

Marist Fathers Australia District Circular

December 2025

From the District Superior

A Christmas Homily

"Our Gospel passage tonight begins with an extraordinary exercise of political power. The emperor Caesar Augustus issues a decree. He's a powerful man. The most powerful man in the ancient world. He has the power to compel everyone to stop what they're doing, to put their lives on hold, and return to their home towns to be registered.

And then the Gospel account moves from the great and the powerful, from

Caesar Augustus, to Mary and Joseph, a carpenter and his betrothed who live in the village of Nazareth in Galilee.

Caesar's decree couldn't have come at a worse time for Joseph and Mary. Mary was well into her pregnancy, and the baby was due any time now. But Caesar's decree was law, and they had to set out from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

They had no arrangements in place for accommodation, and when they arrived, there was nowhere to stay.

So Jesus was born in poverty and deprivation, and the very circumstances of his birth proclaimed loudly that his kingdom was not of this world. And an event which would alter the course of human history like no other passed all but unnoticed on that first Christmas night.

The birth was announced by an angel, but not to Caesar Augustus, or to the High Priest, or to anyone with power and influence.

The angel sought out some local shepherds who were doing it tough, camped out with their sheep in the fields. And that night the powerful and the influential, tucked up in their beds, snored on throughout the night, totally unaware of the birth of Jesus.

And as it was at the beginning, so it would be at the end of Jesus' life. By and large the influential and the powerful people ignored Jesus, were offended by him, and eventually put him to death.

His message found a hearing mainly among fishermen, shepherds,

prostitutes, public sinners, the needy and the neglected. Jesus' birth was the fulfilment of



Mary's Magnificat:

*"My soul glorifies the Lord
My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
He looks on his servant in her
lowliness,
Henceforth all generations will call be
blessed.
The Almighty works marvels for me,
holy his name.
His mercy is from age to age on those
who fear him.
He puts forth his arm in strength and
scatters the proud-hearted.
He casts the mighty from their
thrones, and raises the lowly.
He fills the starving with good things,
sends the rich away empty".*

In the birth of Jesus, God came among us quietly, humbly, gently and unobtrusively. And the only qualification for sharing in the Good News of Christmas is that we recognise our need.

Sometimes we are all too aware of the reality of sin and weakness in our own lives, and in the world in which we live. Christmas enables us to look that reality in the face, and still come away hopeful and joyful.

If we humbly recognise our need, and keep on trying to live our Christian lives, keep on trying to overcome our weakness and our failings, however inadequately we do that, then we can be absolutely confident that's God's grace and God's forgiveness will always make up for whatever may be lacking in us.

The good news of Christmas is that our salvation depends ultimately not on us and on our sometimes-inadequate efforts, but rather that it's a free gift from God.

Our second reading tonight gave us the hope-filled words of St Paul:

"God's grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race and taught us that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God, while we are waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ".

Tonight is a night of great hope and joy for the whole human family. The feast of Christmas highlights and celebrates our destiny, a destiny that is ours as sons and daughters of the Father, and brothers and sisters of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have a lot to celebrate. And we pray this night that we will all come to share in the divinity of Christ, who on this night humbled himself to share in our humanity".

~~~~~

All of us at this time are still acutely aware of the terrible evil perpetrated at Bondi Beach on the night of December 14.

Once again, we are reminded that the world we live in is a perplexing mixture of good and evil, of pain and sorrow, of human greatness and human depravity.

We pray for the victims, for all Jewish Australians, for our country as we come to terms with our collective pain and disquiet.

My apologies for a few problems we have been having with our email broadcast lists; some of you have missed out on circuit messages, or a copy of the October District Circular. The problems were partly caused by my computer crashing on the night of December 7.

Once I have become friendly with my replacement computer, and moved over to Hunters Hill immediately after Christmas, we should be able to sort out any difficulties.

As we prepare for our celebration of Christmas in a few days' time, and a New Year beckons, we count our blessings and move forward in hope.

In particular, on your behalf, I thank **Gavin** for his generosity in agreeing to lead the District in the years ahead, thank **Tony Kennedy** for his leadership over the last 12 months, and also the members of the District Council for their commitment and sage advice.

Finally, although I'm not involved in the day to day running of the District Administration, I know enough to want to offer a huge and grateful thankyou to **Andrew Biddle**, **Kathleen Fleming**, and **Anne Martinus**, for their competence and dedication.

To everyone, a very Happy Christmas, and every blessing for 2026.

*Peter McMurrich sm*  
District Vicar

## District Council

The Council had its last meeting for the year on Tuesday, 16 December.

**Gavin Foster** attended as an observer, but as from 1 February, when he assumes the role of District Superior, he will be doing more than just observing.

Items on the agenda included:

- Financial Report
- Professional Standards Report
- Marist Mission Centre Report
- Aged Care
- Personnel
- Departure from St Patrick's
- Installation of New District Leader
- Marist Charism Group
- Labour Agreement Work Visas

## Calendar

District Council meeting dates for 2026 will be:

- Jan 20 (if needed)
- Feb 17
- Mar 17
- Apr 21
- May 19
- Jun 16
- Jul 21
- Aug 18
- Sep 15
- Oct 20
- Nov 17
- Dec 15

On **Friday 30 January** there will be an installation ceremony in the Montbel chapel **commencing 4.30pm** followed by a meal to mark the beginning of **Gavin Foster's** term as District Superior.

## District Superior's Diary

The new District Superior's diary is blissfully empty at the moment, but that situation will change once **Gavin** commences work on 1 February.

## Appointments

**Fr Michael Whelan** appointed to Maryvale/Montbel community from 1 January, 2026.

**Fr Peter McMurrich** appointed to the Maryvale/Montbel community from 1 January, 2026.

**Fr Gerard Hall** appointed to the Herston community from 1 February, 2026.

## Sick

**Terry Garrett:** on 4 December, Terry saw his oncologist and was advised that there are no further treatment options to address the spread of his cancer. Please journey with Terry in prayer over the weeks ahead.

**Jim Carty:** Jim had an aortic valve replacement at Macquarie hospital on 2 December, and was back home the next day. He was feeling well in the days after the surgery, but his recovery has been set back by a severe bout of asthma.

## News

**Departure from St Patrick's:** after 157 years of ministry at St Patrick's, our pastoral care of the parish will come to an end on Boxing Day, when the remaining Marists will vacate the presbytery. Actually, we will be around a little longer on an *ad hoc* basis, as we will be coming back on a daily basis to supply the Masses and confessions up until midday on New Years' Eve.

The departure on Boxing Day will allow time for the presbytery to be given a good clean, and for the new team to move in, prior to their commencing ministry on 1 January. On Friday 12 December, the monthly *Ad Clerum* newsletter from the archbishop finally announced the new team: **Fr Lewi Barakat** will be the new parish priest; he will have 2 live-in assistants ( **Fr Matthew Lukaszewicz** and **Fr Anderson Gallego**) and one live-out assistant (**Fr Anthony Misfud**)

In recent weeks **Lewi** has been immersing himself in the life of the parish, meeting with the lay members of the pastoral team, greeting people outside Masses, and attending various parish gatherings. He has made an excellent impression, which bodes well for the future.

We suggested to the incoming administration that the Marists will take only their own personal items, leaving furnishings, library books, TVs, fridges, cutlery and crockery etc. in place. For the benefit of the Maryvale/Montbel community however, we have removed our liquid assets from the cellar, and these should be appearing on the tables of Montbel in the weeks (and probably months!) ahead.



On Sunday, Dec 28, the 12 noon Mass will be a special farewell to the Marists, with special music from our choir. At the conclusion of the Mass, a plaque will be unveiled on Gloucester Street, acknowledging the Marist presence at St Patrick's over 157 years.



All four Marists currently at St Patrick's will be moving out to Hunters Hill, at least for the foreseeable future. **Michael Whelan** will take up a room in Montbel and **Peter McMurrich** has a room picked out in Maryvale; both are intending to be permanent residents. **Paul Hachey** will be somewhere on the Hunters Hill site until around the beginning of March, when he will return to the United States. **Paul Mahony** is currently weighing up his options, with his earlier plan to return to the Tamworth area being reconsidered; he will initially do some supply work at Sawtell.

On Sunday, 7 December, the gallery of bronze busts in the courtyard, representing significant figures in the life of St Patrick's, was augmented with its final two members, **Joseph Monnier**, the first Marist parish priest, and **Dan Kelly**, who supervised

all the Sunday Mass collections at St Patrick's over many years prior to his death in 2014. **Dan** would attend each of the twelve Sunday Masses, hear all the sermons, and make sure the two collections went ahead at each Mass. Someone recalled recently that when **Dan** himself was taking up the plate, he would stand and shake the plate in front of any non-givers until he got a satisfactory result! The gallery of bronze busts was the inspired idea of **Michael Whelan**, and he can rightly be pleased that the project has come to a very successful conclusion.

**Transfer of Provincial Archives:** Since 1985 the Province/District archives have been located in an air-conditioned concrete bunker under the Colin library. A decision has been taken to relocate the archives to the ground floor of the District office building at 3 Mary Street. This will make the archives more accessible to the District administration, and foreshadows the likelihood that the Colin library building will eventually be demolished. **Peter McMurrich** will shortly begin the work of transferring all the archive material to cardboard cartons which will be temporarily stored in the large room on the top floor of the Colin library building. A contractor will then dismantle the compactuses and shelving and re-erect them in the District administration building.

**District Directory:** for the last 15 years or so we have combined with the New Zealand Province to produce a joint annual Directory featuring both countries. This arrangement began at a time when there was a possibility/likelihood that our two Provinces would unite. As a result of the recommendation of the recent General Chapter that New Zealand look to pairing up with the District of Asia, and we with the Province of Oceania, our joint Directory will cease. A separate Australia District directory will be published early in the new year.

A warm word of Thanks to the New Zealand Province for preparing and printing the joint directory over the years.

**No Idle Talk:** confreres who have had various bouts of surgery on their life's journey may have experienced some

surgeons as being rather task orientated and not so interested in idle chit-chat and effusive greetings. One confrere who recently had some facial surgery found his surgeon a little like that, though certainly an excellent surgeon. When checking out some Google comments, the confrere noticed that one patient had unkindly written: "This bloke must have skipped uni the day they taught the course on bedside manner".

**Herston:** The units at Herston have now been changed from being part of the one property, to being legal entities in their own right under of a strata title arrangement. While this will have little impact on the day to day life of the community at Herston, it does mean that when and if individual units in the Herston complex become surplus to our requirements, they can be sold off individually. Previously, our only option was to sell the entire property in a single sale.

Our policy in respect to Herston is clearly outlined in our Aged Care document:

In times past there may have been an expectation that men would leave Brisbane for Sydney and better care when either health or age determined. The reality is that there are confreres who are deeply attached to Brisbane/Queensland, whose families and friends are there and who have lived and worked in Brisbane for a considerable part of their lives. There are also those who are acclimatised to the northern latitudes.

Present policy is that men may continue to live in Brisbane should they so wish, being mindful that a heightened level of assisted living such as Montbel is unrealistic because of our limited resources. Nevertheless, a significant degree of support is possible through the services of government home care packages.

The present accommodation at Butterfield Street, Herston, does not provide suitable living conditions for the elderly. ...The criteria for transferring to a nursing facility is the same as for Montbel.



## Personnel

Welcome back to **Ray Chapman** and **Ron Nissen** who both recently returned from participating in the five-day commemorative pilgrimage which ended at La Neyliere on November 15. The pilgrimage commemorated and honoured the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of our Founder, John Claude Colin.



Ray and Ron at Fr Colin's birthplace

**Tony Kennedy** departed for Rome on 6 December after some busy weeks following his return from the General Chapter at the end of October. We wish him well as he takes up his role as an assistant general.



Tony K bound for Rome

**'Aisake Vaisima:** 'Aisake left for Rome on 16 December to join Tony Kennedy in the General administration. On a temporary basis he will continue to manage aspects of the Oceania Province's investment portfolio from Rome until a replacement can be

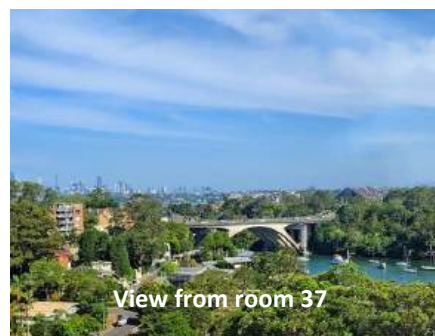
## Deaths

**Fr Bernard Mersmann SM,** Germany, Nov 05

**Fr Maxime Legros SM,** France Dec 08

appointed to Sydney. During his time in Australia, 'Aisake was able to make an essential and much appreciated contribution to the ministry at St Patrick's.

**Neville Byrne** has now transitioned from Maryvale/Montbel to St Joseph's nursing home, 41 Gladesville Rd, Hunters Hill. He is in Room 37 and can be contacted on 02 8025 4237.



View from room 37

## JPICC Corner

District Committee for  
Justice, Peace and  
Integrity of Creation

At its Dec 11 Zoom meeting the **Marist Family JPIC** committee considered:

- Update on online platform: JPIC website
- Draft statement on Domestic Violence
- Evaluation of Social Justice Statement gathering
- Reflection on the year's work together.
- Thoughts for the future
- Setting dates ahead until mid-year.







Above: **Gavin Foster** and **John Larsen** farewell **Ron Nissen** leaving for the Colin Sesquicentenary Pilgrimage. | **Tony Kennedy** and **Gavin Foster** at attention. | **Stephen Truscott** and **Michael Moore** in Perth. Below: Birthday celebrations at Montbel.... **Paul Glynn** | **Aliki Langi** with 'Aisake Vaisima | **Robert Hollow**.



Above: **Michael Carroll** blessings proceedings at the Women's Advent dinner, Villa Maria grounds. Below: Celebrations at Montbel and Villa Maria for the Golden Jubilee of **Sr Noelene Simmons SM**.







Above: **Gavin Foster** with principal and student leaders at Holy Spirit College, Bellambi, for the blessing of a bust of **Ven Jean-Claude Colin**. Below: **Ben McKenna** arriving in Sydney en route for a family visit to Tasmania. | Villa Maria community farewells **Tony Kennedy**.



Above: **St Patrick's** pastoral team, end of year dinner: **Paul Hachey, Sr Fidelis, Andy Carter, Helen Niejen, Michael Borromeo, Michael Whelan, Peter McMurrich, Paul Mahony, Mona Redito** and **Cindy Kurniadi**. Below: Repairs continue to Villa Maria mission cemetery fencing.





## International



Above: Participants in the Colin Sesquicentenary Pilgrimage at Le Barbery, the birthplace of Jean-Claude Colin, | Blessings of a photo of the Tollet portrait of Fr Colin on his grave. | Outside the former chapel of La Capucinière, Belley. Below: Colin song competitors at Davao, formation community and international novitiate. | Community of Marist College, Suva.







Above: In Istanbul for the visit of Pope Leo: **Donato Kivi**, **Arnaldo da Silva** and **David Sanchez** | ... and Sisters **Irene** and **Juliana SMSM**. Below: **Ben McKenna** farewelled leaving Rome | ... and with Marist Mission workshop participants in Thailand.



Above: Newly-ordained **Charles Sangul** in Vanuatu. | Bishop-elect, **Jacob Aba** | ...with **Peter McMurrich** and bishop-to-be **Susitino Sionepoe** during S&L program at Hunters Hill. Below: Six new deacons from Casa di Maria, Rome. | Newly-ordained **Hemi Ropata** with **Tim Duckworth**.

