

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 December issue of the Launch Out Letters (LOL)!

A friend of a friend recently shared about being confronted by a non-Christian who indignantly asked: “What has Jesus got to do with Christmas?!”

In this issue, **Margaret Bearsley** offers a reflection on the Nativity Gospel and her article and its title provide an excellent response to that question. The sad part is not that non-Christians fail to understand Christmas; the real tragedy is that many Christians may not either, even if we faithfully observe the Advent traditions.

No matter how many Christmases we’ve celebrated, Margaret’s opening questions--*What does the Nativity mean? What does Christmas mean?* are questions we need to continuously ask, as they invite us to rediscover the true gift that Christmas brings- that is, God’s self-emptying for us.

As Christmas increasingly becomes “that long-awaited holiday at the end of the year”--a reset before facing the next (fair enough), it is vital, not only to remember but to enter into the journey of the Holy Family and marvel at God’s design in the history of salvation.

For her final article of the year, **Bridget Taumoepeau** connects the Nativity message with the justice issues in our time, particularly what I would call the politicisation of theology to suit the agenda of the powerful. The context of Jesus’ birth was as chaotic as ours. The world was not preparing for His coming; in fact, the powerful of that time dreaded it. He did not receive a king’s welcome, yet His humble arrival speaks volumes about the kind of King and Kingdom, He came to bring.

We also share photos from the last Pastoral Presentation of **Margaret Bearsley, Jude McKee, Bernadette Patelesio** and **Vicky Raw**. It is a fitting celebration before Te Hao Nui – Launch Out takes a pause as we build new formation programmes that could attract more candidates in the future. This edition also includes a tribute to past graduates; the shoulders we stand on, who made Launch Out, not just as a formation programme but a ministry that brought forth many ministries.

On behalf of the Candidates, Pastoral Mentors (**Bridget Taumoepeau, Susan Apathy, Mary Jackson Kay, RC, and Neil Vaney SM**) and Spiritual Directors (**Regina Daly PBVM, Clare O’Connor RC, and Neil Vaney SM**), we wish you all a blessed Christmas and a hope-filled New Year. May this Christmas fill us with a sense of awe at God’s self-gifting and may that wonderment transform us to be bearers of hope to the world.

Maya Bernardo,

Migrant Ministry & Formation Coordinator

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*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

For comments and suggestions email:

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

Never hang a jandal on the Christmas tree!

Margaret Bearsley
Launch Out Graduate

A Reflection on the Nativity of Jesus

Luke 21: 5-19

At Midnight Mass we will hear, and hopefully I will be awake enough to listen to, Luke's account of the Nativity of the Lord (Lk 2: 1 – 14).

What does the Nativity mean? What does Christmas mean? For Christians and non-Christians alike, it seems Christmas means family time, food, drink and presents. Christians and non-Christians alike can readily associate Christmas with: Peace on Earth and goodwill to all!

And Johnny Mathis fills our hearts with his velvet voice:

*A ray of hope flickers in the sky
A tiny star lights up way up high
All across the land, dawns a brand new morn
This comes to pass, when a child is born*

We usually sing this in my parish during the half-hour of Carols before Midnight Mass. It always makes me cry; it's just so beautiful.

'The world' would have us think that Christmas is about the innocence and the hope, in a general sense, that all newborn children epitomise—hope for the future, and for the possibilities of greatness or heroism that might lie hidden within this newborn child.

But for Christians, Christmas is actually a story of the battle of two worlds. The world represented by Caesar – or Lord – Augustus is the world of power, domination, might, and violence. The world represented by Christ *Our Lord* is a world of the power of *kenosis*, of the self-emptying of God. It is the story of the Almighty God taking on the form of the 'creature', humanity, and therefore, it is already the story of the Cross.

This year, our Midnight Mass Nativity reading is Luke's version, and so we have the manger and the shepherds. These are essential to the message in Luke's account (note: no Wise Men on camels for Luke!).

The manger is so important in Luke's Nativity scene that it is mentioned three times, in Chapter 2 verses 6, 12, and 16. Why? Both St Augustine and St Cyril of Alexandria refer to the manger's allegorical significance, as pointing to the Eucharist: just as a feeding trough provides food for animals, so Christ in the manger provides his own body for believers, in the bread of life. There is much to be said for this allegorical reading.

Many, including Pope Francis, see the manger and swaddling clothes as signs of Christ having been born into poverty. And that is a helpful reminder of God's preferential option for the poor being highlighted right from the moment of the Incarnation.

I do love, however, the Scripture scholars' reading of the manger. One of my very favourite Scripture scholars is the late great RE Brown. In his magnificent work on the Infancy Narratives, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Doubleday, New York, 1999), he explains that, rather than symbolising poverty, the manger and the swaddling clothes symbolise something quite different.

First **the manger**: The manger relates to the complaint in Isaiah 1: 3 "*The ox knows its owner; and the donkey knows the manger of its lord; but Israel has not known me; my people has not understood me*". So, in his Infancy Narrative, Luke would be proclaiming that God's complaint made through his prophet Isaiah, has been repealed. The shepherds have been sent to the manger to find the Lord who is the source of joy for all people.



It is not Caesar Augustus, the most powerful ruler on earth, who brings peace and joy. No! As the angel of the Lord said when he appeared to the shepherds near Bethlehem, *“Be not afraid; for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord”* (Lk 2: 10 - 11).

The shepherds go and, finding the baby in the manger, begin to praise God. This is the reversal of Isaiah 1: 3. God’s people have begun to know the manger of their Lord! Ironically, God’s people here are the poor and outcast. Shepherds were very low in the social order. So, while the manger might not, in Luke’s thought, have been a symbol of Christ being born into poverty (and the next point on the swaddling clothes suggests why this might be the case) the appearance of the angels to shepherds, in the grazing land around Bethlehem, is entirely consistent with Luke’s Good News being proclaimed to the poor (Lk 4: 18).

Now for **the swaddling clothes**: Sticking with RE Brown’s *Birth of the Messiah*, Brown suggests that the swaddling may be a sign that Israel’s Messiah is not poor or an outcast among his people, but rather is properly received and cared for as King. Wisdom 7: 4 – 5 has Solomon, the wealthiest of Judah’s kings, affirming, *“I was nursed with care in swaddling clothes. For no king has had a different beginning of existence”*. Accordingly, Luke is telling us that Jesus, being born in the city of David, and in a manger, is now sustaining God’s people who have recognised him. He is swaddled just as David’s son, King Solomon, was.

I N R I

Let’s face it, New Zealand society identifies Christmas with the ‘silly season’ of wearing reindeer head-gear and flashing bauble earrings, having boozy parties and too much food, and then selling unwanted gifts on TradeMe. I get that secular Christmas trees have Kiwiana decorations. How else do you turn a religious festival into something fun for non-believers?

It may be that indigenous symbols could add a significant layer of meaning to our Nativity sets—think of the magnificent Ko Hāta Maria, te Matua Wahine o te Atua, the “Holy Mary Mother of God” painting created by Damien Walker, situated in St Mary of the Angels in Wellington—but I have yet to see a serious Māori Nativity set.

Let’s never ‘enculturate’ our Nativity sets with Kiwiana. The Incarnation is a peculiarly Judeo Christian event. There is no other way to understand why the Nativity scene sits in the shadow of the Cross. Sorry Johnny, but the hope of the newborn babe Jesus is SO MUCH MORE than just a brand new morn! Never hang a jandal on the Christmas tree!



ONLINE RESOURCES

- 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/>
- Move over Netflix here's something new for a movie night- **Leo from Chicago- The Documentary** (52:03 minutes) <https://youtu.be/DsXlp4trJkk>
- Advent Resources - IgnatianSpirituality.com (a service of Loyola Press)- <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/advent/>



LAUNCH OUT BOOKS

The following books will soon be available in e-book format. If you receive a monthly copy of *LOL*, we'll let you know when they're released—and you might even receive a complimentary copy as a thank-you for your support! If you want to know more about these books, email me at m.bernardo@wn.catholic.org.nz

Launching into the Deep: Going to the heart of lay vocation and leadership in the Church

By Bridget Tamoepeau

Bridget's book documents the history of Launch Out and Lay Pastoral Leaders in the ADW, against the background of the history of laity in the Church and the impact of Vatican II. Her book also captures the influence of Pope Francis in shaping lay leadership and vocation in the future.

Can the Catholic Church answer my questions? Come and see

By Margaret Bearsley

Margaret's book is written for those who are seeking for meaning in their lives and wondering if the Catholic faith can be what they are looking for. It is written for those with no prior knowledge of Catholicism, or any faith tradition. It is meant as a resource for OCIA.



A day to remember



On 22 November, we gathered in joy and gratitude as **Bernadette Patelesio** (*Te Wairua Tapu Parish*), **Victoria Raw** (*Te Whetu o Moana Parish*), **Margaret Bearsley** (*Holy Trinity Parish*), and **Jude McKee** (*St Theresa's Plimmerton*) shared their final pastoral presentations, reflecting on 6–7 years of formation through the Te Hao Nui – Launch Out program.

It was a day filled with wisdom, laughter, and thanksgiving, attended by Archbishop Paul Martin, pastoral mentors, spiritual directors, family, parish, and colleagues.

Archbishop Paul gave a heartwarming message of congratulations to the graduates. He asked them to continue their ministries in the parishes. Pastoral Mentors gave their response to the valedictory of the graduates. Mary Ann Greaney spoke on behalf of the alumni, and Christine Walkerdine led the closing prayer.

Bernadette, Vicky, Margaret and Jude will celebrate the completion of their formation with a mass in their parishes next year.

We give thanks for their dedication and commitment to serving our communities. And we give thanks for the gift of formation.





The shoulders we stand on

A tribute to past Launch Out graduates.

*I gathered the group photos and compiled them through this collage. Many of the faces you see below are familiar and have been shapers and movers of parish life across the archdiocese. Thank you for giving such strong and inspiring shoulders to stand on. From 2002 to 2025, Launch Out has produced a total of 37 graduates, including 13 Lay Pastoral Leaders and 9 employed by either the ADW or NZCBC for ministries. The rest are drivers and movers in their parishes and communities. Special thanks to the first Formator--**Joan McFetridge**. The catch was great, but so is the net. All glory to the God who called and launched us! --Maya*



*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





LAUNCH OUT GRADUATES

2006-2019

- 1 Barbara Rowley (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 2 Chris Walkerdine (ADW Ministry)
- 3 Cushla Quigan (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 4 David Wootton (Prison Chaplain)
- 5 Debbie Matheson (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 6 Eleanor Hautler
- 7 Esther Saldanah (Hospital Chaplain)
- 8 Fiona Rammell (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 9 Fr Matthew White (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 10 Gordon McConnell
- 11 Jackie Jansen (Prison Chaplain)
- 12 Joe Green (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 13 Justin Hills +
- 14 Karen Holland (Lay Pastoral Ministry & Director, Catholic Social Services)
- 15 Kevin Crighton
- 16 Kilian de Lacy (Senior prison chaplain NZCBC)
- 17 Kitty McKinley (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 18 Lisa Beech
- 19 Lucienne Hensel (ADW Ministry)
- 20 Malia Vito Tupai
- 21 Margaret Luping (Hospital Chaplain)
- 22 Mary Ann Greaney (ADW Ministry)
- 23 Mary Margaret Schuck +
- 24 Mary-Ann Peetz (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 25 Merrick Mitchell (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 26 Mikaela Teofilo (Lay Pastoral Leader, Samoan Chaplaincy)
- 27 Monica O'Connell
- 28 Patsy Buttle (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 29 Sesilia Matealiga +
- 30 Sharon Penny (Lay Pastoral Leader)
- 31 Telesia Alaimoana
- 32 Terry McAuliffe
- 33 Tony Lenton (Senior Hospital Chaplain, NZCBC)

2020-2025

- 34 Bernadette Patelesio
- 35 Jude McKee
- 36 Margaret Bearsley
- 37 Victoria Raw

Ancient yet new

Bridget Taumoepeau
Pastoral Mentor



Advent is upon us – the time of waiting in anticipation for the birth of Christ. The liturgical colour is purple, signifying penance and preparation for Christ's birth. The colour represents a time for solemn reflection, introspection, and repentance, as believers prepare for the coming of Jesus. It is sometimes difficult to turn our minds to these thoughts, as we view Christmas as a joyful time, in contrast to the other period of purple, Lent, when we are preparing for the sadness of the Passion and Crucifixion, albeit followed by the glory of the Resurrection.

Yet there are so many links between the two celebrations – obviously the beginning and the end

of Jesus' earthly life, but also the mystery of God's gift to us of His Son here on earth amongst us. The secularisation and commercialisation of Christmas tend to obscure the true beauty of the Incarnation. Not only its beauty, but the beginning of an extraordinary life with all its teaching and presence of God in our lives.

As we remember this event and imagine it afresh, we should place ourselves in that time. The difficult political situation – the Jews being governed from Rome; the census demanding that they travel back to Bethlehem, despite Mary's advanced pregnancy; the difficulty in finding shelter; the simple life of the family; their working-class roots. And then as the early days of Jesus' life play out there are more worries – only being able, because of poverty, to take the most modest gift to the Temple for His presentation; the strange and worrying prophesy that Mary's heart will be pierced with sorrow and then the terror of knowing that they must flee, as refugees, to save the child's life, in light of the threats of the ruler, Herod.

This is not just a charming ancient tale that we know by heart, but a reminder that for many these days, similar experiences are their reality. It is sobering to think that God chose to bring us His Son in such circumstances. *Dilexi Te*, the beautiful Apostolic Exhortation started by Pope Francis and completed by Pope Leo, reminds us of how Jesus 'identified Himself with the lowest ranks of society', pouring out His love to the end, confirming the dignity of every human being, especially those who are 'weak, scorned or suffering.'

And as for ourselves - how we repeat the sins of indifference to suffering; intolerance of the 'other'; the scandal of Christmas feasts, while many go hungry; choosing to ignore the Gospel message that this little Child will grow up to teach us; picking and choosing which part of that message we will adopt in our own lives. Pope Leo pointed out to us this type of hypocrisy, when recently he commented that to be anti-abortion, yet to be in agreement with the inhuman treatment of immigrants in America, is not pro-life behaviour. While we may cherish the life of Jesus, yet ignore the needs of those around us, we are forgetting His message that by failing to care for others we are failing to care for Him. (Mt 25) Easy to love a little Child, and innocent baby, but harder to love grown up people around us – our neighbours.

Just as the Nativity heralded a new era –the extraordinary gift of God, sending us His Son in human form, so it is the time for us to start anew, knowing that the Child will become the bearer of God's message for us, our Saviour.

Unlike the disciples themselves, we know what transpired; we know the way it will play out. But do we truly listen to the message and the teaching? Do we, every day, endeavour to live a loving, joyful, non-judgemental life, loving God and our neighbour?

Photo by Sergey Zhesterev on Unsplash

LITANY OF TRANSFORMATION

Jesus, You took what was ordinary and made it extraordinary.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You took what was lost and brought it to light.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You took what the world holds in contempt and turned it into a treasure.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You took what was broken and made it whole.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You took wind and storm and brought peace to the raging sea.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You listened with love and gave the voiceless, hope and courage.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You took our sin and shame, and forgave us, filling us with peace.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You took bread and wine and turned it into it into Your body and blood.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You triumphed over death and opened the door to everlasting life.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*

Jesus, You took our little offering and turned it into a blessing that multiplies for Your glory.

Response: *We praise Your wonder o God*



Unknown Author

Photo by [Suzanne D. Williams](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Formation is a journey of transformation. I saw the prayer above from the old files of Launch Out. It didn't say who the author was and I failed to find its origin online. I revised it and used it as the opening prayer for the Pastoral Presentation last 22 November 2026- Maya