

Launch Out Letter (LOL)

November 2020

Blessed are those who mourn...

By Sharon Penny, Lay Pastoral Leader, Wairarapa Parish

I waited and waited and waited some more, patiently, knowing God would come through for me. Then, at last, he bent down and listened to my cry. He stooped down to lift me out of danger from the desolate pit I was in, out of the muddy mess I had fallen into. Now he's lifted me up into a firm, secure place and steadied me while I walk along his ascending path. Psalm 40:1-2

26 May 1998. It was very early in the morning. I woke knowing something was different. I realised that there was no sound or movement coming from the other side of the bed. My son was in the shower and the rest of the family were asleep. I did not want to believe it. I took my time opening the curtains, putting on my dressing gown. This could not be true. John was larger than life, a big man with the big voice now forever silenced. It felt like all time was suspended, the present moment was all there was.

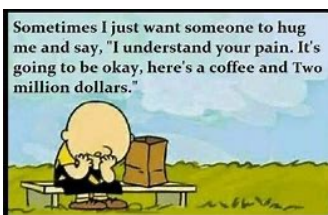
I remember quietly summoning my son from the shower and asking him to check again just in case I was mistaken. I did not want to wake my other son and daughters because I did not know what to say to them. I wanted to spare them from the shock for as long as possible and to give myself time to think and work out what to do next.

Once family and friends were informed, we were surrounded by waves of love and support with visits, food, flowers, phone calls and cards. It seemed only natural to me to bring John home and for him to be with us until the day of the funeral. Partly so we could get used to the idea that he had really died, partly so we could be together until the last possible moment. His casket was gradually filled with all sorts of tokens, letters from the children and they spent time talking with him, touching him and coming to terms with the harsh and strange reality of what death means in a physical sense. We cried a lot; visitors also cried a lot with us.

My whole life, my family's whole life had been turned upside down. We were in pain, living in a kind of dream that was real. I found it overwhelming to be swamped with sorting out practical details and people wanting me to make decisions, sign documents. I was grateful that I had Dad to help me and he made it all so simple.



All I wanted to do was to be there to comfort my children and to try and help them make sense of what had happened to us. One thing that made me angry was the fact that John's name was deleted from all our accounts and documents, even his name in the phone book. It felt like the world was saying he never existed, he wasn't important anymore...he was



I clearly remember during that time of being in my garden talking with my parish priest when I had this strong sense of the presence of the Spirit. It was like a small spark of hope inside me and I heard the words "You can do this, I am here with you" and then somehow I knew I could. I could lead my family through the fears and sadness, the unknown, with trust that all would be well.

A year later my mother died from breast cancer. And in 2001 my father died after an operation. Sometimes I felt like I was in a TV drama. How could all this happen to me and my family? These were hard days but we had the loving support of family and friends **and** my faith and trust in the Spirit; who I believe sustained me throughout with that simple message “You can do this, I am here. *Philippians 4:13 I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

....they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4

As a Lay Pastoral Leader I am privileged to often be with people who are struggling with the death of a loved one. My own experience with sudden death, and journeying with my mother through terminal cancer has deepened my capacity for compassion and my own understanding of the many emotions and feelings that people go through in the event of loss such as anger, bewilderment, isolation, guilt to name but a few.

“Do everything in love.” 1 Corinthians 16: 14

When I accompany a person or family as they grieve we develop a special relationship as they share their feelings and memories and I gain an insight into their world that is special and unique. I come to appreciate the person they have lost through their stories. Laughter is present too as they remember the family jokes and sayings that are uniquely theirs.

Sometimes the family request that I lead the Prayer Vigil and the funeral itself. This is always a privilege. We work together to weave a ritual that expresses their sorrow, celebrates their memories and allows them to say goodbye with respect, dignity and love.

Being with people and supporting and comforting them in their pain and grief, giving them the time and space they need to talk; listening deeply, praying with them is the most intense yet most uplifting part of my ministry. It brings me joy.

“I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.” Rabindranath Tagore

Happy Birthday!

Birthday blessings to: *Jude McKee, 10 November*
Barbara Rowley, 23 November



Parade.com

Thoughts on *Fratelli Tutti*

By Bridget Taumoepeau, Launch Out Mentor

Pope Francis started this letter to all of us before Covid struck, but then used the time of isolation to complete a beautiful letter “on fraternity and social friendship” – urging us to live “a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel”.

Francis reminds us that the world and each of us personally will not be the same after the pandemic – we can be better or worse. This letter helps us to build a better world drawing on our experiences and lessons we have learned, especially during lockdown and social restrictions. It is linked to his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, when he introduced us to the idea that everything is connected; *Fratelli Tutti* reminds us that everyone is connected; all of us with each other.

This is a profound letter that takes time to absorb. It is a long document; there are 8 chapters – read it slowly, section by section. (You can access it on line at the Holy See website www.vatican.va or buy it very cheaply on Kindle, and hopefully it will soon be available in New Zealand in book form.)

Consider discussing it with family and friends, including non-Catholics and those of other faiths or none. It is about a better society and social friendship, so will appeal to many people.

We can make a start by considering three things – the beauty of our Church History; the gift of Catholic Social Teaching, and the relevance of the Gospel for today's world:

History

It is inspired by the life and teaching of St Francis of Assisi, but was started as an extension of the “Document on Human Fraternity” that Pope Francis signed with Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Egypt's Al-Azhar mosque in 2019. That signing celebrated the 800-year anniversary of St Francis meeting peacefully with the Egyptian Sultan Malik al-Kamil during the Fifth Crusade. So, we have recurring examples of how we can love and care for each other despite our differences.

This leads on to the role that religion has played in both violence and peace through the ages and the importance of religion in promoting fraternity in our present world. In particular the idea of Christian identity is addressed and the way we are bound to ‘encounter the sacred mystery of the other, to communion with the whole human family’.

Catholic Social Teaching

It is a document for our age, so offers us an opportunity to review our thoughts about the present world situation – political, economic, social etc. It addresses the sad issues of inequality; political systems that do not address the common good nor foster an atmosphere of selflessness and caring for each other; the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. In this way it calls on Catholic Social Teaching and links us to encyclicals of previous popes that have addressed these issues, from the time of Pope Leo XIII and *Rerum Novarum*, considered the first social encyclical (1891), up until the present. This is an opportunity to learn more of this tradition we have, that guides our relationships with God and with our fellow men and women.

The relevance of the Gospel for today's world

Pope Francis has composed a long and detailed meditation on the Parable of the Good Samaritan. He points out that the issue of human relationships, violence, conflict and the imperative to love and care for each other is an age-old problem, which is addressed in both the Old and New Testaments. This can lead us to review the wisdom of the scriptures, especially the parables and their relevance for current times, bringing us back to the instruction to love our neighbour as ourselves, and, importantly, to consider who is ‘our neighbour’ in today's world.



Taking a chapter at a time of this beautiful letter, which is addressed to us all, would allow us to see the relevance of the teachings of the scriptures, past Papal documents and those of the present Pope, to the way we lead our everyday lives. Francis wants all of us to examine ourselves; to measure ourselves against these teachings and to contribute to a culture of encounter and universal fraternal love. This is, of course, the call of the Gospel in our lives.

Rediscovering the domestic church

By Lisa Beech, Launch Out Candidate

It is only a year ago since I was part of the parish property review group in Te Wairua Tapu parish. I remember passionate and sincere conversations about what our parish community might look like in 20 years' time, how we might best organise and structure our buildings and church communities to care for present and future generations, while reaching out to the margins and peripheries.

We talked about changing patterns of participation and transport. We looked at where wealth and poverty were present in our community. We talked about how climate change might affect available land. I don't think any of us imagined a time when people couldn't gather, or wouldn't want to gather, in parish churches because of a pandemic.

As the Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions of 2020 became our normal, at first I thought this was just a temporary change. I enjoyed creating my own space for prayer at home by myself. I didn't enjoy digital liturgies, but connected sometimes out of solidarity.

But when our churches began to open again, I found that my anxieties had exploded. Even thinking about going into spaces where there might be a lot of people brought on panic attacks, whether supermarkets, churches or other public spaces. My life which had always been about gatherings – Mass, church meetings, seminars, conferences, concerts, rallies, protest marches – suddenly was reduced to only feeling comfortable when fewer than 10 people were present. Suddenly, the large parish gatherings that I had loved were frightening, rather than comforting, places for me.

Some months on, things have started returning to normal. I can thank my GP and a wonderful counsellor for aspects of that. But also two wonderful Launch Out sisters, Maya and Bernadette, who were happy to share meals, fellowship and over time, prayer together at my home, during the time that going out was difficult for me.

It has given me new insights into the meaning of “domestic church”, a phrase familiar from Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* and Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*. Vatican II used the phrase particularly in relation to faith within families:

In what might be regarded as the domestic church, the parents, by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. (Lumen Gentium #11)

Amoris Laetitia also refers to this phrase in the context of the “church” created inside a family home.

A family's living space could turn into a domestic church... Here we see a home filled with the presence of God, common prayer and every blessing. (Amoris Laetitia #15)



This is Lisa's lounge, where she usually prays, with one of her cats, Coco.

This sense of homes as a cell of the wider parish community was a core part of my upbringing. House Masses, prayer groups and Lenten study groups were parts of our family routine – if we were not hosting a group, we were visiting other families at their homes to pray. Movements such as the Passionist family groups, Young Christian Workers meetings and other small gatherings were formally part of the church communities around us.

By contrast, while evening prayer with candles and hymns was part of my children's early upbringing, I remember very few instances when we shared that experience with anyone outside our immediate household. And even that fell away as my children got older and evening activities got busier. Living on my own again now, with adult children who have moved away, I didn't realise until the lockdown and subsequent restrictions how valuable those intimate times of home-based fellowship and prayer had been to me growing up.

Starting to share regular prayer with Maya and Bernadette at my home has revived interest and awareness of the numerous references in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul to the early Christian communities who met both at the temple and in people's homes, such as in Acts 2:42-47, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 2 among others.

It has also re-awakened my interest in the Base Christian Communities which have been a feature of the churches in many parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia, which Pope Francis refers to in *Evangelii Gaudium* #29 as "a source of enrichment for the church."

The Latin American Bishops referred to these base communities as "the first and fundamental nucleus of the church... the initial cell of the ecclesial structure and the centre of evangelisation" at Medellin in 1968, and as "an environment particularly favourable to new forms of lay service" at Puebla in 1979, with "better interpersonal relationships, acceptance of God's word and reflection about life and reality in the light of the Bible."

African theologian Andre Mukenge stresses it is important to recognise Base Christian Communities as a place of greater inclusion, not withdrawal from parish structures. As in the account of the Acts of the Apostles, members of the community find a place of common prayer in their homes, yet continue to visit the temple.

However, for many people in our parish communities, even when there are no Covid-19 restrictions in place preventing attendance at Mass, health conditions, vulnerabilities and a desire to protect others may keep people away from our traditional large gatherings. Some, like me, may have a longing for communal forms of prayer which is not being met by online liturgies or individual prayer.

My own experience of anxiety and the healing of small group fellowship during the lockdown has awakened my desire to see what we can learn from the early Church, movements such as Base Christian communities, and other traditional forms of gathering in homes, as well as the renewed emphasis on domestic churches. This may assist us as the Covid-19 pandemic continues, but also may help us rediscover sources of connection and fellowship that we had forgotten.

Online Resources



Important dates:

12 November 6:00PM, Zoom Meeting
20 November, LO Dinner Out
21 November, Project Presentation

Commonweal has had a series of webinars which are relevant for us here in NZ. All about the effect on our parishes of the pandemic – lessons learned; possible changes; looking at our faith, among others. <https://youtu.be/UBRYnHFGPn8> (From Bridget Taumoepeau)

Normally this is available via subscription but it has been offered as gift – a great Advent resource for adults and children. <https://www.emmausproductions.com/special-feature/advent-pandemic-2020/> (From Mary Ann Greaney)



When he had finished eating, he said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch".

Luke 5: 4