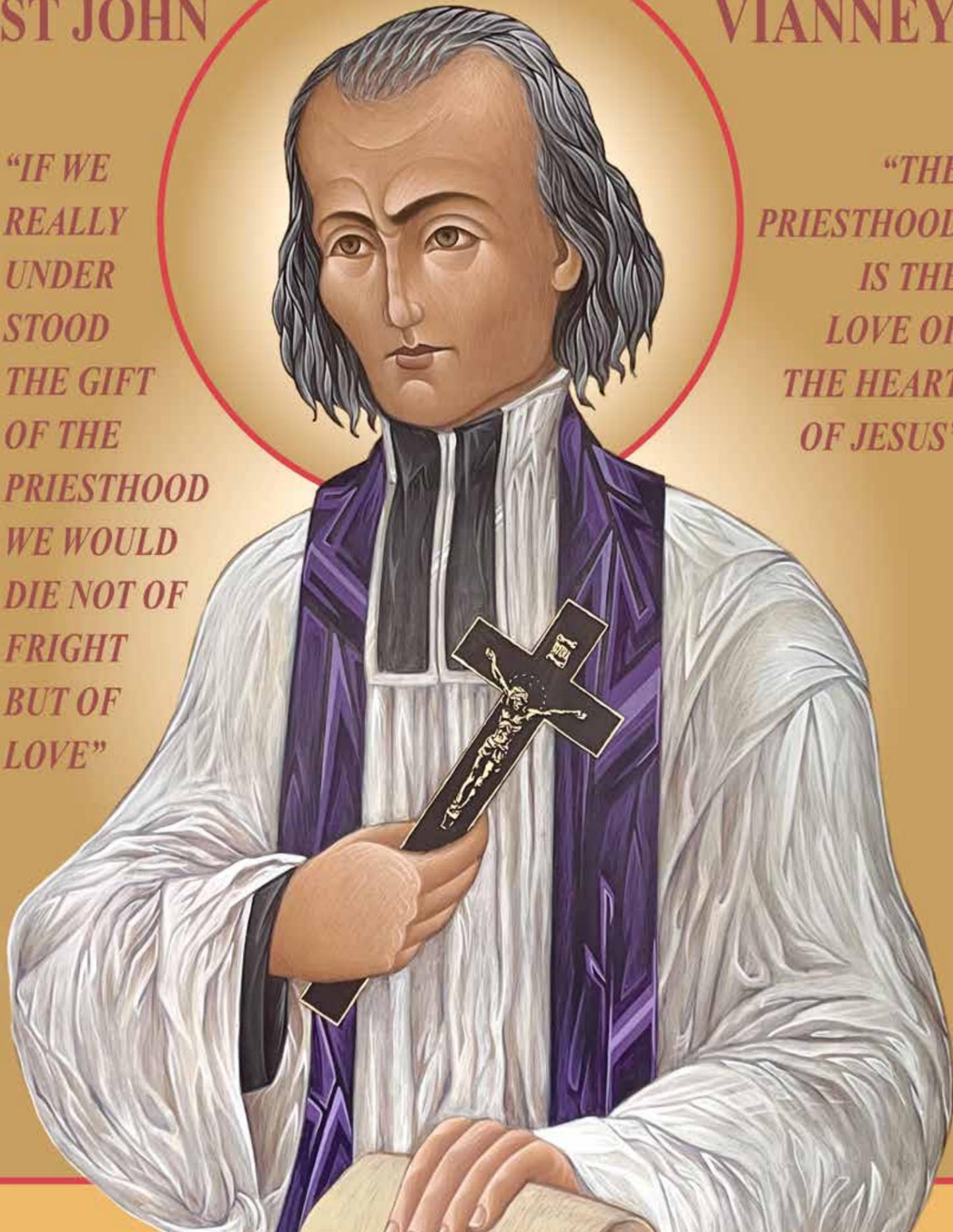
FREE

ST JOHN

*“IF WE REALLY UNDERSTOOD THE GIFT OF THE PRIESTHOOD WE WOULD DIE NOT OF FRIGHT BUT OF LOVE”*

VIANNEY

*“THE PRIESTHOOD IS THE LOVE OF THE HEART OF JESUS”*



## A call to vocations

An Auckland Diocese Special Issue - 2021

## From the Publisher

The largest religious affiliation category in New Zealand is those who say they have no religion.

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Bishop Patrick Dunn

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+ Patrick Dunn

“No vocation is born of itself or lives for itself. A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people. Did not Jesus say: ‘By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another?’”  
(John 13:35)  
– Pope Francis



## NZCatholic

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## From the Editor

# These stories must be told

A wise old priest once told me that having a vocation to the priesthood didn't mean saying "Yes" to God on the day of ordination alone. The priest has to say "yes" to God on every day of his priesthood, he said.

It is a fact that the Church in Auckland needs more priests and religious. It is also a fact that God is still asking men and women to say "yes" to God's call. This special issue of *NZ Catholic* has been made available in order to showcase and highlight the stories of men and women in this country who have said "yes" to God's call — and to illustrate where that "yes" can lead. I hope and pray that it might prompt others to similarly answer "yes" to God's call. To that end, please share this paper with others as widely as you can.

Some of these stories are about people who have only recently said "yes". Some are about those considering saying "yes" to a definitive commitment. Others have said "yes" many years ago, and are still working hard in the Lord's

vineyard. At the end of this special issue are some accounts of farewells for those whose journey on this earth are over and, we pray, Jesus has said to them "yes, welcome home, my good and faithful servant". God will not be outdone in generosity.

Another aim of this special issue is to highlight that most of these vocation stories have already been published in the normal issues of *NZ Catholic*. The occasional vocation story might make it into secular media, but most will not. In order to read about the work of God in raising up holy men and women to answer God's call, the best place to look in this country is the *NZ Catholic* newspaper. I ask you to support the Catholic press in Aotearoa New Zealand by taking out a subscription (see coupon on the back page) or by buying the paper in your parish. These stories must be told and told again.

I hope you enjoy this special issue of *NZ Catholic*.

— Michael Otto, editor, *NZ Catholic*.

# Newest priest ordained

by ROWENA OREJANA

Auckland Auxiliary Bishop Michael Gielen said St Joseph would be a good model for newly-ordained priest Fr Chani Thomas Park.

Dreams had played a part in Fr Park's vocational discernment, and Bishop Gielen noted that St Joseph had acted on messages received in dreams too.

Fr Park was ordained priest by Bishop Gielen on May 15, at the Cathedral of St Patrick and St Joseph in Auckland. Auckland Bishop Patrick Dunn, Hamilton Bishop Emeritus Denis Browne and six priests who helped Fr Park in his voca-

tion journey concelebrated the Mass.

"You have not chosen the easy road. Rather, one that requires a heart like St Joseph's, one that's open to unforeseen possibilities, one of deep service and enduring faithfulness," Bishop Gielen said.

"And you'll have the joy of being part of the greatest story ever told, of God's insatiable love for humanity. You'll now help write the next chapter."

More about Fr Park's vocation journey will be in the next issue of *NZ Catholic*, on sale on May 30 for \$4 in most parishes.

## VOCATIONS

Priests and religious needed, pray daily for them — even if only an Ave. ST DOMINIC, Father of Preachers: Few friars here, too old to do Dominic's work.

We INVITE some youngsters, join us for a while, not as guests fitting in, but as partners in mission:

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DOMINICANS are more than friars and sisters: seculars ran abandoned churches; martyrs; etc. Dominic sat up all night with the pub keeper; you too can preach humbly, in new social media.



Fr Chani Thomas Park with well-wishers, outside St Patrick's cathedral, Auckland on May 15.

# Many unexpected joys in priestly ministry

by MICHAEL OTTO

During his time in ministry as a priest, and lately as a bishop, Bishop Michael Gielen has sensed God moving in many unexpected ways, which were occasions of real joy.

Bishop Gielen said the greatest “unexpected grace” for him has been the extent to which people have allowed him to be a part of their journey. This has been at big events like sacraments and anniversaries and also at random moments, during which people could open up and talk about their lives to a priest in a very personal way.

“I met someone once in a supermarket,” Bishop Gielen said, “and they said — I have something I need to talk about, can I come and see you?”

“They came and saw me that afternoon and got some stuff off their chest — it was incredible. They didn’t know me particularly, they just saw I was a priest.”

Something similar happened in hospital ministry. “Someone sees you and sees that you are a priest and says — can I talk to you. . . they never expected to talk [about that subject] and you never expected to talk about that and it was an unexpected grace.”

Another real joy in Bishop Gielen’s priestly ministry has been fraternity with his brother priests.

“It is just sharing our ups and our downs and our joys and our sorrows, that is something I have invested in more as I have got older, and I have really appreciated that.”

Underlying the particular moments of joy in his ministry is a deep joy that comes from “closeness to the Shepherd”.

“I remember a Cistercian monk once on one of my retreats really challenging me to deepen my relationship with Our Lord, to deepen my closeness to him, so that he becomes the first one in my life and takes that first place.

“And, for all of us, that is an ongoing challenge, it doesn’t come naturally in a sense, that is something you have to invest in, definitely. The times in the priesthood that have been the most rewarding, and where I have known the most peace, are when I have been closest to Our Lord”.

Alongside the joys in the life of a priest, there are also the sorrows and the challenges.

Bishop Gielen, a former director of formation at Holy Cross Seminary, said the best way he and his brother priests have for rising to challenges that occur in ministry is “doing the basics”.

He uses an image of a rugby team to illustrate this.

“When you see guys losing the fundamentals and they start to become too flashy or too caught up in the technical stuff, you will notice that they are moving away from what is going to support them in the end.

“That’s what I’ve noticed with priesthood. You have got to keep prayer, the relationship with Our Lord, the Mass and your relationship with your people. In the end, they are our family, you know. We are celibate, we have made this choice, and our family are the people of God. And you have to invest in it. If you find that you are [not] — and it is a temptation for all of us — you start being isolated, you start to become caught up in the administration, left with your computer, and your door is locked,



Bishop Michael Gielen with a statue of Our Lady at Motuti

and you are not connecting with the people any more, then you are losing your heart.

“In the end, shepherds without sheep are unhappy people, I would say.”

Intentional ongoing formation is important, Bishop Gielen added. Formation does not end when the priest finishes his seminary days.

Bishop Gielen says that keeping up one’s reading, especially spiritual reading, is very helpful in this.

“What you read, what you are taking in, obviously— Jesus says the eyes are the windows of the soul — it is what you are taking in that feeds you. Many small conversions I have had in my life have been through reading.”

He mentioned his reading of *NZ Catholic* over the years, and especially the columns by Fr Ron Rolheiser, as being part of this.

He also stressed the importance of having a

good relationship with a spiritual director.

“I am very committed to my spiritual direction and to supervision, so making sure I have got my professional, my service life and my spiritual life in balance.

“And if you keep those in order — good reading, spiritual direction, supervision, good friends, and everything else looks after itself. The mind, the body, the soul, looking after those areas — and that is true for all of us.”

In his ministry, Bishop Gielen has a real sense of the intimacy of God’s love for his people. Referencing one of the themes of the prophet Hosea, Bishop Gielen said that God’s love is like that of a husband who is wooing his wife, being the body of Christ.

That is something he often senses in prayer — the intimacy that the Lord, the Good Shepherd, has for us.

## The Lord is calling - are we listening?

*Bishop Gielen has the following advice for a young man who thinks he might have a vocation to priesthood.*

Have a good prayer life, if you can, a spiritual director or someone who will journey with you, a mentor or someone who will journey along with you that is reliable — you want to be careful who you choose, obviously — but it should be someone whose spiritual life that you respect and look up to.

And be open — you are never going to find the true love of your life if you are not open, if you are closed. So be open and say, Lord, I

am open, what do you want of me? Give him the opportunity to call you. And, then again, see what happens — listen to the quiet voice in your soul and see what happens.

The other day, I heard a priest refer to the discernment of vocation as an adventure — like, join the adventure; don’t take the easy road and sit on your hands and follow what most people are doing — really be courageous and take up the spirit to discern — is this for me, this adventurous life that may await?

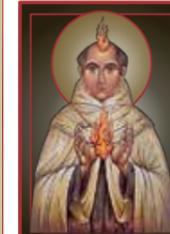
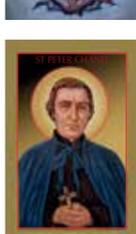
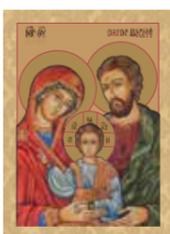
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# Preparing to be rector of Holy Cross Seminary

Earlier this year, the New Zealand Catholic bishops announced the appointment of Auckland priest Fr Mathew Vadakkevettuvazhiyil as rector of Holy Cross Seminary, starting at the end of 2021. *NZ Catholic* put some questions to Fr Vadakkevettuvazhiyil about his appointment and his new role.

**NZC: How did you receive the news about your appointment as rector of Holy Cross Seminary? What was your immediate reaction?**

Bishop Patrick Dunn had asked me some time back last year whether I would consider him sending my name, among others, to the Holy See and I thought about it. The Salesian provincial had asked me if I could go to Fiji as rector of the house of novitiate, and the studentate of philosophy and theology, which I declined. So, I thought maybe God is asking me something. I said to Bishop Patrick, if you wish, please forward my name. But I told Bishop Patrick that Rome most likely would not consider my name, because I am new to New Zealand, in a sense, and in terms of ministry, and knowing people and so on. But when he called me on January 6 with the appointment and asked me to meet him, then it dawned on me that here is something different, there is much I need to learn — but I entrust myself to God.

**NZC: In your future role, you are going to be working with young men discerning God's call. How did you experience God's call to become a priest and how did you respond to it?**

As a small child, coming from the Syro-Malabar oriental rite, the Mass was something very beautiful. The art, the lighting, the celebration of Mass, invoked in me a sense of holiness. I found the priests very happy, very cheerful, and I wanted to be holy and go to heaven. I thought if I become a priest, the possibility of my committing sin is less. That is how it started. As I grew up, coming from a farming area, life was very routine. I asked myself — what is life? There must be something more to it than having regular work and regular income? These questions would not go away. In my high school years, vocation promoters from different orders visited us, and I ended up being with the Salesians of Don Bosco.

**NZC: If a young man in a parish today approached you and said, I think God is calling me to be a priest, what would you say to him? What questions might you ask?**

I would congratulate him for having the courage to say he feels

he is being called to be a priest. I would enquire about his relationship with the parish, whether he has spoken with the parish priest, how has he been connected with the parish, not just the priest, but with the community, because in the process of vocation promotion and encouragement, I think the community has much more to do than leaving it only to the parish priest or someone. Also, it is important to talk about the family, the prayer life in the family, the faith, the relationship with members of the family, even more than the parish — I think these are important in the initial stages of discernment. And it is for the vocations promoter to follow him up.

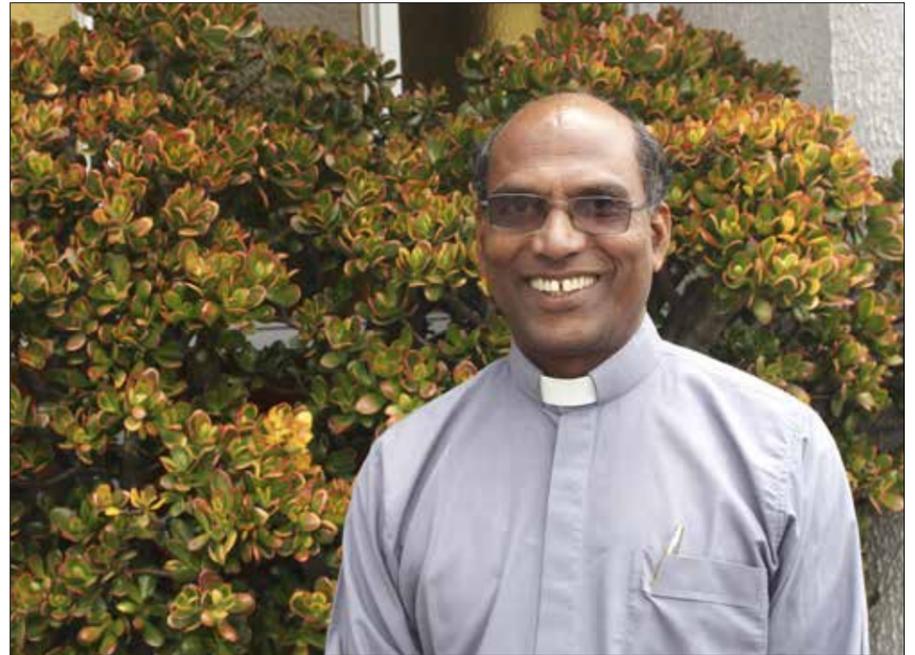
**NZC: Working as a pastor in Africa, as you have done, would have been very different from working as a pastor in New Zealand. What are some of the differences in priestly parish ministry in the two places?**

I went to Africa as a missionary in 1983, I was still a student. The culture was so different, in fact I had a cultural shock at that time. Studying there, learning the culture, learning the language, I could see the greatness of the Church, the Church as missionary, going out and celebrating faith.

By and large, Africans are really spiritual, and they express their spirituality, the divine in their lives, through music, art and liturgy. Sunday is the day of the Lord, they are happy to celebrate, even in long liturgical services. This is an expression of faith. You can see the joy of it.

Coming to New Zealand, in the beginning I asked people why fewer people come to celebrate and I was told, Oh, Father, in New Zealand, we are not poor. Africa is poor and because you are poor, you go to Church to pray. Well, that may be or not, but I wonder if many people in New Zealand really know the beauty of who we are, the beauty of giving glory to God, the fact that we are more than what we do in everyday life. A sense of the deep beauty of who we are comes from our faith, from believing in the resurrection of the dead, and in the life eternal.

**NZC: In documents such as *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, four types of formation are stressed for seminary formation — spiritual,**



Fr Mathew Vadakkevettuvazhiyil

**pastoral, academic and pastoral. Can you comment on the importance of each one of these for diocesan priesthood today in New Zealand?**

When I went to the seminary, I was 17 years of age. I left my state of Kerala in India, and went to Tamil Nadu. I had my own idea of being a seminarian. I thought that I had to be in the church and pray always. I became sick.

I wrote to my father, and my father would write beautiful letters, and in one of his letters, told me, my son, you need to learn to integrate everything in your life. It is not enough to pray, you also need to play, you need to study, you need to socialise. In reality, my father was telling me about formation! That is a harmonious process of growth; it involves human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation.

Regarding human formation, we are first and foremost children of God, and as children of God, we need to relate with each other. What does it mean to be a human? To share and to socialise, to show that we are really sons and daughters of the same God. There are many relationships in life. How do I relate to people? In my own family, to start with? How do I relate to the people of the opposite sex? How do I relate to people who are rich and poor, of different status? There are many aspects to the human formation.

Coming to spiritual formation, this is to establish friendship with God, a relationship with God, communion with God. We are entering into a relationship, not with a notion, but with a person — Jesus Christ.

It is also important to understand and appreciate the daily Mass, meditation, practices of piety, the saints, Our Lady, the fathers of the Church. And to discover and encounter Christ in the sacrament of reconciliation. I really need to feel that I am being led by God, not by myself. That communion with God enables me to have a profound sense of dependence on God, who calls me in my humanity, my weakness.

Intellectual formation is very important. To communicate with people today the message of the Gospel as a missionary, in the language of the men and the women of the age, it is very important that we study, that we have intellectual formation.

What do we study? The Scriptures, that is very important. The liturgy. The sacred history of the Church. The laws of the Church. Also wider social sciences — education from the wider world.

In pastoral formation, the Holy Spirit is the formator. It is important to conform ourselves to the heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who goes out, not waiting for the sheep to come to him. This involves a sense of pastoral charity, feeling the need to be at the service of people, at the service of the Gospel, to relate with the people, give comfort to the people. It is all guided by the pastoral zeal and pastoral charity.

Particularly through these four areas of formation, I believe, a person is helped, with the grace of God, in the discernment to be a priest.

**NZC: You have spent most of your priestly life as a Salesian of Don Bosco. What strengths or gifts from this ministry do you think you will bring to your role as rector?**

For a Salesian, young people are at the heart of their vocation. So, for the Salesian, it is a journey of accompanying the young people, and I think the role of rector is to journey with and accompany the seminarians in their formation. This accompaniment is not passive. It is very active, because you love the person. Love would mean sacrifice, and this sacrifice would envisage presence and that is there, an active presence. Of course, the goal is the salvation of souls.

**NZC: You will have some time working in a parish in Papatoetoe before assuming the role of rector. How will you prepare yourself for the new role?**

I will pray for the seminarians, I will pray for myself, I will pray for the staff. I think, through prayer, I will be close to the seminary community.

Of course, I will need to read the documents on the seminary formation, the *ratio*. I may visit seminaries to have experience of how formation is imparted, especially in those four areas we have discussed. I will listen to Bishop Patrick and the other bishops for what they have in mind, because it is something new for me, and given that I'm coming from another background.



Holy Cross Seminary, Ponsonby.

# Plea for more prayers for vocations

by ROWENA OREJANA

Auckland Auxiliary Bishop Michael Gielen has called on people to support vocations through prayer, asking everyone to pray at least one Hail Mary every day for more vocations.

"As parents, grandparents and parishioners, we've got to pray for vocations. Pray hard. Especially, Marian prayers, asking the Blessed Mary to intercede for vocations. I ask people to pray one Hail Mary every day for vocations," he said.

Bishop Gielen noted the low number of people discerning a priestly or religious vocation at present. He said that even secular society is finding it hard to attract young people to serve in altruistic enterprises, non-governmental organisations and similar fields.

"I've noticed that it's a challenge for society in general, and also the Church," he said. "So, it's important that the Church supports people in serving where they are using their gifts to the best of their ability. Particularly, the Church needs good priests and religious who dedicate their lives in a unique way . . . a very specialised way, to the service of the Church. And obviously, we are not seeing that today."

The low number of vocations, though, "does not mean that God has stopped calling people", he said.

"Either we're not hearing God's call [or] we're not presenting the invitation in a way that's attractive, and that we're not helping people to hear their call," he said.

Bishop Gielen stressed that nurturing vocations starts from the home and the parish.



Bishop Michael Gielen with Holy Cross Seminary rector Fr Brendan Ward and seminarians

"The fundamental houses or homes of formation are the family and the parish. I grew up in a family that prayed every night," he said.

He said Pope St Paul VI referred to the family as the "domestic Church". "[The home is] where you first experience what it's like to be part of a praying community, part of a believing community," he said.

Bishop Gielen said this experience was reinforced in the parish, which became his wider family. He said his parish was where he made life-long friends, and where he learned to be a faithful, mature Christian.

"This naturally led to me discerning to be a priest. I was naturally led in, and took up the call. I followed it and was encouraged by them," he said. "Some of my best supporters come from Tokoroa. Even now, they are still being

encouraging and support[ing] me. Because I was their son, one of their boys."

To young people discerning their calling, Bishop Gielen said they (young people) should "start with allowing Jesus to look at you with love". This was what Pope Francis suggested when he was asked the same question, the bishop explained.

"Sometimes, a sign of vocation is the very fact that it's the thing I don't want to do. I fight it," he said. "If this is something you're running away from, then ask yourself, why am I running? Why would I run from love?" he asked.

"There is no doubt there is a great need in New Zealand for men who are willing to say 'yes'. Let Jesus look at you with love and be courageous enough," he said.

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# Three new seminarians at Holy Cross

by ROWENA OREJANA

Holy Cross Seminary has welcomed three new seminarians this year.

Seminary formator Br Mark McKeeon, FSC, said it's always good to work with young men who are discerning their vocational journey.

"They are open to formation. That's an important quality. . . we are basically leading them to be conformed to Christ," he said.

■ **Ignatius Tung Tran**, 23, is a seminarian from Christchurch diocese. Mr Tran said his brother, Christchurch priest Fr Tranh Tran, invited him (Ignatius) to be a priest in New Zealand in 2017.

"At that time, my vocation was not so strong, and I said 'no'," he recalled. "A lot of things happened during that year. That could be a way God was talking to me; through experience and through reality. Then my vocation . . . grew stronger," he said.

A pivotal event was the death of his uncle, whom he (Ignatius) took care of in the hospital in the last three months of his (uncle's) life.

"I thought about the purpose of life, what is the point of the end of life. Then it came to me that God created me, so he must have a plan for my life," Mr Tran said. "I might become a priest to serve his chosen people."

He left his family in Vietnam to pursue his vocation here.

"My dad is really supportive, because he is also quite a faithful Catholic. Actually, he was very happy when he heard that I agreed to come to New Zealand. And so was my mum," he said, adding "the day I left, she cried a lot. But I think they were tears of joy."

Mr Tran said he has six sisters (one of whom is a nun) and three brothers.

■ **Mark Bond**, 31, is studying to be a priest for Auckland diocese. He is a third-year entrant, having entered the seminary in 2012 and left in 2014. Br Mark teasingly referred to him as the "recycled" seminarian.

"I was quite immature at the time. I think I clashed a lot with the discipline of seminary life," Mr Bond said. He thought he was done with a priestly vocation, until the beginning of last year, when he volunteered at a Lifeteen summer camp.

At a homily about Jesus' presentation at the Temple, the priest said Jesus had two choices: he (Jesus) could have stayed at the temple and become a teacher of law, or be obedient to his parents and go home.

"The way he had phrased it, I could hear almost to the very core of my being this, not an audible voice, but certainly, a very clear message, 'you need to go back'," Mr Bond said.

"I think the reason I can safely say it wasn't wishful thinking or my own voice was I was quite startled by it. It came right out of left field. But at the same time, there was kind of an excitement to it. It was quite scary and joyful and . . . a mix of emotions that I'm still trying to process."

Mr Bond did his masters and PhD in English, and taught at the University of Auckland, as well as at the University of Waikato.

"I was in the middle of finishing my thesis, and I was in the middle of teaching. The wheels were turning at that point. The momentum was there. It was quite a shock to kind of receive that [message]," he said. "It took me a while. I was hesitant, but I finally contacted Fr Sherwin [Lapaan] halfway through last year."



(From left) Ignatius Tung Tran, Mark Bond, and Gerson Badayos

Mr Bond hopes to become a priest "who points less and less to himself and more and more to God and the love and generosity that he has to offer".

■ **Gerson Badayos**, 31, is a seminarian for Wellington archdiocese. He said he had often been mistaken for a seminarian — which led him to decide to be one.

Mr Badayos said that, while still at Holy Cross University of Davao in the Philippines, he worked as a pastoral assistant to a hospital chaplain and therefore was exposed to the life of a priest. He was also involved in many religious activities in his Catholic university.

"I had several encounters with people who were telling me, 'you will end up becoming a priest. We can see and we can say that'. These moments were the factors that led me to discern. And I came to the conclusion that, really, maybe my life is for priesthood," Mr Badayos said.

He recalled one instance when a nun from the Society of St Paul asked if he wanted to become a priest.

"She said, 'you know what, it

could be the Holy Spirit. I don't normally talk to people about vocation. You are the second one I have talked to. The first one, he's a priest now. You could be the second one," he recalled. "I had that goose bump experience."

But Mr Badayos said Pope Francis' message to youth about vocation made him [Mr Badayos] serious about becoming a priest.

"I cannot verbatim remember what he said, but the thought was, if you are seriously considering a religious vocation, try to cultivate that, because it must be God who is putting that in your heart. It really struck me, and I got so emotional," he said.

He said he joined the candidacy programme of the Society of Jesus in 2017, but he didn't feel prepared at that time. He met Auckland-based Fr Sam Pulanco in the Philippines and that was when he has the idea "that it's possible to be a priest in another country".

"Every day is a discernment for me," he said, when asked what kind of priest he thinks he will be. "I want to be a priest that God wants me to be. I want to be a priest for the people."

## Law graduate on Society of Mary vocation journey

by ROWENA OREJANA

The Society of Mary has one new seminarian this year, 23-year-old Lachie Bartlett from Christchurch. Mr Bartlett told *NZ Catholic* that his discernment was "sort of a feeling that grew within me".

"The way that I would sum up my faith would be — God speaks to us through the people and events of our lives. That is like the lynchpin of my faith," he said.

Mr Bartlett, who went to St Bede's College, said he had a very good relationship with priests growing up. His parents would often host priests and those active in the parish for dinner.

At St Bede's, he got involved with the Young Marists, a youth development organisation, working with the leadership teams of the nine Marist schools in the country. He also did the Young Marist Neighbours programme.

Mr Bartlett said that he also formed a solid friendship with Fr Mark Walls, SM, and his (Fr Mark's) older brother, Fr John.

"Long relationship[s] with priests meant for me that it wasn't a vocation that was different. It was a genuine possibility. It has sort of been



Lachie Bartlett

a five-year process of developing relationships with people within the Society of Mary, [and] discerning that this could be a way of life that I could pursue," he said. "It's been like a sort of long bubbling process."

Mr Bartlett sees himself as a future priest who would be people-orientated.

"I'll be someone that's relationship-focused, working with people, hearing their stories and getting to know their experiences," he said.

He was born deaf, and he received his cochlear implant when he was 8.

"I think my ability to overcome challenges and see challenges as gifts helps me relate to people from all sorts of spheres of life. There



Marist Seminarians: Hemi, Tom, Joseph and Lachie

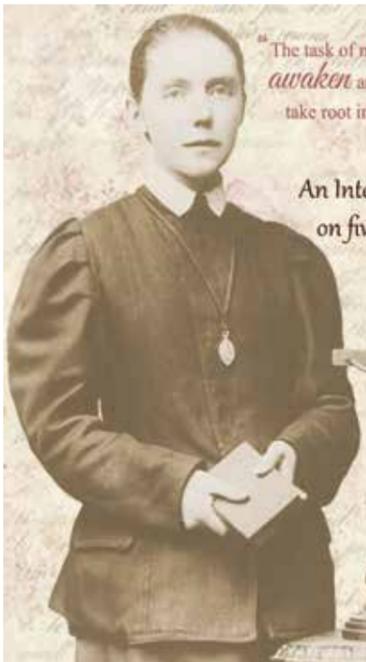
is an awareness of cochlear implants, and people with disabilities, and giving them greater support that they need," he said.

Mr Bartlett finished his law degree at the University of Canterbury, and will be graduating on April 14.

"My law degree is a good way of thinking. I loved my law degree at Canterbury. I loved the friends I made there. I sort of loved studying law, but this is part of my life that I need to sort of pursue," he said.

Mr Bartlett said his family has been "incredibly supportive".

"Shocked, but not surprised" were words used by my brother the most," he said. "The underlying theme is that they want me to be happy in whatever I do."



*"The task of my life and the Congregation to which I belong is precisely to awaken an ever greater interest in the missions and if possible to make it take root in all hearts"*

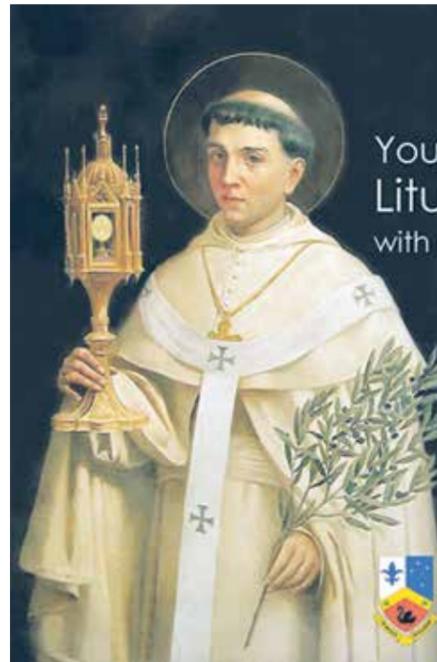
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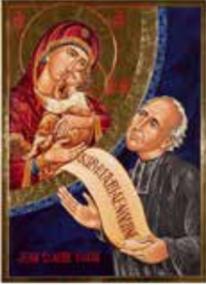
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# Be brave and follow up on that call!

by Sr BRIDGET CRISP, RSM

Many of us know the phrase “actions speak louder than words”. This phrase comes to mind when I reflect on what attracted me to the Sisters of Mercy.

In 1989, I was home on a short break from university. My mother said, “Bridget, come with me to the Catholic Women’s League meeting as we have a special guest, Sr Mary Foy, who will speak to us about the issue of homelessness and the commitment of the Sisters of Mercy in setting up the Monte Cecilia Housing Trust”. I came and I was impressed with the social action that I was hearing about first-hand from a religious sister. I filed the encounter away and went back to university.

During my university years, I had strong indications and pulls to pursue the call of religious life, but I made excuses. Excuses like: “I am not good enough”; “I am not perfect; I am rough around the edges”. The more excuses I made, the stronger the call.

After university, I worked for the quarantine service in Auckland. I considered it an ideal job — a combination of indoor and outdoor work with a lot of variety. Six months into the job, I was not feeling satisfied or fulfilled. Something was missing. Again, the call was strong and, in my frustration, I made contact with Sr Mary Foy, thinking that, if I followed this a bit, that call would go away. Again, I was comparing myself to an internally-created image of religious life that was not real.

Sr Mary Foy, at that time, was still living in the community attached to Monte Cecilia House, where the housing trust was located. Over four years, I joined the community for prayer and a

meal, which often was not regular (for me) due to the different shift hours I worked. During that time, my sense of fulfilment grew. Yet still I tried to pull back by comparing myself to a group of extraordinary women and making excuses: “I have not got the right degree” (my degree was a Bachelor of Agriculture). To the credit of the sisters, they pushed back and gently, but firmly, dismantled my internalised images of religious life and my excuses.

So, here I am, a little over 20 years as a vowed religious, and nearly 23 years since I first said “yes” to becoming a religious. I have done many interesting things over the years. I was with a group who established a large permaculture food garden and worked towards the restoration of a wetland area.

I have been involved in teaching, both in schools and out in the community. I was part of the international team of Mercy Sisters who went to Paris for COP21 for the climate change talks, and I have spent time at the Mercy International Global Action Desk at the United Nations.

Life has been full and satisfying. It is something that Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, would agree with. Some parallels of Catherine’s story echo with mine — Catherine’s observation of the models of religious life in the late 18th and early 19th century did not appeal, and there was a reluctance to go down that road. She wanted to be out amongst the poor. Yet, with guidance of supporters like Dr Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, Catherine said “yes”, and on December 12, 1831, the Sisters of Mercy began and were known as the “walking sisters”.

On reflection about my vocation and where



Sr Bridget Crisp, RSM

I am today, I give thanks to all those extraordinary people who have come into my life, and have shown me the signposts on my vocation and faith journey that is still continuing. My advice to those who are reflecting on a vocation to religious life: be brave and follow up on that call. Don’t try and deny it for God always finds a way!

## What would Jesus be doing during this pandemic?

What would Jesus be doing during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Called to respond to the needs and issues of our times, Nga Whaea Atawhai O Aotearoa — Sisters of Mercy give practical help, as well as prayer.

Covid-19 has highlighted to the world the need for compassion, kindness and working for the greater good. These are the values embedded in the lives and responses of the Sisters of Mercy.

Lockdown was a time of quiet reflection for many, a time to think about our futures —

about where Jesus is calling us to, about listening to the deep voice within. It was also a time to see our environment begin to heal, a time to think about what our role is in healing our oceans, waterways, forests, air and ground.

This was also a time when the call was to

- feed the hungry
- clothe the naked
- protect the vulnerable
- give time to the isolated
- to give the kind word, be the gentle compassionate look, and to patiently hear the sorrows of people

- to share our resources with our local communities.

These are some of the works of mercy that we Sisters of Mercy are involved in, not just during Covid, but throughout our lives, over generations of sisters.

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# Kiwi Columban's long ministry in Pakistan

by ROWENA OREJANA

In the late 1970s, a young dairy farmer from Hokitika was leafing through the *Far East* magazine, published by the St Columban's Mission Society, and saw an advertisement for "young, adventurous Kiwi men".

It was a call for vocation, said Fr Daniel O'Connor, a call that he answered "yes" to.

"I got in touch with the Columbans and they accepted me. I went to their seminary in Sydney for training. During that time, I found [that], even though I had been happy where I'd been in a valley in New Zealand working in a farm, I found a deeper peace in a [Columban College] seminary," he said. "I felt peace in following God's call."

Fr O'Connor said that, as a seminarian, he was asked to name three countries that he would like to serve in as a missionary. His first answer was "Pakistan".

"I heard it was rural, with people living in villages. With my farming background, I felt solidarity with peasant farmers. Also, it was a new mission for the Columbans," he said, explaining that the mission was founded in 1979. He went there in 1983 as a seminarian to study the Urdu language and to prepare for the mission.

Pakistan, known as the "Land of the Pure", is a land of contrasts, Fr O'Connor said, "from the sizzling hot, dusty, summer plains of the Sindh, to the mighty mountains in the north, where the second highest mountain, K2, towers into the sky".

There was widespread poverty then, and there still is.

"The people were very poor. A lot of them were in bonded labour, as well as peasant farmers working for landlords. There were people who did the sanitary work, and

they are seen as 'low caste'," he said.

But he also saw "the goodness of the people, the simplicity of life and the strength of faith".

"People remember God very much in Pakistan. The Christians are called to prayer. And the Muslims are called to prayer five times a day," he observed.

## ■ Five priorities

Fr O'Connor explained that the Columban Missionaries have five priorities in terms of their mission: (being) at the service of, and formation of, the local church, to help build up/establish, and then to move on; solidarity with the poor; tribal apostolate; justice and peace and the integrity of creation; and inter-faith dialogue.

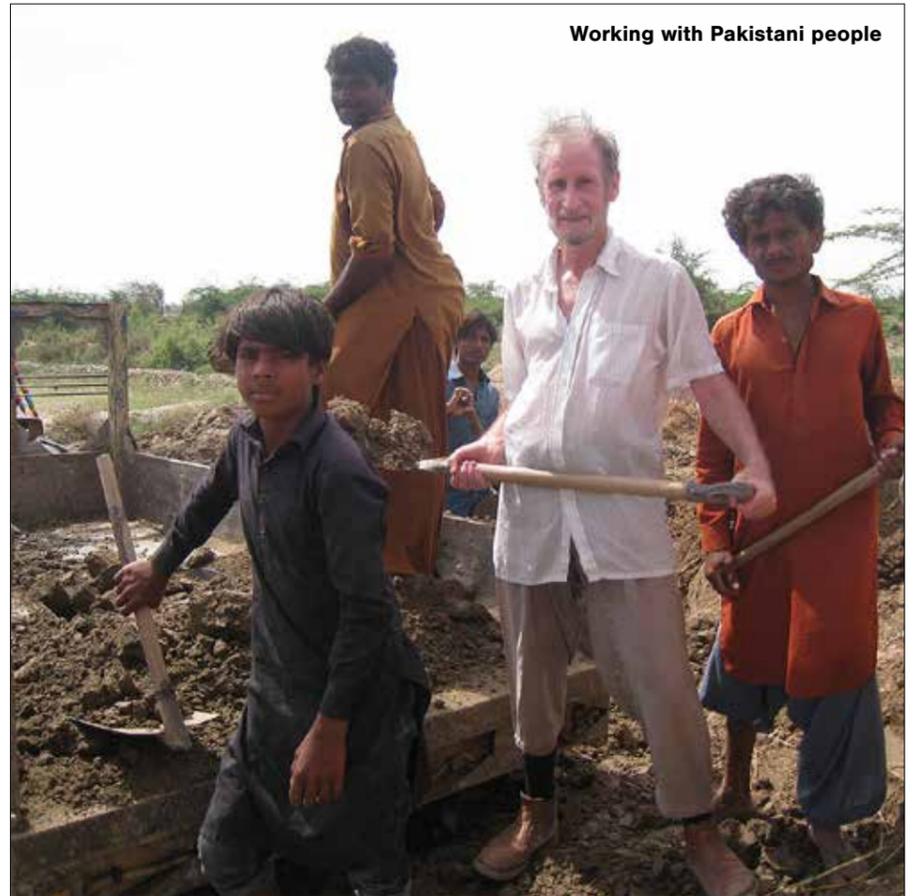
"This requires one to cross over boundaries of culture, climate, language, food and religion. To follow the call to try [to] help to make the reign (and/or) kingdom of God a better reality," he said. "The tribal people mainly live and work as landless peasant farm workers in the many villages scattered throughout the parish. They are at the mercy of the landlords, who are, in the main, rich and powerful."

Education is the key, Fr O'Connor said, to escape poverty.

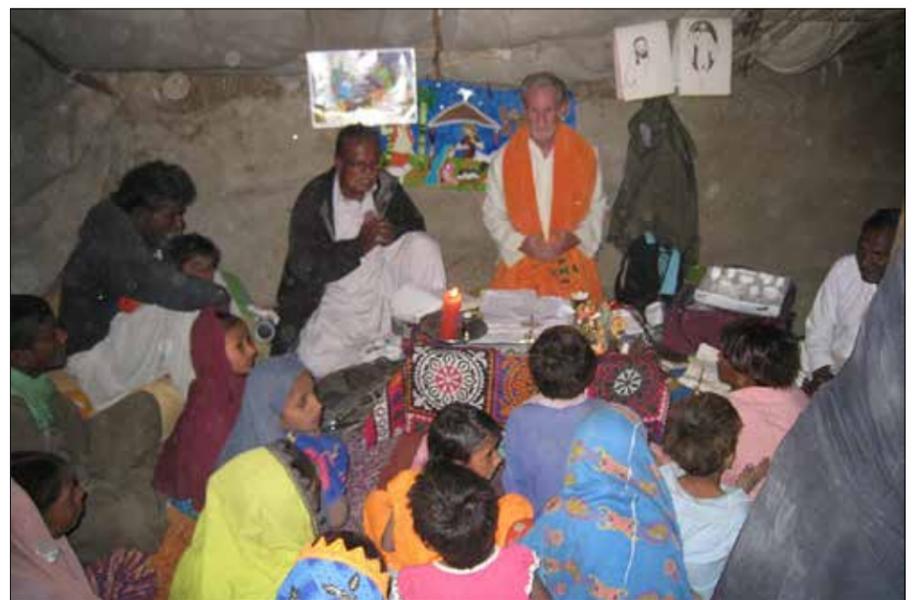
"Some of the people have, therefore, through good education, obtained good jobs as teachers, nurses etc.. Some have also escaped from the feudal system and obtained jobs in factories in the large city of Karachi," he said.

The mission has a school in its church compound in Badin with about 420 students. He said that one-third of the students are Christians, another third are Muslims and a third are Hindus.

"That's a good way of interfaith dialogue. They [the students] be-



Working with Pakistani people



Kiwi Fr Daniel O'Connor, SSC, celebrates Mass at Christmas with a family inside a donated tent that is their home after flooding



Fr Daniel with a buffalo he bought after a traffic incident — and its calf — that now help the village.

come friends with one another, and also their parents [become friends]. They will remember the feasts of the Christians, and also the feasts of the Hindus, and also the Muslims," he said.

The mission also runs the health clinic, which treats tuberculosis patients, as well as providing care for mothers and their children.

"Because of poverty and injustice, there are too many sick people, resulting in many 'dying before their time'," he said.

The diet of the people in this area is poor, which also causes poor health. Fr O'Connor said that the mission bought goats and delivered them to poor widows and needy families. The goats supply them with fresh milk, and the kids from the goats are raised and sold to provide income.

"One morning, while driving the jeep, I ran into a buffalo. The owners insisted that I had to purchase this buffalo. Being an old dairy farmer, I knew that it was not badly injured," he said. He bought the buffalo. "It is being cared for by poor people in a village where it has produced a calf and they are being nourished by the milk," he said.

## ■ Security

Fr O'Connor said he does sports and cycling, but it is a little difficult because of security.

"Until the last few years, Karachi

was regarded as being one of the most dangerous cities in the world. With government action, and the help of armed police and military, it has become a much safer place to live," he said. Still, churches are heavily guarded, particularly around Christmas and Easter to prevent terrorist attacks.

## ■ Call to mission

Fr O'Connor has spent 26 years of his life as a missionary in Pakistan. He came back home in July last year, and returned to Pakistan in December.

"It's feels good to come here and go back again. To be a missionary, you have to deal with leaving the country of your birth. You become at home and you are not at home in each of the countries, for me, in Pakistan or New Zealand," he said.

He said it is a "very enriching and very challenging" call.

"There is a saying also, 'when you go to another country, another culture, another faith, take off your shoes because the place there is holy. The spirit of God has been there centuries before you've gone'," he said.

He encouraged young men to say "yes" to the call to become a missionary.

"You'll learn more about the mystery of life and the mystery of God. It is very fulfilling," he said.

# The happiest day of Kiwi Carmelite's life

by MINA AMSO

Newly-professed Carmelite nun, Sr Catherine of Christ, lacked the words in 2019 to articulate what it felt like on the day she made her final solemn vows.

"There's actually no word," she said. "It was the happiest day of my life, by a long shot. And I suspect on this side of eternity it will remain. I was just so deeply happy."

"After the profession, when I sat down again, I just was so happy. So happy and at peace, and I just felt loved and blessed by God. And I didn't expect that. I didn't know what I expected. Because your feelings are kind of all over the place. I suppose I know a little bit now what it is like for a bride."

Humanly speaking, the occasion made Sr Catherine feel nervous, but all God's love and blessings and the joy of giving herself to God totally eclipsed that, she explained.

But even though it was a joyous occasion, Sr Catherine felt a deep ache inside.

"What was difficult for me at the Mass was that my family are not Catholic, and have found my vocation very difficult. For that reason, there was an element of pain, actually. I didn't know how they were feeling. I didn't know how it was going to go for them."

"I realised I couldn't look at them during the Mass, because I thought I would break down in tears. I knew they were suffering."

However, after the profession, she felt at peace and at the sign of peace, she was able to turn toward them and smile, she said.

Despite that, the then-34-year-old looked composed and poised at the ceremony at the packed-out Carmelite Monastery Chapel in Hoon Hay in Christchurch.

Then-Bishop Paul Martin, SM, was the main celebrant at the Mass, accompanied by 15 priests and Bishop Basil Meeking. One of the priests was Sr Catherine's former spiritual director from Washington, DC, Fr Trinkle.

In his homily, Bishop Martin spoke of one being called to a Carmelite life as being called to join a prayer "powerhouse", a calling into

the "the desert of calm".

"Yes, a calling to the desert, but remember that, for the exodus pilgrims, the desert was the place of hope-filled transition. A place where the traveller was drawn from superficiality to depth, from fantasy to reality and from resistance to intimacy," Bishop Martin said.

"And this is why the daily calling of God for most of us is most often a gentle, persistent alluring, an enticement, a deep traction. And the desert, where adventurers discover freedom from the attachments and preoccupations that prevent our response to the love of God, the desert is a welcome home for those who realise that all the successes, relationships, and possessions of the world can never satisfy the longing of the human heart."

Bishop Martin said all who seek to mature in the faith will realise that the only way to really live a happy life is to have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

"This divine relationship must be the first priority for every one of us for every moment. Whether in home, family, workplace and social life or in a monastery."

## ■ St Padre Pio

Sr Catherine knew that God had called her to the desert of calm, but her childhood and early teen years never would have predicted such an outcome.

She grew up a Presbyterian in Kurow, a small town halfway between Timaru and Dunedin. Her father was a Presbyterian minister. But she wasn't raised with "an active prayer life"; in fact, she stopped attending church services altogether when she was 10 years old.

"It was boring," she recalled, "we never said a prayer at home, not once. Although we did say grace when my grandparents came."

It was her best friend in high school, Caroline Bishop (née Lucas), whose influence propelled the young Catherine to reawaken her faith and love of God. Caroline gave her a book about St Padre Pio to read.



Mother Dorothea Wilkes, OCD, Sr Catherine Smith, OCD (Sr Catherine of Christ), and Bishop Paul Martin, SM. (Photos: Dennis Wilkes)

"The first Catholic teaching I understood was the communion of the saints, because Caroline's mother had explained it to me in a long car ride back from their holiday house. So, at the end of this book, I said 'Padre Pio, pray for me'."

"It was at St Hilda's High School (Anglican) I became interested in the faith, in the Christian faith and then the Catholic faith."

After attending a discipleship training school in Sydney, doing a mission in India and attending Otago University for a year and a half, Sr Catherine travelled to the United States to join the consecrated women of Regnum Christi, where she worked in youth ministry.

Spending eight years there was her foundation to entering the Carmelites later on. When she felt that something was missing in her life, it was Fr Trinkle who suggested to her that she might have a contemplative vocation, which she had never considered at the time. But with that seed planted, Sr Catherine continued her discernment and decided to give the Carmelite community a go. She caught a plane back to New Zealand to discern entering the contemplative and enclosed order in Christchurch.

## ■ Monastery

Life at the Carmelites wasn't always a walk in the park, she said. The three years between her first and final vows were quite testing. That period was purifying, yet confirming of her calling to be a Carmelite, she told *NZ Catholic*.

"Everything about this life recharges me and gives me life, and it's enriching," she said.

"It wasn't about doubting that I had a vocation, it was working

through the struggles of community life, things come to the surface, and you've got to start facing your issues, it's more working through that and just asking yourself 'can I live this life?' Because sometimes you would like to run away from that — the weaknesses which everyone else sees, but you hadn't — and it is painful. Those had been my crises more than vocational ones."

Two saints who were very present for Sr Catherine, from her initial conversion to accepting her vocation, right up to days before her final profession, were Saint Padre Pio and Saint Therese of Lisieux. While on an eight-day silent retreat before her final profession, Sr Catherine experienced "heavenly signs", which helped confirm everything.

"The night I began my retreat, on the 22nd [of September, 2019] somebody gave us an alms of 900 Masses [to be said] at [Padre Pio's] shrine [in Italy]. We've never received that as a gift before."

"That, for me, was a sign from heaven," she said.

The first day of the retreat fell on September 23, which is Saint Padre Pio's feast day, and the day Sr Catherine made her final vows happened on the feast day of Saint Therese of Lisieux. It was all coming together.

"That [Tuesday, October 1] was one of the only days Bishop Paul could do. She [Saint Therese of Lisieux] is a Carmelite, I love her. She's helped me many times in the past with little things, so I felt [she was] very present when I was saying her novena."

"These were some of the little signs from heaven, on the day of my final vows, that made it seem so blessed by God."



Sr Catherine of Christ, OCD, receives the veil.

# A deepening self-knowledge

Three years after his ordination in Christchurch, NZ-born Jesuit Fr Rob Morris is now director of the Sevenhill Retreat Centre in South Australia. He was recently interviewed for Jesuit Vocations Australia's 'Cuppa with a Jesuit' video series.

**Q: What's the significance of Sevenhill for Jesuits?**

Sevenhill has a very special place in the hearts of the Jesuits in Australia. It's sort of our "hearth place". The first Jesuits to come to Australia were Austrians, who arrived in 1848. Sevenhill was the very first place they settled, about two hours north of Adelaide.

I think of Sevenhill as the house of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Our ministry is built around the Exercises, giving people spiritual direction and silent directed retreats.

**Q: What in Ignatian Spirituality are you finding helpful in life at the moment, particularly in these uncertain times?**

I'm very lucky where I am, because Sevenhill is such a beautiful place. I have cows on the property, so I'm playing at being a farmer.

That's been a very important way of offsetting what a lot of people are feeling in terms of isolation. And I guess for me, it's also grounded in my sense of Ignatian Spirituality — finding God in all things. Every situation we find ourselves in provides a means for encountering God.

**Q: How have you seen other people growing in their journey with the Lord through Ignatian Spirituality?**

One of the most profound ways people find growth through the Spiritual Exercises is a deepening of self-knowledge — that they are totally loved by God.

Increasingly, that's a very hard thing for a lot of people to come to today. We always carry some element of a more negative image of God in our mind. There can be a whole lot of causes for that. So one of the great things that comes out of the Spiritual Exercises for people is that overwhelming sense that God loves them. It's one of the most profound insights that I think Ignatius came into.

The other thing people benefit from is a knowledge of the discernment of spirits — the ability to see the signs where God is working in my life, and the opposite, the signs where there are obstacles to my encounter with God in my day.

It's having an internal awareness of things that are moving me towards God — peace and joy and life — and the opposite, things that take me towards myself.

**Q: What would you say to a young man who was thinking about religious life?**

I often think back about my own experiences, that I probably waited a bit too long. I joined when I was 35. It takes courage to take that step. And I had some fears. Fears around sexuality were a big thing — can I be chaste? There was also the lack of confidence and matu-



Fr Rob Morris (right) leads prayer at St Aloysius Church in Sevenhill at an event commemorating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Fr Leon Rogalski SJ, the first chaplain to the Polish community in Australia.

rity within myself to make a life commitment. It seems daunting, and the bad spirit can play with that, and make the fears much worse than they really are.

So if you find yourself thinking about something all the time, and you feel kind of excited at the idea of doing it, and there's a sense that you know this is leading me to something more in life, it doesn't hurt to give it a go. It's not closing doors on other options, but you're opening a door, and if it's the right

place for you, that will become very clear, very soon.

There's no shame in giving it a go and deciding that's not the path for me. But my advice would be that it's important that a young man gives it a go. That's probably the only way you're going to find out whether you've got the vocation or not.

You can find the full conversation with Fr Rob and learn more about the Jesuits at: [www.facebook.com/JesuitVocationsAustralia](http://www.facebook.com/JesuitVocationsAustralia).



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# Fr Trung ordained after lockdown delay

by ROWENA OREJANA

The much-awaited ordination to the priesthood of Fr Peter Trung Nguyen — which was initially scheduled for April 18, last year, but was postponed because of the Covid-19 lockdown — finally took place on June 6, 2020 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Palmerston North.

It was a very emotional moment for Fr Nguyen when he thanked his mother and father and the rest of his family who couldn't be there due to the closure of New Zealand's borders. His voice broke and he had to pause to collect himself.

His family, instead, followed the livestreaming of his ordination on the diocesan website. His parents are in Vietnam, while his five brothers and a sister are in religious and diocesan communities in France, England, American, Colombia, Belgium and India.

"Thank you, Cardinal John [Dew], for ordaining me a priest today, and all clergy and people who are present really and virtually to support me on this special occasion," he said. He also thanked resigned bishop Charles Drennan, who went to Vietnam and met his (Fr Nguyen's) family and invited him to serve in Palmerston North.

In his homily at the ordination, Cardinal Dew thanked Fr Nguyen for following Jesus' call to serve in New Zealand.

"Anyone who makes the decision to follow the call of Jesus and try to live as his disciples, knows that it means that we die to ourselves in some way and in whatever way that is. That's what gives glory to God," Cardinal Dew said.

"That's very true of any of us who choose to follow Jesus and the priesthood, or who accept that he (Jesus) has actually chosen us first. Jesus chose you, Trung."

The cardinal also reminded Fr Nguyen of St Paul's words to Timothy, "be self-possessed".

"[Being] . . . self-possessed means being comfortable in who we are before God. Being content in who we are and knowing that God has chosen us for service. And knowing that God chose us and loves us. Being self-possessed is knowing we can do nothing by ourselves. We can only rely on the grace of God and learn to be grateful that God's grace is always at work in us," Cardinal Dew said.

As the ordination took place during restrictions on numbers at public gatherings under Covid-19 alert level 2 at the time, only 100 people were allowed to be present inside the



Newly-ordained Fr Peter Trung Nguyen (right) at the altar during the ordination Mass. (Photo supplied)

cathedral itself. Others could view the Mass by livestream in other rooms.

Fr Nguyen told *NZ Catholic* his journey to priesthood began when he was 12 years old. He left his family home to assist the priest in his parish.

"It was a common practice in Vietnam for young men to serve the parish. Quite a lot of young men wanted to do it. It was a privilege (to be chosen)," he said.

He said even at a young age, there was "something in the back of my mind that said: I want to be a priest".

He went to university in Ho Chi Minh City and studied philosophy.

"I had a lot of fun and had the normal student life. But deep in my heart, I wanted that lasting joy," he said.

In his fourth year at the university, he met a Kiwi priest who invited him to serve in Palmerston North.

He asked his spiritual director for advice and

spent a lot of time in retreats before he made the decision.

Initially, his mum had no problem with him becoming a priest, but she didn't want him to go to New Zealand. She accepted his decision after a while.

"Before I left my family, this is what mum said to me: 'Go in peace and our prayer is with you and for you. Your happiness is our happiness'," he said.

Before entering the seminary in New Zealand, Fr Nguyen reportedly learned English at the English Training College in Palmerston North.

He said, as a priest, he would want to strengthen the ties between school and parish. Fr Nguyen was also appointed vocations director of the diocese before his ordination.

"My message to young people is — don't be afraid to take further steps towards vocation. It might be a challenge, but it is a wonderful journey."



Br Jonathan Craven

## Kopua blessed by local vocation

by PALMERSTON NORTH DIOCESE Vocations Team

Kopua is a hidden treasure of the Church in New Zealand. That it is hidden is not by chance. It's a Cistercian monastery, and so seclusion is part of its nature and purpose.

That doesn't mean that Kopua, tucked away in the rolling hills of Tararua, is enclosed. In fact, part of the Cistercian charism is to offer hospitality through the monastery guest house, and all are welcome to the seven times of prayer which punctuate the monks' day.

Kopua ([www.kopuamonastery.org.nz](http://www.kopuamonastery.org.nz)) has been enjoying something of a revival in recent years.

Parts of the monastery have been rebuilt, in a contemporary rendition of the ancient Cistercian principle of noble simplicity, which extends to the design of all that makes up a monastery. Also, a native tree-planting project now offsets the dairy farming on the fields that make up the property.

With this physical revitalisation, there has also been a welcome increase in the number of monks at Kopua. Notwithstanding visa hurdles, four monks have arrived from the Cistercian monastery on Guimaras Island in the Philippines.

Brothers Aelred, Anselm, Gregory and Ra-

phael are all surviving the New Zealand winter, have happily settled in, and have applied for stability; the monastic equivalent of permanent residency. For them, among the many blessings of Kopua are the deep silence of the countryside and the dark star-lit night skies.

God's providence has brought a further blessing to Kopua in the person of Brother Jonathan Craven. He is a local vocation. Jonathan grew up in Marton and went to Palmerston North Boys' High School, before university, work and time overseas. Last year, he "received the habit" (part of it actually, as the black full-length scapular comes further down the formation track). This is a sacred ritual that marks the transition from postulant to novice.

Jonathan has enthusiastically embraced the life of prayer, contemplation, study, manual work and hospitality. He says: "It's been easier than I imagined to enter into the simplicity of the life. In its own way, it's joyful, and the community has helped me in the practical aspects of the life. Thanks be to God, I feel at peace here".

Jonathan was to continue his novitiate at Tarrawarra Abbey near Melbourne, where there are other novices, before returning to Kopua.

Please God someone may follow him in formation here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

# Faith and hope in the hell of communist 're-education' camps

by MICHAEL OTTO

A classic of Vietnamese "gulag literature", written by an Auckland-based Catholic priest, was updated, translated into English and republished last year to coincide with the priest's golden jubilee of priestly ordination.

*I Must Live* by Fr "Andrew" Nguyen Huu Le, is an account of the years he spent in communist re-education camps in Vietnam, from 1976 to 1988. He was arrested for opposing the regime and was caught fleeing the country.

But it is more than a listing of details, incidents and dates — it is also a reflection by the priest on how God's providential love was present throughout, enabling Fr Nguyen to be an instrument of God's love and mercy in many desperate situations. This was a providential love which, in time, enabled him to forgive those who had harmed him. There were even friendships formed, with generosity and kindness shown. It is a testimony to the deep faith of a Catholic priest who refused to be "re-educated" along communist lines.

That said, the book is a harrowing read. There is "baking" heat, with the priest being in a windowless cell with several other men, and the air being so hot that breathing is an exhausting struggle. It is being in a prison — the so-called "Gate of Heaven", near the China border — that was so cold that some men "howled like wolves", before falling asleep from exhaustion. It is being shackled in a punishment cell in "the bottom of hell" at Thanh Cam camp, and having to live for weeks in one's own excrement, cleaning oneself with one's hand and using clothes to clean those hands. It is reeking of the smell of faeces and urine, to the extent that even a fellow priest could not stand being too close. It is being tortured, beaten, starved, nearly dying of thirst, being naked. It is seeing another prisoner's eye cut out. It is hearing of fellow prisoners' plans to eat you. It is seeing a friend beaten to death and having his corpse thrown on top of you, so that you can't breathe.

And for much of this time, there was no end in sight. That was the cruelty of the re-education camps. There were no fixed sentences, which one could count down. There was just the vague promise that, if one was successfully re-educated, one would be released. Hope was a

distant country.

But Fr Nguyen's camp dossier had chilling words stamped on papers: "With disposition that cannot be re-educated". This damning statement was why his incarceration was so long.

Fr Nguyen, who spent two years in a refugee camp in Thailand before coming to New Zealand in 1990, at the invitation of Bishop Denis Browne to be chaplain to the Vietnamese community in Auckland, was one of many of his countrymen who endured "re-education". From 1975, some 400,000 people were put through the camps.

Accounts of life and death in these camps have been written over the years, but Fr Nguyen's book, which was first circulated on the Internet and was then published in book form in 2003 in Vietnamese in the USA, became a "best seller ever". It ran to 45,000 copies.

## ■ Meeting

Fr Nguyen told *NZ Catholic* that the book became much more widely read after publicity in 2004 of his meeting, eight years earlier, with "the guy who killed me" in Thanh Cam camp — Bui Dinh Thi. Thi had been one of the detainees responsible for enforcing camp discipline. A Catholic parishioner, he murdered two men who had been with Fr Nguyen in a failed escape attempt, and he tried to kill the priest too. He beat one of the men (Diep) to death and starved the other one (Vanh) until he died. He dumped the former's body on top of Fr Nguyen.

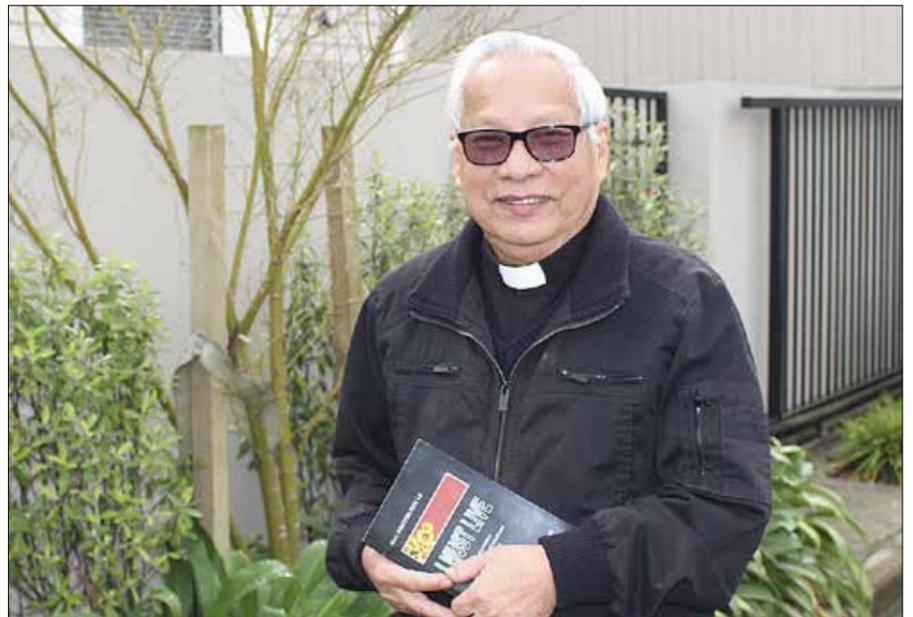
Among Bui Dinh Thi's many acts of violence against Fr Nguyen was this: "Then the guard seized me, punching my belly, making me fall backwards. Bui Dinh Thi punched me forwards again and so they continued like two soccer players using me as a ball."

In 1996, Fr Nguyen met Thi in the United States and forgave him. The priest showed *NZ Catholic* a photo, which has him holding the hand of his nemesis, with Bui Dinh Thi's family smiling for the camera.

Fr Nguyen told *NZ Catholic* that he asked Thi a question — "why did you try to kill me?"

"We had nothing to do with each other before? . . . I am a priest and you are a parishioner — why have you tried to kill me?"

"He bowed down his head for a while and he said, Father, it is very hard to say. I said that is OK — but if you cannot answer my question,



Fr Andrew Nguyen Huu Le with his book

this question will follow me to the grave."

The accounts in Fr Nguyen's book led to Bui Dinh Thi being reported to US authorities. Fr Nguyen was to testify against Thi in court and he was deported back to Vietnam in 2004. But because there was no treaty between the US and Vietnam to enforce this, Bui Dinh Thi reportedly ended up in the Marshall Islands, where he is said to have died in 2011.

Fr Nguyen's years in the camps left him with impaired vision in one eye, with leg injuries which prevent him from walking freely, and with reduced use of one lung. But he doesn't feel bitterness towards the guards and the prisoners who harmed him.

As he explained in the book: "Over a long time, especially the three years writhing at the bottom of hell in the disciplinary cell of Thanh Cam camp from 1979 to 1982, [this] gives me a well-founded stance for saying that, in each person, there are equal parts of good and evil, developing according to the living conditions. . . . In prison, I witnessed and endured the cruel and malicious actions of a number of prison guards, as well as those of treacherous fellow prisoners. I know that it was partly due to their cruel nature. However, if there was no nurturing and encouragement by the regime, then those actions would not have occurred, or if they did, they would not have reached such degrees of extreme cruelty."

He added: "Never condemn a human being, never destroy a human being but, at any cost, wipe out any repulsive regime that encourages and nurtures hostility among humans. Replace it with a healthy society, so that humans can get to develop their righteousness and integrity."

His time in the camps gave him a renewed appreciation for his mission as a priest. Eventually, he came to hear God's voice telling him there was a mission for him there.

"In Vietnam," he told *NZ Catholic*, "the role of the priest is very important, especially in jail. For a few years, I was the only priest for maybe 1000 prisoners. Most of them are Catholics and they looked at me as the one they hoped to stand for what is right and to be the witness to the love of God in jail."

"I thought — I can't do this. . . but, in jail, the priest is the chosen one, to be the beacon, to strengthen their faith and make them hope and be happy and make them feel they have something to lean on."

Fr Nguyen was able to celebrate Masses from time to time in the camps, as parishioners would smuggle in bread and wine, sometimes disguised as medicine for prisoners. He would teach other prisoners and carried out some baptisms.

As he looks to the future for Vietnam, where the history of the people goes back 4000 years, this history and the character of his people give him hope that communism will not last there forever. But he acknowledges, with sorrow, that he may never see his homeland again. He once got as close as Thailand, where he "cried a lot".

"I never accepted the communist regime," he said, "so as long as they are still in power, I cannot return home. But I live here. My body is here, my heart is in my homeland."

But he does not complain. He is against complaining, as he stated in the book. When the text reached the lowest point in his life, when he was desperately struggling to breathe in a cell so hot it was like an oven, he suddenly addressed the reader: "I would tell everyone that: You don't know you are living in paradise. Never open your mouth to complain."

Fr Nguyen is keen to publish the English translation of the book in New Zealand, if possible, and would welcome approaches from publishers who might be interested. He can be reached at: [tpsnguyen@yahoo.com](mailto:tpsnguyen@yahoo.com)



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# Extraordinary form ordinations at St Benedict's

by MICHAEL OTTO

In the months and weeks before October last year, Father Roger Gilbride, FSSP, felt a "holy impatience" to be ordained as a priest.

Scheduled to be ordained in Sydney on two different dates earlier in 2020, Covid-19 border restrictions meant these celebrations were postponed, so Fr Gilbride had to bide his time, working with Fr Antony Sumich, FSSP, in Te Atatu in Auckland.

But now Fr Gilbride's period of "holy impatience" is over, as he was ordained by Bishop Emeritus of Hamilton, Bishop Denis Browne at St Benedict's church, Newton, Auckland, on October 3, 2020. Deacon Brendan Boyce, FSSP, was ordained to the diaconate at the same Mass, celebrated in Latin in the extraordinary form. Numbers present were restricted, with Auckland still being in Covid alert level 2 then.

"Holy impatience" was a phrase Fr Gilbride read about during his seminary studies.

"One of the ordination booklets that they have in the seminary has some commentary on the ordination, and it talks about a 'holy impatience' for wanting to receive the sacrament. And probably the last two years in the seminary, I have kind of had that. I want to get to work," he said.

Returning to New Zealand from a parish in England in 2020, where he had worked as a deacon, Fr Gilbride, then-aged 32, was initially only meant to be here for a couple of weeks, before being posted to Sydney. But the lockdown put paid to that. He ended up spending several months here, but viewed it positively.

"The postponements have been a little bit frustrating, but it has been nice to be back home for a good chunk of time." He spent his time assisting Fr Sumich, preaching, teaching catechism and preparing for ordination.

However, after news of the second postponement came through in July, 2020, "when it was clear that we couldn't get to Australia, Fr Sumich went to speak with Bishop [Patrick] Dunn and said 'we are really stuck'.

"We have thought about the bishops in New Zealand who have offered the Latin Mass in their younger years as a priest and we are thinking about asking one of them if they would be willing to do the ordination. So [it was] suggested — could we ask Bishop Denis Browne? And Bishop Dunn said sure, that is no problem. So, Fr Sumich went to Bishop Browne and basically said to him, look, we are really stuck, we have got this problem, we can't get to Australia, can you help us? He said 'Yes' immediately."

Fr Gilbride said that, in the weeks leading



(From left) Fr Roger Gilbride, FSSP, Bishop Denis Browne, and Deacon Brendan Boyce, FSSP, after the ordination Mass

up to the ordination, himself, then-Subdeacon Boyce and Fr Sumich helped reacquaint Bishop Browne with the "Old Mass", "going through the rite of ordination".

They all expressed their great gratitude for Bishop Browne agreeing to help them in this way.

"We are very appreciative that Bishop Browne has agreed to do the ordination. I want to thank everyone who has helped make this ordination possible," Fr Gilbride said.

(According to their website, The Priestly Fraternity of St Peter (FSSP) is a clerical Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical Right, canonically erected by St John Paul II in 1988. Their priests celebrate the traditional Mass in Latin (Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite)).

Originally from South Africa, Fr Gilbride grew up at Murray's Bay on Auckland's North Shore. But while his family were nominally Catholic, they did not practise their faith, apart from going to the occasional Christmas Mass.

While in Saudi Arabia, when his parents were there for work, the young Roger Gilbride watched the television coverage of the death of St John Paul II and the election of Pope Benedict XVI, and this sparked an interest in the faith for him.

At Kristin School in Auckland (Anglican), he started to read the Bible.

"But it was when I went to university, and I was interested in the whole Catholicism thing, so I joined some of the Catholic student groups."

He initially studied economics, and went on to study history and German, and did an extra year studying philosophy. He later spent time working for pro-life groups. But from the age of 18, he started to feel a call to the priesthood.

"In my first year at university, a priest of the fraternity visited New Zealand and I was invited along just by chance, and he spoke about the fraternity.

"A few months later, I did a semester of studies at a university in Germany. It just so happened that the university was an hour's train ride away from the seminary of the fraternity. Because I had met this priest, I thought, I will go and have a look at their seminary. So I visited the seminary three times during my stay, and when I came back to New Zealand, I finished my studies and worked. I had had this experience with this community, so my vocation was growing, and I thought, I like this community and that is where I'd like to go."

His seminary studies took him to Sydney, USA and Germany. Initially, the Latin was something

new to him.

"Once you are exposed to Latin liturgy on a daily basis, it ceases to become an obstacle," Fr Gilbride said.

"At my seminary in Germany, there would have been seminarians from more than, probably, 15 countries. There was an entire French-speaking section and an entire German-speaking section, and there was no common language apart from Latin. So we all prayed, we all had different cultures, different languages, but we prayed together in the same language, and you could really sense the universality of the Church, when everyone is praying at the same time."

Fr Gilbride expected to be posted to Sydney, whenever practicable.

"I hope to be a good priest and, being in a religious order, my assignments are given to me by my superiors . . . [wherever I am sent], I hope to be faithful to the promises I have made as a deacon and a priest."

In his homily at the ordination Mass, Bishop Browne gave thanks for the generosity of Fr Gilbride and Deacon Boyce in answering the call to serve God's people, for which they would receive strength, joy and peace from the sacrament of holy orders.

"You will be known from now on as Father Roger," Bishop Browne told Fr Gilbride.

"And what happens when you are ordained to the priesthood is that you are given almighty powers, amazing powers. The power to be able to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, power to be able to sanctify the People of God through your prayerfulness, through your love and service for the people, through your holiness and through your generosity in being called."

"You will be known as Father Roger, so the people will respect you and honour you," Bishop Browne said.

"As you accept that responsibility, know that the grace of God will be with you also. The power of the sacrament of holy orders will lift you up, and you will rejoice every day in the fact that God not only calls you every day, but gives you the strength and the power of the sacrament of holy orders.

"As Father Roger, you will be one who will sanctify the people, especially through the celebration of the Eucharist, but also through the celebration of other sacraments . . . These are wonderful gifts that God gives you through the calling to the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

". . . God will give you great joy and great peace in the wonder of knowing that you serve God's people."



Fr Gilbride blesses Bishop Browne after the Mass

# Fr Frank ordered no sad faces at his funeral

by MICHAEL OTTO

Auckland priest Fr Frank Roach gave two orders before he died. Both concerned his funeral. The first was that there were to be no eulogies. The second was that there were to be no sad faces.

The reason for the first order came from the Gospel reading — Luke 17:10 — used at the funeral Mass, celebrated at St Therese church in Mangere East on December 22, last year, explained Fr Neil Darragh in the homily.

“We are unfaithful servants. We have only done what we needed to do, we have only done what we were told to do, we have only done what we should do. In other words, we do not expect any compliments, we do not expect praise, we do not expect recognition, for what we do,” Fr Darragh said.

“And this is how, especially a priest, should live. It is, in fact, how Frank lived,” he added.

“So I am very nervous about suggesting any of the good points about Frank,” he said, to much laughter from the congregation.

But Fr Darragh found ways to point out many of Fr Roach’s good points — his love of reading and of history, his friendliness to ministers from other churches, his hospitality, his generosity, and his love of music.

Fr Darragh fondly recalled Fr Roach’s sense of humour.

The homilist referred to the photo on the front of the order of service, saying it captured something about Fr Roach.

He is anticipating that we will indulge in some type of humour, here at the funeral. It is going to



Fr Frank Roach (as shown on the order of service)

be something we can laugh at, Fr Darragh said.

“And that is what he was very good at. He could make people laugh.

“When you went into a place where there was a gathering, or a dinner, or lunch or something, where he was, nearly always there was laughter. He had that talent. He knew he had it and he wanted to use it, because that was good.

“Perhaps the most important of all, he could laugh at himself. And he quite often did tell stories about himself that were humorous stories that made him look silly, as Fr Frank would say, but they were meant to be humorous.”

One such story concerned the time a loud party was taking place next to where Fr Roach was saying evening Mass, Fr Darragh said. Loud music and drunken laughter

and shouting went on until the early hours of the morning, and Fr Roach went to the property, where he shouted at those present to stop the noise. It was disrupting his concentration, which was focused on rewriting his homily for the next Mass. He told those at the party that if the noise didn’t stop, he would curse that house.

Now these are fairly strong words, and no priest should ever say them, Fr Darragh noted.

But Fr Roach was obviously taken seriously. About five minutes later the noise stopped, and “Frank never got a wink of sleep for the rest of that night because he was guilty and worried” about what he did, and he knew it was wrong.

He told this story, and at the end of the story, he would say “wrong again”, which he often said, Fr Darragh added.

Fr Roach died in Auckland Hospital on December 18, 2020, aged 89, after a short illness. In his priestly ministry, he served at Te Awamutu, Papatoetoe and Grey Lynn, before a ministering in Samoa in the early 1970s.

Returning to Auckland in 1974, he worked in the Samoan Chaplaincy and was parish priest at Grey Lynn, Hillsborough, Waiuku, Mangere East, Pukekohe and Panmure parishes, before his retirement in 2014.

Fr Roach was ordained in 1957, before Vatican II, and “he didn’t agree with a lot of the changes that happened. He thought they messed up the Church, and he said so”, Fr Darragh said.

But Fr Roach didn’t think priests should return to wearing elaborate garments, and he was no fan of en-

forcement of some rules and regulations for the sake of it. But he did think the rules should be there.

“He and I met in the early 70s, and from then on we were friends,” Fr Darragh said.

The two disagreed on “almost everything theological, but we were still good friends for all that time”.

“When [Fr Roach] went to Samoa in the 1970s, he was a bit despondent about the condition of the Church. But when he went there, he found a Church that was vibrant, strong and musical. Samoa, in a sense, was his renewal.”

Fr Darragh spent a few minutes of the homily at Mangere East speaking in Samoan, with his remarks drawing several ripples of laughter from many in the congregation.

Fr Roach also became involved with the Tongan community in Auckland — and he was one of the founders of the Tongan Catholic community here, Fr Darragh added.

At the end of the homily, Bishop Patrick Dunn thanked Fr Darragh for giving “a eulogy that was not a eulogy”.

At the start of the Mass, in welcoming people, Bishop Dunn noted how many people considered Fr Roach as “family”.

The bishop said people gathered for the funeral as a type of “extended family”.

He also noted Fr Roach’s love for his own family.

Bishop Michael Gielen and Bishop Denis Browne were among the concelebrants at the Mass. Fr Roach’s body was interred at Panmure Catholic cemetery.



## Is God calling you to a vocation in The Priestly Fraternity of St Peter?

The Traditional Latin Mass community in Auckland has prayed earnestly to God for many years that He send Traditional priests to work in His vineyard.

Could you be the answer to those prayers?

### What is the Fraternity?

The Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter (FSSP) is a Clerical Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical right, that is, a community of Roman Catholic priests who do not take religious vows, but who work together for a common mission in the world. The mission of the Fraternity is two-fold: first, the formation and sanctification of priests in the cadre of the traditional liturgy of the Roman Rite, and secondly, the pastoral deployment of the priests in the service of the Church.

So you think God might be calling you to a vocation in The Priestly Fraternity of St Peter? We are looking for men who are:

- 20 to 35 years of age, unmarried.
- Have a strong sense of piety, discipline and

sacrificial willingness to dedicate oneself totally to the service of Christ and His Holy Church.

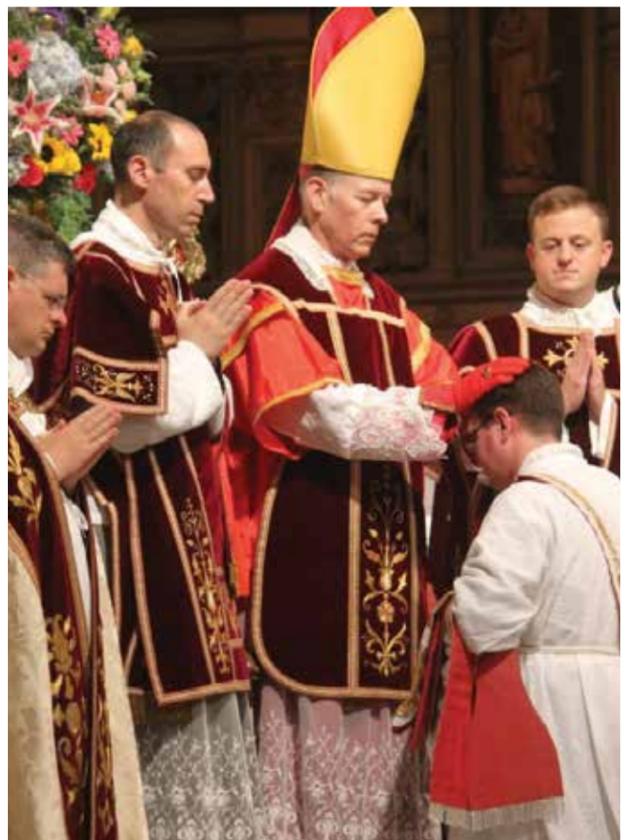
- Desire to live in community and in obedience to the rule and superiors.
- Strong attachment to the Traditional liturgy and practices of the Church.
- A good reputation, moral aptitude and intellectual ability.
- Good physical and mental health.
- High degree of fluency in English.
- At least high-school certificate/diploma, though preferably tertiary studies.
- Free from financial debt.

### Is Christ calling you to join us?

Young men from Auckland who are considering a vocation to the Fraternity are encouraged to contact Fr Antony Sumich, FSSP, to discuss this.

Please contact him using the following details:

Rev. Fr. Antony Sumich, FSSP  
027 2024787 fsspaukland@gmail.com



# Bishop farewells first priest he ordained

by MICHAEL OTTO

Fr Malo Nun Toon was the first priest Bishop Patrick Dunn ordained — and now Bishop Dunn has preached at the priest's funeral.

Fr Nun Toon died at Mercy Parklands in Auckland on February 9, 2021, aged 73.

In his homily at a requiem Mass at Holy Cross church in Henderson on February 13, Bishop Dunn said Fr Nun Toon, who spent the first half of his life in Samoa, had a “deep sense of vocation”.

This was shown in his persistence and determination during his seminary days at Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, Bishop Dunn said.

“He did have a struggle with English, and at one stage the rector spoke with Bishop Denis (Browne), who sent him to the seminary, and said, we are not sure about the English. Bishop

“[Malo] brought numerous qualities to his ministry, such as compassion for those who were poor and needy. He was known for his generosity, and people in need knew to come to him. In their desperation, he would always respond with compassion, and not turn them away.”

- Sr Akenese

Denis spoke to Malo and Malo said — well, I will stay here forever, until I have got there,” Bishop Dunn said.

“It was certainly a one-way ticket. He was responding to a call deep in his heart.”

Bishop Dunn recalled that, in 1995, Fr Nun Toon was the first priest he ordained.

“So I always felt a special bond with Patele Malo. And I was thinking in some ways his CV is a very simple one for a priest. He was ordained at Christ the King parish, and served there for five or six years, then Holy Cross, Papatoetoe, and then Otahuhu and Middlemore Hospital. He had the stroke in 2011, and then that fall in 2017 that led to him being hospitalised at Mercy Parklands.”

Bishop Dunn went on to link Fr Nun Toon's life with the mystery of the cross, which is at “the very heart of the Gospel”.

“None of us is very keen on the mystery. It is part of all our callings, but I often felt with Fr Malo, with the stroke, the sickness and the struggles, that is the mystery, part of the secret of the Gospel.

“Fr Malo let Jesus work through him.”

Speaking on the Gospel reading at the Mass, Bishop Dunn added that “each one of us, no matter how talented we are, we have just got a few loaves, a few fish, not much. If we can offer our gifts as generously as Malo offered his life, then we can leave it to Jesus to do the rest. That's what Malo did.”

At the start of his homily, Bishop Dunn noted that Fr Nun Toon's sister, Sr Akenese Nun Toon, RSM, had earlier read out a message from Archbishop Alapati Lui Mata'eliga of Samoa-Apia, in which the archbishop expressed his sorrow at the death of his “dear friend”, calling Fr Nun Toon a faithful and cheerful son of the church of Samoa and a blessing to the many people the priest had met.

Fr Malo obviously had friends in high places, Bishop Dunn said, adding that Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Novatus Rugambwa had sent a message promising that prayers would be said.

Sr Akenese, in a reflection given before the Mass, recalled that, as a young person in Samoa, Malo had felt a strong call to the priesthood, but their father would not allow him to pursue it then. Instead, the young Malo worked to support the family, and spent 20 years as the “right hand man” at the Chan Mow supermarket in Samoa, before going into business for himself as an owner-operator taxi driver.

“There was an upside and a downside to Malo's business sense,” Sr Akenese said, with a smile.

“Firstly, most of his passengers were poor priests and religious, so no money was asked. He lived the vow of poverty, but then so did we, because he never made any money, which was the purpose of having a taxi, to support his family.

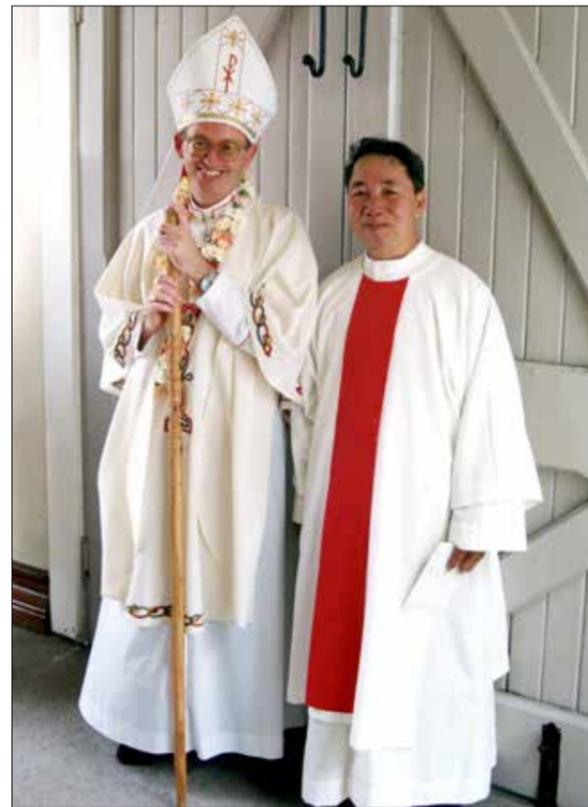
“But he was paid tenfold with the prayers of his passengers, who also encouraged him to reflect more deeply on his faith and how he could best live it.

“I think it was this that really started him on the journey to priesthood.”

Sr Akenese also spoke about her brother's struggles with seminary studies, but, with prayer and encouragement from those around him, he persevered.

“I think my brother, when he went to the seminary, he went one way. There was no u-turn.”

Speaking of her brother's life as a priest, she said he “brought numerous qualities to his



Bishop Patrick Dunn with Fr Malo Nun Toon when the latter was ordained in 1995.

ministry, such as compassion for those who were poor and needy. He was known for his generosity, and people in need knew to come to him. In their desperation, he would always respond with compassion, and not turn them away”.

“He was a humble man, quietly serving people without any great fuss or fanfare. And indeed, he would not be too pleased to hear me speak of these things publicly.”

Sr Akenese added that her brother loved his family deeply, and he was loved in return. His family was very proud of him.

She also thanked the doctors and nurses at Mercy Parklands for the care given to her brother in his final years.

Among the concelebrants at the requiem was Hamilton Bishop Stephen Lowe, a seminary classmate of Fr Nun Toon's. Bishop Dunn noted that Bishop Lowe and his classmate priests celebrate 25 years of priestly ordination this year. Bishops Denis Browne and Michael Gielen were also among the concelebrants.

Fr Nun Toon's mortal remains were interred at Waikumete cemetery.



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