

# LAUNCH OUT LETTERS (LOL)

Newsletter and Journal of Te Hao Nui– Launch Out Formation Programme  
Archdiocese of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Welcome to the November issue of the Launch Out Letters.

November is the month of remembering the saints and our dearly departed. We are privileged to have **Lucienne Hensel**, Launch Out graduate, and current Parish Advisor of ADW to lead in the Gospel reflection on the widow's mite. Lucienne draws our attention to the generosity of God, as a way of rising above the deficit-mentality that we so easily get caught up in. The world and our lives will always be limited and mired in suffering; such is the human condition. Most often, it is not what we have that shapes our views of life. Thus, often our vision of eternal life is a paradise that compensates us for the pains we endured in our mortal lives. **Margaret Bearsley**, continuing on from her Part One commentary on Joseph Ratzinger's book on *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, delves into Ratzinger's take on hell, purgatory and heaven. Ratzinger presents a Christological view of heaven. This means that we are, in a way, already in heaven when we are one in Christ, and that being in Christ we find the fullness of our existence.

Coincidentally, when we think of death and eternal life, we invariably think of ageing. I share an article republished from *Welcom* on a new ministry in ADW--the Aged Care Project. It is important to support ministries such as this, as we prepare for the rise of elderly parishioners and their move to residential care facilities. One of the biggest crosses of ageing is the loss of memories. **Neil Vaney, sm** offers insights on 'remembering'—why we remember and its purpose. Our memories are the stuff that solidifies our identity. Who we think we are and what our lives are all about is a concoction of what we remember. The Eucharist itself is a liturgy of remembering the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our faith is deepened and sustained by the Eucharist's continuous remembering.

**Bridget Taumoepeau** shares her lament that any hope for the ordination of women deacons in the recently concluded synod was shut down. Lay Pastoral Leaders (LPL) came out of the 1998 Wellington Synod as a rejection of the gendered ordination for deacons. Launch Out emerged as the formation programme to the LPLs. Launch Out is a small ministry, in a small island at the ends of the earth. We are like the widow's humble coin. We are called to give our best, trusting that the God who receives our offering will use it in God's time for the good of the Church.

The gospel of the widow's mite unveils the oneness of the complex notions of life, death, and heaven. These are all parts of life. Our mortal life, the one we are in now, is limited and often, full of strife. We are all like the widow, trying to get by, but are called to give our lives away to something bigger than ourselves. In doing so, we receive something much more. And if we give in Christ, we live in Christ. And if we live in Christ, we are already in heaven.

*Maya Bernardo, Launch Out Formator and Manager*



*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*

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Visit the Te Hao Nui-Launch Out webpage: [https://](https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/about/church-mission/launch-out-formation-programme/)

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# We can never outdo God in generosity

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Lucienne Hensel  
Launch Out Graduate



We live in uncertain times; wars erupting, natural disasters due to climate change, and a post-pandemic crisis that is being felt around the world. We see scenes of devastation and terrible suffering, millions displaced and living in abject poverty. Closer to home, friends and family members struggle to make ends meet. We all know someone who has recently lost their job. The needs around us can seem overwhelming.

In this context, the Sunday readings are particularly challenging for those who wish to follow Christ. While the world hoards goods – making the rich richer while the poor become poorer – Christ's disciples are called to be unattached to wealth and possessions, to hold material goods lightly, and to be willing to put aside self-interest. We are called to see the world through God's compassionate gaze, and to let our hearts be moved to generosity.

As always, God uses the lowly to teach the wise. Today we encounter two widows who gave all that they possessed. In biblical times, widows were on the peripheries, often left destitute with no means of support, ignored by the rich and powerful. Their example speaks powerfully to us. The widow who opened her home to Elijah the prophet had nothing to spare. She had just enough to feed her son and herself one last meal. Yet, when Elijah asked for bread, she gave what she had. Similarly, the widow in the temple gave her two copper coins – all that she owned.

Have you ever heard the call to give – whether it be money, time, or other resources – but held back because of fear that you may not have enough for yourself? How hard it is for us to put our own needs and wants aside and put others first, as the widow of Zarephath did! St Teresa of Calcutta said: *"I must be willing to give whatever it takes to do good to others. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts."* Are we ready to give until it hurts? Are we willing to share, even when we have little to spare? To give when it means that we may have to do without.

Jesus compares the rich, who made a big show of giving large sums, and the humble widow who gave her two small coins. His message is loud and clear! It is *how* we give; not *how much* we give that really matters. What is our disposition?

Perhaps God looks not so much at *what we give*, but rather at *what we hold back*. Do we give only from our surplus, whatever is left over once our wants and needs have all been satisfied? Are we held back by the fear of not having enough? Or do we give God our 'first fruits', putting God's kingdom and the needs of others before ourselves? Do we give grudgingly or joyfully from the heart? For God loves a cheerful giver! (2 Cor 9:6-7)

Elijah said to the widow: *"Do not be afraid"*. At this, she put her trust in God and did what he asked. The widow in the temple overcame her own fears when she gave all she had. She gave it humbly, joyfully and with great love. And she gave freely! She trusted that her God would provide for all her needs. We do not know what happened to her, but we do know what happened to the widow at Zarephath! Her jar of flour was never empty, her jug of oil never ran dry!

Like that widow, I too can say that my jar of flour is never empty, and my jug of oil never dry. When my husband, Rainer and I, were full-time missionaries without any source of income, we learnt to rely on God for all our family's needs. We came to know God as a loving and generous Father, and we learnt the freedom to receive and to give, no matter how little we had. We have countless stories of God's providence, and how God provided for others through us. Although circumstances have since changed, God continues to fill our lives with good things, and we find great joy in being able to share our blessings with those who are in need. For in the words of St Paul, *"There is more joy in giving than in receiving"*. (Acts 20:35)

In his new encyclical *"Dilexit Nos"* Pope Francis quotes: *"when our Lord dwells in a heart, he gives it such sentiments, and this heart reaches out to the least of our brothers and sisters."*

Truly, the Lord dwells in our hearts, and we have been blessed with every good thing. Let us then not hold back from sharing our blessings with the least of our brothers and sisters, and giving as generously as the two widows gave. For most of us, this is a work in progress. St Ignatius of Loyola taught us to ask for the grace we desire, and if we do not yet desire it, we are to ask for the desire to desire it! I often ask for the grace to be more aware of the needs around me, to grow in generosity and to be able to give freely and joyfully.

Our heavenly Father lavishes His love on us. May we grow more and more into His image and likeness, and imitate His generosity, love and compassion for the world.

And remember, we can never, ever, ever outdo God in generosity!

***"Lord, teach me to be generous.  
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;  
to give and not to count the cost,  
to fight and not to heed the wounds,  
to toil and not to seek for rest,  
to labour and not to ask for reward,  
save that of knowing that I do your will.  
Amen"***

# Every knee shall bow

## A Commentary on Joseph Ratzinger's *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life (Part Two)*

Margaret Bearsley  
Launch Out Candidate  
Holy Trinity Parish

In the first part of my review on Joseph Ratzinger's epic work, *Eschatology*, I commented on his analysis of the 'problem' of eschatology. That problem relates to the very essence of Christianity: it is Jesus Christ who spans the unbridgeable gap between life and death. This 'span' of Christ is 'explained' in Phil 2:5 – 11: Christ emptied himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

Part Two of *Eschatology* deals with death and eternal life.

It does this by looking first at Psalms 16 and 73, which provided one of the principal supports for the early Christian proclamation of the resurrection, for the psalmist dares to say:

*[Psalm 16]...my body also dwells secure.  
For you do not give me up to Sheol,  
or let your faithful one see the Pit...  
in your presence there is fulness of joy,  
in your right hand are pleasures for evermore*

Then Psalm 73 leads us still deeper:

*My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my  
heart and my portion for ever.*

Ratzinger draws a pivotal conclusion from the expression of the psalmist's experience: communication with God *is* reality. "It is true reality, the really real, more real, even, than death itself."

In my personal experience, I think this is why at prayer, and deeply at Mass, I feel particularly close to my loved ones who have died. They are right there with me in the presence of the Lord. As an aside, during prayer and at Mass are the safe places for communing with the dead. In my stupid, stupid, stupid youth, I agreed to use a Ouija board. It did seem we were communing with the dead. And then it seemed the dead, or worse, were always watching. It was frightening. Believe me, you don't want to go there!

The inner simplicity of Christianity is that we share in the pascal mystery, the suffering and death of Christ, by that 'dying' which is faith and love. But the Christian understanding of Christ's death (and of our sharing in it) is not a romantic ideal of 'heroism'. Christ does not die in the noble detachment of the philosopher. He dies in tears. On his lips was the bitter taste of abandonment and isolation in all its horror. The crisis of the Western world turns very much on a philosophy and education system which try to redeem humanity by bypassing the cross.

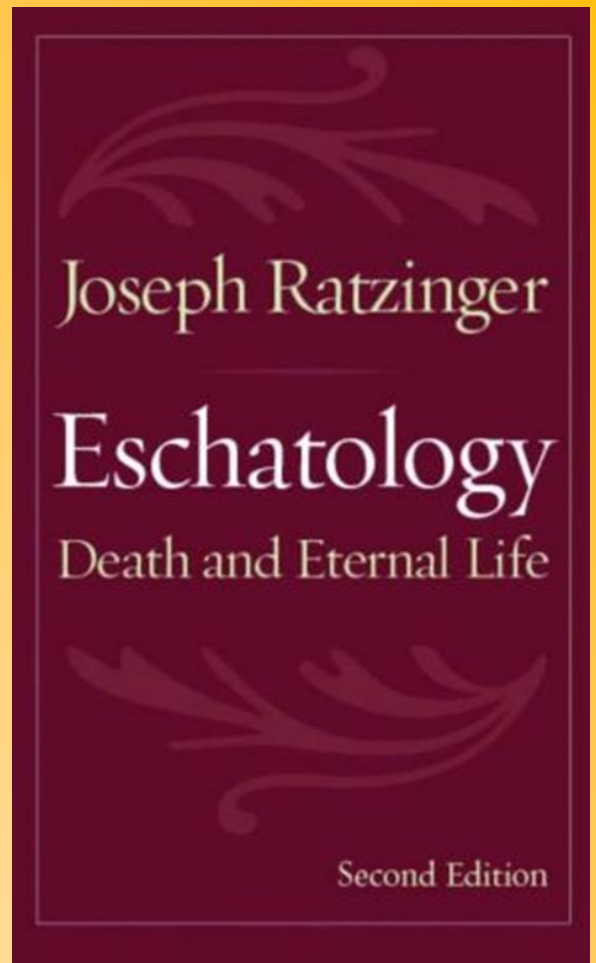


Image copied from <https://www.christiansupplies.co.nz/product/9780813215167/eschatology-death-and-eternal-life-joseph-ratzinger/>

Click [here](#) for Part One of this article.  
Page 4 of October LOL issue.

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Central to Ratzinger's theology of immortality is the notion that immortality is 'dialogical'. That is, immortality rests upon a relationship:

Reflecting on the Gospel story of Peter walking on the water, only the Lord's outstretched hand can save the sinking Peter, that is, humankind. Only God incarnate can draw us out of the waters by his power to hold us firm. Only Christ can make us stand atop the waves of the sea of mortality. His promise is that we will attain the vision of God, in the faith and love which take the Lord's hand and are led by it.

Part Three of *Eschatology* focuses on the resurrection of the dead 'on the last day'. Ratzinger explains the only possible understanding of the resurrection is that the dead each enter an intermediate state where the outcome of their life is settled at the close of their earthly activity, and thus they reach their definitive destiny. But the final eternal happiness of heaven is not possible while suffering remains on earth. For God, whom we come to know in the cross of Christ, history is so real that it leads him down to Sheol, so real that heaven can be really and truly heaven only when it forms the canopy of a *new earth*.

Ratzinger reminds us that details of the world of the resurrection are beyond our understanding, and that we ought not to try to particularise them. Rather we have the certainty of the drive of the cosmos towards a goal, a situation in which matter and spirit will belong to each other in a new way.

On the Parousia (the return of Christ), as to when it will occur, the Biblical references to the end (earthquakes, war etc) are not data for pinpointing a time; the signs are present in every age. Rather, they refer to the importance of always being watchful, like the 10 bridesmaids in the parable.

Since it is Christ whose return we await, Ratzinger exhorts us to "*live the Liturgy*" as a feast of hope-filled presence directed towards Christ. In this way, the Lord dwells with us. In his dying on the Cross, the Lord has preceded us so as to prepare for us a place in the house of the Father. In the liturgy, the Church should prepare for him a dwelling in the world: let the liturgy be real, until that time when the Lord himself gives to it that final reality which meanwhile can be sought only in images.

On the topic of judgement, for those of us who worry about our loved ones who have died and whose faith was questionable, Ratzinger provides a reassuring explanation that the traditional view about judgement overemphasised the decision at death. Instead, says Ratzinger, the truth of a human being 'emerges' through the

fundamental orientation of the person's existence, over all the pathways of their life. In terms of the sum total of decisions from out of which an entire life is constructed, this final direction may be, in the end, a fumbling search for God, valid no matter what wrong turnings have been taken along the way.

Lastly, *Eschatology* deals with Hell, Purgatory and Heaven.

Ratzinger is a 'Hell is real' theologian. He acknowledges the pervasive line of thought throughout the Church's history (and quite prevalent today) that, given God's loving relationship with history, there must be a universal reconciliation at the end, and the Neo-Platonist idea that evil is in fact nothing and nothingness.

For Ratzinger (who grew up in Hitler's

Germany don't forget), Scripture and the Tradition are unequivocal. Eternal damnation is possible. God has unconditional respect for human freedom. The cross teaches us that God, Godself, suffered and died. Evil is real for God. And for the God who is love, hatred is *not* nothing. It killed him on a particular Friday which was most real.



The Alpha and the Omega in a . Copied from <https://unsplash.com/photos/brown-and-green-cross-on-brown-wooden-wall-1cmACyYeO-g>

Ratzinger is also a 'Purgatory is real' theologian. Purgatory is not some kind of other-worldly concentration camp where the person is forced to undergo punishment. Rather, as identified in 1 Cor 3:10 – 15, it is the inwardly necessary process of transformation, in which the person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints. Simply to look at people realistically is to grasp the necessity of such a process.

What actually saves is the full assent of faith, but in most of us that assent is buried under (again, from 1 Cor) a great deal of wood, hay and straw. We are receivers of the divine mercy, but this does not exonerate us from the need to be transformed. Encounter with the Lord *is* this transformation, and it burns.

Then heaven. We hear often enough that 'Heaven is not a place'. So, what is it? Where is it?

Heaven is Christological. It is not a place outside of history to which one goes. Rather, its existence depends upon the fact that Jesus Christ, as God, is human, and makes space for human existence in the existence of God. One is in heaven when, and to the degree that, one is in Christ. It is by being with Christ that we find our existence as human beings in God.

Finally, Ratzinger reminds us of the Parousia, the Second Coming: Heaven will only be complete when all the members of the Lord's body are gathered in. That completion includes the "resurrection of the flesh". It is called the Parousia (which is Greek for coming or presence) since the presence of Christ will reach its fulness and encompass all those who are to be saved and the whole cosmos with them.

The end of the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit* has the toy rabbit becoming a real live bunny, so, even more real than being a loved toy rabbit. It's a sweet ending for children. But in our grown-up human world, we know that a real bunny will die; quite likely it will be killed by a dog or a hunter. Real life is harsh.

By having faith in the Last Things, we can hope that the rabbit (and all those we love ... and maybe also those we don't) will ultimately be part of the cosmos that comes to fulness at the Parousia.

Come, Lord Jesus!

REFERENCE:

Joseph Ratzinger (Second Edition) Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC (1988).  
The First Edition was published in German in 1977

## BIRTHDAYS

### NOVEMBER

10 Jude McKee

15 Lucienne Hensel

25 Barbara Rowley



## ONLINE RESOURCES

- [Food for Faith https://foodforfaith.org.nz/](https://foodforfaith.org.nz/)
- Women Deacons and the Catholic Church-An Explainer. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPgY13vrpKk&ab\\_channel=America-TheJesuitReview](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPgY13vrpKk&ab_channel=America-TheJesuitReview)
- **Pray-As-You-Go** - A recommended app on your phone which provides a daily reflection of the Scripture passage scriptures for the day <https://pray-as-you-go.org/>
- Ignatian Prayer resource - <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/praying-with-scripture/>
- [Pope Francis' Full Address to the Members of the Synod on Synodality](#)



## UPDATES

### EVENTS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE

<https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/events/>

### LAUNCHOUT PASTORAL PRESENTATION

The Candidates will present their parish projects, experiences and reflections on **23 Nov, 9:00-12:00 at the Catholic Centre, Level 2, 204 Thorndon Quay**. Open to Launch Out Graduates and Friends. Email [m.bernardo@wn.catholic.org.nz](mailto:m.bernardo@wn.catholic.org.nz) for details.

**PRAYER DAY WITH MARY KAY, rc.** 19 October 2025. It was a beautiful day and the Home of Compassion was a haven bursting of the wonders of creation. The air was filled with the cacophony of birds chirping and the flora of Island Bay proclaiming the glorious Wellington sunshine. To cap it all, a rainbow appeared to sing with us. Happy to have Telesia join us and missing Bonita. This is our last activity for the year leading to the Pastoral Presentation on 23 November 2025. Time flies. Thank you Mary for loving and wise accompaniment.



## The Church is where the people are: The Aged Care Project of St Mary's of the Angels

By Maya Bernardo  
Formator and Manager

Republished from the [September 2024 issue of Welcom.](#)

National statistics show that our aged population is increasing exponentially. Within our parishes, seniors make up a significant proportion of our ministry and our gatherings. However, this also means that in the near future, when our senior parishioners move on to rest homes or retirement villages outside the suburbs of their old parishes, we could see a significant shift in our parish demographics and a potential drop among our churchgoers. Concomitant with this trend is the shortage of priests, growing complexity in the health and safety and safeguarding policies, and a whole other range of social-economic and political issues surrounding ageing and the care for the aged. Our elderly are now becoming a significant part of the peripheries we are called to encounter.

The best ministries often emerge when the needs of the people cross paths with a group of people who feel called to make a difference. The urban parish of St Mary's of the Angels was faced with the challenge of reaching out to its parishioners who had moved out of Wellington Central, but still feel St Mary's is their spiritual home. What started as visits to former parishioners in their rest homes by Sr Frances Gibbs, long-time parish minister of St Mary's and former nurse, has evolved into a ministry that now covers 11 rest home facilities across Wellington Central and involves about 25 lay volunteers. These volunteers include some Launch Out people: **Telesia Alaimoana (graduate)**, **Terry McAulife (graduate)** and **Rutger Keijser (candidate)**. It also includes a care facility for elderly with disabilities. It has developed its own formation programme, with regular sessions that run on a Saturday once a month at St Joseph's Mount Victoria. Along with Sr Frances, the programme is now run with St Mary's parish priest, Kevin Mowbray and another Marist priest, Jeff Drane.

The ministry has been running for two years, with no official name (it is currently called 'The Aged Care Project'), but it has a solid and distinct spirit that is based on relationship building. The model of aged-care they are promoting is trans-parochial and goes beyond providing the sacraments to the Catholic residents but is also providing support to the staff of the residential facilities. This care also extends to the families of the residents and support ranges from visitations, liaising with the parish, and accompanying families during bereavement. A group of lay people are allocated to specific rest homes, and they collaborate with a group of priests, mostly from the same parish. It is hoped that such a model, or something similar, for this ministry will eventually cover many more rest homes within the whole of the archdiocese.

The traditional configuration of what we call the 'church' is predicated on the parish as its basic organisational unit headed by a parish priest. This model of demarcating territories is centred on a religious edifice (church building) where we all go to worship and gather. The changes in today's world forces the Church to be open to new ways of being church. The Church continues to evolve, and its mystery continues to unfold through our responses to the call of mission--that of spreading the Good News to all the corners of the earth (Mark 16:15).

Church is where the people are; Church is where the greatest needs are. As exemplified by the Aged-Care Project, the Church as the living body of Christ, goes to where the people are. Being present to our elderly to assure them that they will always be part of our church life, and that we stand beside them as they make their most important and final journey to eternal life.



If you are interested to join and support the Aged Care Project, email: [parish.priest@smoa.org.nz](mailto:parish.priest@smoa.org.nz)

## Do This in Memory of Me

By Neil Vaney, sm  
Spiritual Director

There is still an academic debate whether Jesus' last supper was a re-enactment of the original Paschal meal. In many ways that does not matter. What we can be sure of is that it carried the same weight and meaning of all the great Jewish feasts such as Tabernacles or Pentecost. These were not just a retelling of the past but the summoning into the present of the grace, the power and the meaning of the long-gone event itself.

This understanding lives on in our sense of Eucharist. Over the centuries, numerous settings of text, gesture and dress have clothed this ritual – yet the heart of it has never changed; it is the making present of Jesus' death and resurrection.

During my 3-4 weeks at home recovering from prostate surgery I enjoyed a time of seeming inactivity: reading, dozing, praying, and being cared for. In one of those providential incidents that have so often touched my life, God sent me a book, *Why We Remember*, by Dr Charan Ranganath, that opened up vistas of my life once again.

The author is a leading researcher in the understanding of how the human brain works. He writes with authority and clarity. He begins by depicting how so many of us picture memory, something like a computer printout residing in one section of our brain. Not so. His image is of a dynamic and selective actor, constantly forming and reshaping our identity. Our memories are like works of art assembled in different parts of the brain: the frontal lobe, hippocampus and amygdala, each with slightly different functions. We start with a fact or an event, say my fifth birthday or the first time I met my present partner. Then comes interpretation: what impact did it have on me, what aspects do I particularly recall (something shaped by my present needs and biases), and the work of my imagination, filling in the blank gaps. Such moments are often reworked during a lifetime making memory something like a sculptor's chisel, shaping the identity that finally emerges.

This presentation made great sense to me, busy as I have been over the last few years trying to recapture and reinterpret my childhood years, both the great gifts and painful incidents I inherited from my parents and seven siblings parked in a tiny street in the state housing area of Karori where I grew up. Writing a spiritual biography helped but I had recently also visited a



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therapist to try to resolve conflicting images and memories of my dad.

The session opened up for me a far wider vista, reaching back to my grandparents and great grandparents who came to this fledgling colony in the 1860's and 1870's. It brought to life the Irish goldminer scrabbling for gold in the sand of Charleston beach on the wild West Coast, the Cornish soldier who came to fight in the land wars, and the Polish refugees arriving in Lyttleton harbour in 1871. I saw afresh how they were fleeing injustice and prejudice, but were themselves no strangers to violence. Then I began to see my mum as a Polish peasant land girl and my dad as the repository of Irish romantic dreams and sorrows. My own self-portrait sharpened to picture one who fought for the underdog, who slogged

doggedly at hard, persistent work, deeply stoical, yet at the same time filled with a romantic love of beauty, and an abiding relationship with the land, the whenua.

As my memories took flight so did my identity consolidate. No longer was I just Neil, son of Edmund and Evelyn Vaney, but even more the living vessel of my forebears, carrying their hopes and dreams, and passing on to future generations their hopes and gifts.

Part of the insight gained by the charismatic renewal in the Church has been an awareness of the importance of the healing of memories. Graced recall and a powerful experience of forgiveness and self-acceptance have been great blessings to many – but they should not have been an endpoint. What they provided is what Ranganath labels as the entrance into error-laden learning, a constant sharpening and refocusing of our memories, including the blunders and hurts, so consolidating our identity in Christ. Such work leads to growing acceptance and peace, a preparation for the final fulness of life that will open up for us as we pass through the portal of death into eternity.



Copied from <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-10/synod-briefing-day-10-synod-focuses-on-decision-making.html>

As the 2024 session of the Synod began, we heard the news that 'there was currently no basis for ordaining women deacons.' While I had not expected that women deacons would be ordained for some time, maybe not in my lifetime, I did not expect that the door would apparently be slammed shut. More disturbing was the fact that the members of the group, appointed by the Pope to study this matter, were kept secret and their deliberations, as well as the deliberations of the two previous papal commissions set up to study the female diaconate, are not being released to the public. There was a certain irony that this decision was made

during the Synod on Synodality. This was a topic of much interest to many throughout the world, having been raised with the Pope at meetings of women religious and at the Synod on Amazonia, where there was acknowledgment of the important role that women played in that region, as catechists and parish leaders. The interest was so great in the 2023 Synodal discussions that it became one of the groups established for further study.

My reaction was one of sadness, disappointment and a distinct feeling of being undervalued. It reminded me of times when, despite devoting my professional life to the care of those with mental illness, I would often hear poorly informed criticism of mental health services and frankly ignorant comments about those who suffer from such illness. A hurtful and depressing experience.

We are constantly told that being a deacon is a vocation of service. Specifically, charity of service, proclaiming the Gospel, preaching, assisting during Mass, blessing marriages and presiding over baptisms and funerals. In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6: 1-7) we hear of the seven named men being appointed to assist the Apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, as auxiliaries to serve the Christian community.

The history of deacons, especially women deacons, in the Church is interesting and very well summarised in the America Media commentary "Women deacons and the Catholic Church." We should not only rely on ancient history, but look at the story of women in the more recent Church.<sup>1</sup> Even a glance at foundresses of the many 'active' religious orders demonstrates the energy and skill of many women, often despite harsh opposition from the hierarchy, in their founding of orders related to need – nursing, education, social services, care of children, the poor, the dying, and so many other needy groups. Of special interest to me were the women who founded medical orders in defiance of the Vatican's then ban on nuns working as doctors, not changed by Canon Law until 1936. What a legacy of a response of service to needs within the Church and society.

Women know all about service – imagine if they withdrew their work for a week! In my parish alone the Vinnies shop would close; there would be no leadership on the liturgy and faith formation committees; the church would not be cleaned, nor the collection money counted and banked; the accounts would not be done. There would be a less than 25% chance that the Lectio Divina service would be led on the Monday; that you would be greeted at Mass; that the offertory procession would occur; that the scriptures would be proclaimed or communion distributed either at Mass or in the community.

Our context is significant, in that in secular New Zealand we have a tradition of women leading the way – the first country in the world to give the vote to women, and more recently, on a couple of occasions, we have had, concurrently, a woman prime minister, woman chief justice and woman governor-general – positions of service and grave responsibility. And now the joy of a new young Māori queen. My own experience of professional advancement, in New Zealand, was that I was treated as an equal, judged only on my skill and suitability for the job.



*Barbara Rowley's commissioning on 01 October 2006 as Lay Pastoral Leader of St Bernadette's Naenae (now part of Te Awakairangi Parish). In the photo are Cardinal John Dew, on the right Fr Pat Greally and Fr. Patelo Mauga, Parish Priest of St Michael's, Taita. Naenae and Taita then were a pastoral team. Barbara is the 2<sup>nd</sup> woman to be commissioned as LPL, the first one was Cushla Quigan.*

Eminent voices have drawn attention to the situation of the Church, relevant for women's place in it – the late Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, Archbishop of Milan, and *papabile* in the conclave of 2005, shortly before his death in 2012, stated that the Church 'was 200 years out of date'; the late prestigious church historian John O'Malley SJ talks of the Church being stuck in 'the long 19<sup>th</sup> century' and Massimo Faggioli, prolific writer and Theology Professor, has just this month written about the feeling at the Synod that 'something will have to be done about the role of women', quoting Phyllis Zagano as commenting that "'Management' is open to women. 'Ministry' is not."<sup>2</sup>

During the Second Vatican Council (VCI)

much discussion was given to the restoration of the permanent Diaconate. Comment was made that lay men, including married men, were already carrying out the functions of deacons. *Lumen Gentium* §29 outlines both the tasks and the reinstatement of this Order, recommending that men receive "the imposition of the laying on of hands, not for the priesthood, but for the ministry." *Ad Gentes*, The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, §16, also describes how men, already carrying out the roles of "preaching the word of God as catechists, governing scattered Christian communities in the name of the bishop or parish priest, or exercising charity in the performances of social or charitable works" would be "strengthened by the imposition of hands which has come down from the Apostles." "Their ministry would be more fruitful through the sacramental grace of the diaconate."

While the decision to ordain permanent deacons was left to individual bishops, we know that since then many dioceses have included permanent deacons as ordained ministers. Of particular interest to those of us in the Archdiocese of Wellington, is the decision by Cardinal Tom Williams, following the 1998 Wellington Synod, not to ordain men as deacons, but to establish the lay pastoral formation programme for lay pastoral leaders. The fact that, at that time, the permanent diaconate was restricted to men, played no small part in that decision. Since the time of VCI, women have taken up more and more roles in the liturgy such as proclaimers and ministers of communion, despite formal recognition of this not being given by Pope Francis until 2021. Women are prominent in the charitable activities of the parishes, often more so than men.

One issue that Pope Francis raises, in his reluctance to ordain women deacons, is that he does not want women to become clericalised, by joining the ranks of the ordained. I think he should have more faith in women's abilities to work in male dominated environments. In addition, it has often been remarked that if women were more involved in the running of the Church, there would be better safeguarding against abuse of all types. Again, we have an excellent example of that in St Mary McKillop, who, long before there was much acknowledgment of the problem, exposed clerical sexual abuse, in 1871, in Australia. She suffered excommunication for that disclosure, but later was completely exonerated by an episcopal commission.

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My thoughts now turn to the Gospel, specifically to the role of women. It is interesting to note that at the beginning and end of Jesus' life women played very important roles. Obviously, we would not have welcomed the Son of God to the world without Mary, but it is her response to the message of the Angel and her interaction with her cousin Elizabeth, who recognised her as the Mother of God, which are so impressive. This is no passive young girl, but a brave and faith-filled young woman who grasped the enormity of the situation and accepted this huge responsibility. Not just carrying and delivering the child, but raising Him and staying with Him in His ministry, until the tragic end. In my journey to the Catholic Church, I had no concerns about the importance of Mary, which is often a stumbling block for converts. I had always had great admiration for this woman, whose ability to listen to God and to respond, was such a model of faith and a challenge to us all to imitate.

And then we have Mary Magdalene, being the one to recognise the Resurrection and, as a result, being given the title of Apostle to the Apostles. As well as these very dramatic and important roles being fulfilled by women, we have the references to the women following Jesus, and, particularly the loyalty of the women at the time of the crucifixion, when many disciples had run away in fear. We are often reminded that the role of women was different in the first century, which makes their recognition as people of great importance in the life of Jesus, all the more significant.

I am grateful to Pope Francis for his involvement of women in roles within the Roman Curia, and to significant appointments to bodies such as the International Theological Commission, and I suppose that has raised our hopes that the journey to the diaconate would be relatively smooth and timely. The disappointment is great, as it appears to perpetuate the idea that women cannot aspire to an outward recognition of their importance within the Church, despite currently carrying out the tasks of deacons. It also seems ironic that the Synod puts great emphasis on mission – yet not acknowledging the importance of women in evangelisation – the very essence of mission. I do, however, take comfort in the history of the Church, where we have seen thoughtful, deeply faithful theologians and educationalists often vilified, condemned, and restricted in their practice, only to be later recognised as prophetic influential teachers in the Church.

I pray that the path to the female permanent diaconate may be similarly redeemed, and I will trust in the Communion antiphon for the day that I write this, taken from the aptly named Old Testament book of Lamentations "The Lord is good to those who hope in Him; to the soul that seeks Him. (3:25).

<sup>1</sup> Youtube.com/waratch?v=zPgY13vrKk

<sup>2</sup> Massimo Faggioli, "From Management to Ministry?" *Commonweal* October 1, 2014.