

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 for 2025!

November invites us into deeper reflection on what it means to be *in communion with the saints*, as professed in the Nicene Creed. It is a time to remember our departed loved ones and the holy people whose lives offer concrete examples of discipleship. This month also holds the World Day of the Poor (17th) and the Solemnity of Christ the King. These are seemingly distinct observances that, in truth, are deeply interconnected in the life of the Church.

During a recent prayer day with Cardinal John, he shared the Augustinian value of oneness of all things in Christ. This insight offers a lens through which we can see November's themes not as separate, but as unified in the mystery of God's presence in all things.

Vicky Raw's reflection on the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time emphasizes the need to *prepare with hope*. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple; words that feel foreboding. I imagine myself among the listeners, pressing Jesus for details so I can prepare. As human beings, we are wired to prepare, especially when danger looms. But Vicky reminds us that hope is not just the best way to prepare; it is the only way.

Neil Vaney SM and **Bridget Taumoepeau** offer further insights into preparation for death and in the work of the Church. Neil's essay explores two ways of approaching death: in denial or in faith. As followers of Christ, we choose faith, and we nurture it through prayer. Bridget shares her experience speaking at the Conference of the Major Superiors of the Pacific Islands (CMSPI) in Fiji, reflecting on lay formation within the framework of synodality. Both invite us to confront hard realities of death and the challenges facing the Church.

To these realities, I would add the plight of the poor. Poverty is the condition that most deeply concerns God. In *Dilexi Te*, Pope Leo's first Apostolic Exhortation, we are reminded that God chooses the poor. Yet in the realm of material preparation, the poor are often left behind. Most often they cannot prepare for natural disasters and are often casualties of national leaders' unguided and unguilted decisions.

Poverty often programs the poor into a cycle of helplessness. As Christians, our truth is our oneness with Christ and in that oneness, our solidarity with everyone, especially those made poor. Preparing for eternal life is not an isolated undertaking; we will be held into account for what we did for the poor (Mt 25:40). This is at the heart of the Church's mission of evangelization and our discipleship calling.

Vicky's invitation to prepare with hope is not abstract. It is a call to live prayerfully, to face our own challenges with trust, and to allow prayer to remind us of our unity in Christ, our true Sovereign. In prayer, we are guided by Christ, who unifies, heals, and prepares the world through and for us.

Maya Bernardo,

Migrant Ministry & Formation Coordinator



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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Preparing with hope

A Reflection on the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 21: 5-19

Victoria Raw
Launch Out Candidate



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We are about to enter the penultimate week in the liturgical year and today's Gospel leaves us in no doubt that end times are also real and upon us. The Gospel starts off with those around Jesus admiring the beauty of the Temple but he turns their enthusiasm into confusion as he says that it will all come tumbling down – everything will be destroyed. His proclamation of the destruction of the Temple was referring to his own body as well as the physical building in AD.70. This double meaning was totally lost on those around him. All they wanted to know was when and how the Temple building was going to be destroyed.

I had a great friend who once told me that she read the last few pages of a book to find out what the ending was before she started the book. I was shocked as it had never occurred to me that someone would do this. In my mind this would spoil the journey of the story, the character developments and the build up to the final moment. If I knew what the ending was I probably wouldn't bother reading the book.

In a way this may be what Jesus was trying to teach those (and us) in his Gospel: you need to know what the end is in order to prepare for it. Yes, there will be difficulties that will up-end the natural and physical world that we live in. We only have to see what is going on today with wars, famines, hurricanes and high winds, floods and violence in our streets. This is not just overseas but it is also in Aotearoa, New Zealand. We live in a very seismically active country and the evening news is filled with shocking events. It can leave one feeling hopeless and helpless.

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Maybe on a smaller level there are hurdles and challenges that we face at home, at work or even in the supermarket. When we just have to grit our teeth, write that email, make that phone call or give when we would rather not. Each of these little things can build up to be like a war that is raging or a hurricane that is unsettling us internally if they are not done.

We need courage not just in the big things but in these small things too, so that they actually get done. All courage and persistence needs to be based on Christ so that once the fears are conquered in faith they no longer become the monster that seemed to overpower us.

To be prepared for what God asks of us, we must first pray for the courage to respond. No matter how dark or hard things are it is not the end. But how we face these moments – big or small – matters and makes a difference. There is more to this life than what we just see and know superficially. The death and resurrection of Jesus – the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple of his Body is testament to this. He conquered death by restoring new life.

There are things that are worth dying for and others that are worth living for despite everything all around us pointing to darkness. Despite trials and persecutions we are asked by Jesus to walk in hope, courage and perseverance particularly in the darkness in order to become bearers of God's light.

Personally, this is certainly an unnerving and scary prospect. Will I get it right? Will I clam up out of fear? Will I back down? Will I? Jesus is quick to add, before his listeners have time to make these excuses: "make up your mind not (my emphasis) to prepare your defence because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict."

This reminds me of Jesus, not much later, being put on trial in front of the Sanhedrin and then taken to Pilate. In each case Jesus' answers were not what his accusers were expecting. His eloquence throughout his ministry brought about changes in people's lives that had never been experienced before.

So, in fact, we know what the end is. Knowing what happened to Jesus should give us hope. His death was not the end – his resurrection was the up-ending of his gruesome, but necessary, crucifixion. Through his redemption of our sins he has given us our salvation. As pilgrims of hope, in this year of jubilee this is indeed something to hold on to.

Our perseverance will be what saves us in the end.

In this month of November we remember and pray for those that we know (and don't know) that they may rest in eternal peace and that their perseverance will bring them to the fulfilment of salvation which is new life in Heaven with all the other saints and angels. The Communion of Saints – our ancestors, our companions in life and the children of tomorrow. – is such a wonderful mystery to contemplate. The past, the present and the future are deeply interconnected.

One day we will all be one when we rest in the Lord. Whilst we are still on earth our restless search can only find peace and fulfilment from the One as 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you' (St. Augustine).



UPDATES & ONLINE RESOURCES

Hephep hooray!

Six to seven years of online and face-to-face classes, late nighters and mulling over theological topics--finally over! A mix of relief, disbelief and gratitude from our graduands--

Jude McKee, Victoria Raw and Bernadette Patelesio.

Jude (in picture with her sister Carmel and brother-in-law, Mike), Victoria Raw finished their qualifications from Te Kupenga. Jude attended the graduation in Auckland; and carried the Launch Out flag for us. She successfully finished the New Zealand Diploma in Christian Studies-Christian Leadership Strand (NZDCS-CL); Vicky finished the same degree. Bernadette finished the New Zealand Certificate in Christian Studies-Christian Ministry (NZCCS-CM).



Prayer Day with Cardinal John

What a better way to end the year than a day of prayer with Cardinal John Dew. John led us into an Augustinian reflection. There were two themes of John's reflection - *Oneness and Rest*, and they are connected. It is seeing the oneness of all things in Christ which allows us to rest in Christ. This was definitely an expansion and deepening of the Ignatian Spirituality we have soaked up in the past years under Pope Francis.

Vicky gave us tokens of her trip to Fatima along with marmite-flavoured crisps. Happy to have our dear brother Rutger with us. And most of all, grateful to be able to have it at the Home of Compassion.



- Latest issue of **Welcom** https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/adw_community/welcom-issue-2-out-now/
- **CathNews New Zealand** <https://cathnewsnz.com/> - An online resource produced by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC). Please sign and subscribe.
- Resource for Sunday homilies and reflection where Launch Out Candidates occasionally guest - **Food for Faith** <https://foodforfaith.org.nz/>
- New free Catholic online resource. Founders are: Dr Joseph Grayland, Michael Kelly SJ, John Murphy, SM and Professor Thomas O' Loughlin - **Flashes of Insight** <https://flashesinsight.com/>
- **Delixi Te** - first apostolic exhortation of Pope Leo https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html
- **Breathe of Grace** is a meditative way of praying the Hail Mary. Thanks to Regina Daly for recommending.
- Recommendations from Bridget:
 - ◇ **Women in Church**- For Pete's Sake- A Vatican Podcast with Stephanie MacGillivray- Senior Officer at Caritas Internationalis <https://youtu.be/ypKEKYEPJCQ?si=JiWvaLn8utQsgLXE>
 - ◇ **The Spiritual Life**- A podcast by Fr James Martin S. J. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFA_2Z1L-3tq0x873_jc5I9lDhuC3V9P4



A Christian approach to death

By: Neil Vaney, SM

Introduction

Published in 1973, *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker had a deep impact – and still does. Becker wrote from a psychological and philosophical viewpoint. His insights, though not mainly religious, have strong implications for Christian faith. Writing a decade or two later, the French anthropologist, Rene Girard (1923-2015), touched the depths of our faith beliefs, especially his analysis of why and how Jesus died the way he did, executed on a cross.

These thoughts came back to me recently because of the death of my sister Ena. Younger to me by three years, stomach cancer took her so quickly, just two months ago. Deeply spiritual, she received many assurances of prayer from friends in prayer groups, telling her that they were praying for a miracle. Her response? “Please don’t – I am ready to let go and meet my Lord.” In her honour, I offer some reflections mirroring the insights I obtained from Becker and Girard.

Becker’s Vision

Becker explored human desires, notably the wish most of us experience, somehow to make a mark in life, to achieve something notable and memorable. Yet, gnawing away at this, is the spectre of death, a growing sense that life is short, and can be snuffed out like a candle flame; the same for those we love. His research focused on ways in which most people (particularly those in Western industrialized societies) attempt to ignore or avoid the inevitability of death. He highlights the fashions and trends that strive to hide this remorseless reality. Just think of the vast sums spent on creams and lotions to conceal the wrinkles and stretch marks that record the passing of time, or to mask greying hair; also, the way in which 70- and 80-year-olds (normally sequestered in retirement homes) are lauded for amazing feats of running marathons or rowing skiffs – “at their age!”

Girard’s Vision

It was Girard’s extensive studies of global cultures that led him from a dormant Catholicism to a fervent faith. His analysis of highly diverse cultures showed him that the role and practice of sacrifice were deeply embedded in them all. He used the categories of mimesis and scapegoating to explain this universal behaviour. Mimesis is enshrined in the way we learn, principally by imitation, a critical dimension in our first decade of life when we are utterly dependent on parents and caregivers. This is how we imbibe, like our mother’s milk, the fears, hopes, beliefs and prejudices that animate our early life. We are the sum of those who loved us or failed to love us, carrying their hopes, strengths and failings, fears and biases, unless we challenge them, till we die. A critical part of this is how we deal with failures in our lives and in the groups in which we grow up. Girard noticed the virtually universal way in which civic and religious leaders singled out individuals or groups who believed or lived differently – Jews, Moslems, immigrants – blaming them for the ills of their world, in this way uniting people to believe that their hopes for a brighter future rested in eliminating such dissidents, whose lives were to be sacrificed to unite a renewed and purified society.



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Girard also noticed that the Bible contained a creed that ran counter to this pattern. This insight led to his profound religious conversion. He saw Jesus as a powerful and charismatic leader who pointed out and denounced the domination and control of the Jewish leaders and their use of the Torah (Jewish law) to enforce a rigid conformity on their people, made holy by the innumerable sacrifices of cattle and sheep carried out in the temple in Jerusalem. Betrayed and hunted down, Jesus refused the intervention of his followers and his God, instead accepting a shameful and terrible death, trusting in his Father's love, uttering the words, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. "(Luke 23.34) Meeting violence by violence, hatred by hatred, would never free the world; only love could do this.

A Christian Approach to Death

How then should we, who believe in Jesus' love and power to save us, prepare to meet our death? The answer is simple but difficult. It is through prayer. St Teresa of Avila described prayer as spending time with the One who knows and loves us most. Many of us find it very difficult to conceive of prayer in this way; we have been brought up to see it as a time when we tell God what we want, say we are sorry for our sins, and acknowledge His power and control. Yet, as Teresa pictures it, prayer is more of a loving dialogue, marked by listening as much as by talking. In fact, as love and communication grow, fewer and fewer words are needed. So too with Godly talk. We need to sit in openness to the divine Word. Only seldom does that come in the form of audible words or illuminating insights. Normally such efforts to pray will be plagued by distractions, anxieties and awareness of our inability to grasp the otherness and incomprehensibility of God. It is akin to a spiritual dying, slow and painful. Yet as we let go, and let God, a deep surrender and self-acceptance will come to us. We know we are loved and forgiven beyond our wildest dreams. Gradually this awareness will reshape our life, preparing us to awaken to an inconceivable love when we have walked through the doors of death.



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Formation, Formation, Formation!

Bridget Taumoepeau
Pastoral Mentor

Recently I attended the Conference of the Major Superiors of the Pacific Islands (CMSPI) at the Regional Pacific Seminary (PRI) in Suva, Fiji. The theme, following on from the last meeting in 2023, was *Formation – Lay, Initial and Ongoing – in a Synodal Church*. My role was as the chair of the panel on lay formation.

We were fortunate to have Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, OP and Sr Maria Cimperman RSCJ as keynote speakers. Cardinal Timothy gave the retreat reflections for the Synod meetings in Rome (now collected as a book – ‘Listening Together’) and Sr Maria, a professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, was invited to be a non-voting expert at the Synod and is now on Group 2 of the Study Groups – Listening to the Cry of the Poor.

Attendees at the Conference came from all over the Pacific, as well as New Zealand and Australia – bishops; priests, both religious and diocesan; religious sisters and brothers, as well as laity. The Papal Nuncio and his Secretary, based in Wellington, also attended the last two days. On the lay panel were Cardinal John Dew, Archbishop Emeritus of Wellington; Susie Sela, who represents Oceania at the Synod; Arthur Groom, the executive director of Caritas in Fiji; Joleen Mataele, representing the LGBTQ+ community and myself.

The first day was devoted to the importance of synodality, and then each day the different aspects of formation were discussed with panel presentations and conversations in the spirit. While there are aspects of formation which are unique to different groups within the church, there are many overlaps and themes began to emerge. One feature of the conference, which emphasised the principle of the importance of everyone in this process, was the agreement that we would not use titles. Refreshing to hear the Nuncio being called Gabor, or our brother Gabriel!

The themes and suggestions were collated and presented to the conference for acceptance. As well as this being important for participants to take away and work towards implementing in their communities, the CMSPI executive will share these recommendations with CEPAC, the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific. One theme to emerge was the intention of CMSPI and CEPAC to work more closely together and to have cross representation at their meetings. Oceania is a huge geographical area, with many different cultures, communities and histories. Many island societies are poor and are seriously impacted by global warming and climate change. There are practical difficulties in travel within the Pacific, and often unsatisfactory internet connections, so these meetings and connections are by no means easy to pursue. Hence conferences of this type are all the more important and influential.



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And so, we come to the recommendations (they are preliminary, as they will be finalised by the conference organisers). They were expressed as barriers to formation, with suggested solutions. In reading this, the context of the Pacific should be remembered.

Firstly, there was agreement that formation is important for everyone. Acknowledged barriers for laity were the limited and/or unstructured formation programmes, leading to a lack of accessible opportunities for learning and growth, with the solution being the development of ongoing, context-sensitive formation programmes with clear plans, resources and opportunities for laity to grow in faith, leadership and synodality. It was also noted that there was an absence or under representation of women, youth and marginalised groups in decision-making and leadership roles. The obvious solution for these shortcomings was the promotion of the involvement of these groups to promote a shared mission and participation. Insufficient funds and human resources were also identified as barriers. As well as allocating funds for formation laity were encouraged to share resources by communicating with other parishes, communities and institutes to implement formation programmes, support lay initiatives and maintain long-term continuity to improve efficiency and lower costs. Clericalism was also mentioned as a barrier to the delegation of responsibility for formation to laity, and for hindering shared responsibility for pastoral and formation work.

Two issues that were not emphasised were, firstly, the drop in vocations – while this is an issue in the Pacific, probably particularly in the female religious orders, there is still a relatively high rate of priestly vocations.

Secondly, the idea of accessing free formation via websites, podcasts, webinars etc was mentioned, but was not taken up much in the discussions. This latter issue is one that could be easily promoted in New Zealand as a way of laity keeping in touch with developments within the church, as well as undertaking a more academic approach to the faith.

The week was stimulating; a great opportunity for networking; very positive in its general outlook and a great opportunity to share ideas and encourage each other. Hopefully there will be concrete results in the form of improvement in all aspects of formation – lay, initial and ongoing. It is up to the participants to see how they can implement the ideas that were discussed. A follow up of progress might be one way to keep us moving forward.