

Responsorial Psalm Response Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.		Gospel Acclamation Alleluia, alleluia! All who eat my flesh and drink my blood Live in me and I in them, says the Lord. Alleluia!					
WEEKEND MASSES							
Epping	5pm Vigil, 8:30am, 10:15am, 6:00pm						
Carlingford	6:00pm Vigil, 7:45am, 9:30am						
WEEKDAY MASSES	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur	Fri	Sat.	
EPPING	No Mass	12:15pm	10:00am	12:15pm	12:15pm	9:15am	
CARLINGFORD	9:30am	No Mass	9:30am	9:30am	9:30am	No Mass	
HEALING MASS	Carlingford —1st Thursday, Epping — 3rd Wednesday						
EXPOSITION OF THE EUCHARIST: Epping Saturday 9:45-10:15am, Carlingford , 4th Thursday 10:00am							
SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION: Epping Saturday 9:45-10:15am Carlingford Saturday 5:00—5:30pm OR BY APPOINTMENT							
BAPTISMS AND WEDDINGS BY APPOINTMENT							
PARISH OFFICE: 29 Oxford Street, Epping NSW 2121 PH: 9876 2853 Email: parish@eppcarl.org.au							
ST GERARD MAJELLA PRIMARY SCHOOL: PH: 9871 1633 Email: sgc@dbb.catholic.edu.au							
OUR LADY HELP OF CHRISTANS PRIMARY SCHOOL: PH: 9868 3322 Email: olhc@dbb.catholic.edu.au							

Lord, in Jesus your Son, you restored to us the gift of Everlasting life. Grant that life to:
Recently deceased: Vincent Kertapati, Veronica Ann Gracie, Gilbert Connor, Barbara McCardle (UK), Patricia Amy (sister of Margaret Coonan), Fr Paul Ryan, Marion Barton, Mary McKinnon, Stan Connelly, Tsang Chan Yuk, Marcella Power, Gan Chin Joo, Mrs Tsang, Joan Gurr,

*Please pray for Angela Roworth who died last week.
The funeral Mass was held last Friday at Our Lady Help of Christians' Church.*

Anniversaries: Vjekoslav & Juljana Medved, Yuki Chan, Joseph & Edina La Porte, Kath Smillie.

Also for: Tomo & Kata Medved, Mato Matijasic, Karlo Puskaric,

Please pray for those who are sick: Sean Huhse, Joel Steinberg, Patricia Rumble, Dean Pan, John Davies, Nicole Greenfield, Michael Furlong, Saulius Dovydas Balsya, Residents of Wesley Rayward Nursing Home, Rose Prior, Mark Di Palma, Anthony Conlon, Amy, Andrew Hannam, The Craig Family, Fr Mick Court, Margaret Maher, Cooper Rundell, Anna & Leo Bruzze, Gerhard Stieger, Fred Saad, Ron Jenkins, Mike Van Werdt, Tammy Birch, Dorothea Ellis, Veronica Hartwich, Rebecca Lawler, Ben Thornton, Elaine Finlayson, Greg Walsh, John Gilberti, Stella Nathan, Catherine Walsh, Brendan Stone, Melanie Loudoun, Mary Wijewardana, Pam Taig, Elaine Hunt, Arnold Day, Maureen Carlon, Fr Adrian Borst, Ausustine Hong, Luba Charlton, Tony ?, George Khouri, Martin Sill, Antony Hogan, Ingrid Connor, Steve Toth, Rob Neil, Josie Scully, Martin & Gay Flood, William Jones, Kath McCarthy, Patricia Amy, Nicholas Rajanayagen, Maria Lee, Frank Holmes, Joyce Fewtrell, Patricia Muschalik, Ernest Lau,

Due to privacy laws, names of the sick and deceased can only be put in the bulletin with the permission of the immediate family.



Congratulations to Greg and Jan Doherty, who will be celebrating their 60th Wedding Anniversary on Thursday, 23rd August.

May God continue to bless you both in your Married life.

**From
The Parish Family**



The Catholic Parish of Epping and Carlingford Diocese of Broken Bay

Our Lady Help of Christians' Church
31 Oxford Street, Epping and

St Gerard Majella Church
543 North Rocks Road, Carlingford

Parish Priest: Fr Peter Dowd,
Ph.: 9876 2853
Email: peter@eppcarl.org.au

Assistant Priest: Fr Joey Frez
Ph.: 9872 3400
Email: joseph@eppcarl.org.au

Email: parish@eppcarl.org.au

Parish Website: www.eppcarl.org.au

Parish Office: 9876

Welcome to our Parish of Epping and Carlingford consisting of our two worshipping communities of St Gerard Majella's at Carlingford and Our Lady Help of Christians at Epping. If you are new to the area or visiting today we are glad that you are with us, and we hope that our celebrations of the Eucharist together will provide both nourishment and challenge on your Christian journey.

YEAR B

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

19-8-18

Proverbs 9:1-6

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

Dear Parishioners,

It has been seven months now since I arrived in Australia, and in our parish, and many people always ask me these questions:

How are you liking Australia and the parish?
Do you like it here?
How does the church in America differ from here?

First of all, I would say that I am really enjoying my stay in Australia. I love the place, the people, the lifestyle and the food, especially the pastries because I have a sweet tooth. People here are genuinely so friendly and welcoming. I love the laid back Aussie attitude because from experience I have learned that as you grow older you need to enjoy life. People here do not take their problems too seriously which is a good attitude for me. Problems are part of life so they come and go.

People here are satisfied with what they have. They do not need to have the latest model of their smart phone or car and they do not have too many possessions in their house.

Australia is beautiful! You have nice beaches, mountains, greeneries, etc. One of the things I love to do is to take a walk around the neighbourhood and just appreciate the gardens. You have so many varieties of trees and flowers here.

But the biggest benefit for me is that my family is here so that makes a big difference!

How is the Church here? Let me share with you these three observations:

- 1) The Church here is very organised. Our Diocese is also very well organised. It has different offices with efficient staff that take care of specific functions. Each office has a lot of programs for the priests and lay people. Our parish office is also very well organised.

- 2) People here are involved in their faith and parish. I am amazed at how our parishioners volunteer for the different ministries and other activities or programs in the parish. You can sense the parishioner's commitment and dedication to the Church. You can sense the people's willingness to learn and to grow in their faith. People in our parish are always excited to move on, especially our retirees who are involved in more than one ministry.

- 3) There is a big sense of community. I was surprised that people here like to socialise. The parishioners take time to really talk to you after Mass while greeting them in front of the church. A lot of people attend the different activities in the church. I was amazed at how many people attended the different events that were planned during the visit of the Year of Youth Cross as well as the large attendances for our Alpha program. Here, people do not just come to church, give their donation, and go back home. They want to be a part of the Church! They treat our parish as their family!

I was talking to one parishioner before and she asked me the same questions. Upon hearing my answers she said that she never thought about all these good things that she has here and she realised how blessed her life is. Often-times we overlook the good things that are in front of us because as the saying goes, "familiarity breeds contempt." But for someone like me who comes even from a very developed country, I am telling you that you have something very special in your midst. Our Epping-Carlingford parish is so vibrant and alive, I would like you to be involved in the gift of our faith community that is readily available to you. I must tell you that other parishes would love to have what we have in our parish, so please do not let go it to waste. I encourage you to be a part of our parish, to be actively involved in the life of our parish, and to grow in your spiritual life in our parish.

Fr Joey

Growing in Faith - Sharing with Others

John Paul 11 said that "the more you give away your faith, the more faith you will gain."

More than half of all parishioners in Epping and Carlingford have said that they would like to share their faith with others. But many of you say that you want to know how to share it better with family, friends and colleagues.

You can learn the skills of how to share our faith in a low-key, appropriate and friendly way with others.

The Growing in Faith - Sharing with Others course will be held on four Thursday nights commencing September 6, starting at 7.15 pm, at the Epping parish meeting room.

The four weeks are:

Missionary Disciples

Becoming a Missionary Disciple - Pope Francis says we all should be Missionary Disciples.

- What is a Missionary Disciple?
- Why should I be a Missionary Disciple?
- How do parishes develop Missionary Disciples?

Sharing my Faith

- Why did people become Christians in the early Church?
- Why do people become Catholics today?
- How do I need to act, and what do I need to know, to share my faith?

A Welcoming Parish

- What are newcomers looking for from our parish?
- First impressions of our parish
- Why visitors and newcomers are VIPs, and how to ensure they will stay and grow.

Sharing My Faith

- Answering questions about the basics of our faith, the "Kerygma"
- Recognising the questions or interest of others

Share
Your
Faith!



To sign up for Growing in Faith – Sharing with Others, fill in a form and place on the plate or in a box in the church or just email your name to maree@epcarl.org.au

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.
Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

AFTER HOURS SICK CALLS—9876 2853

Outside office hours our office phones divert to Fr Peter, Fr Anselam & Fr Joey at home. In the event that they are unavailable, their answering machines will record your message or ring the number given in the message. However, please restrict office and routine enquiries to office hours.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Our parish is strongly committed to ecumenism and a formal Covenant has been signed with the Anglican Parish of Epping, Epping Uniting Church, West Epping Uniting Church and Epping, Baptist Church.

....continued from page 5

I ask, 'Are there enough prison chaplains? And Peter's response is, "There is a chaplain in every gaol. I think the issue is community support rather than the number of chaplains. People leaving prison need relationships—the church does relationships. How open is our church to building bridges not walls?"

A story taken from CN Cath New in turn taken from mnnews.today Aurora August 2018

Catholic Life & Faith Formation

Public lecture by His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos of London (Coptic Orthodox Church)

"Challenges and Opportunities for Ecumenism: Present and Future"

Archbishop Angaelos is the President for the Orthodox Churches, Churches Together England, and works extensively for Religious freedom and Ecumenism. He is also a Member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, and Member of the Coptic Delegation to the World Council of Churches. Hosted by the National Council of Churches in Australia and The New South Wales Ecumenical Council.

Date: Wednesday 22 August 2018

Time: 5.00 pm to 7.00pm

Venue: NCCA & NSWEC Rooms, Level 7, 379 Kent St. Sydney

Register online at: <https://www.trybooking.com/413042>

THE NICENE CREED

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
At the words that follow, up to and including 'and became man', all bow.
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL

A reminder that if you are admitted to hospital to please ensure that you write down your religion as Catholic on the admission form, so that you can receive Catholic services during

HAVE YOU TOLD US? If you have recently changed your address, phone number or email.

For parishioners who give by credit card, does your credit card expire in the near future? Please give the parish office a call on 9876 2853 if you have received a new credit card and/or a new expiry date.

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Healing Council**
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Reflection on this Sunday's Gospel: What Do You Want?

Do you remember the last time you were thirsty? How your mouth felt dry and brittle and ready to cry out? If you were near to a stream, maybe you buried your face in it and drank to your heart's desire.

And give a thought to hunger. Most people reading this will never have experienced true wrenching hunger, common in parts of Africa and Asia. We all know that our stomach cannot remain empty forever—our bodies demand energy. And guess what. They can go on just a short, short time before thirst must be assuaged.

There are other longings in us too, as the following poignant, anonymous poem from the 16th century illustrates:

Western wind when wilt thou blow
that the small rain down can rain
Christ if my love were in my arms
and I in my bed again.

How can four short lines express such complete, aching desire, deprivation and yearning? Spend just a few moments with this poem and you will feel it. Warmth, sleep, sun, rain, the seasons, and most of all, encircling love.

Underneath all these hopes and wants and desires ... there silently nestles the desire for God.

Fact is, we are small beings. We keep our equilibrium only by precarious balancing of need and fulfillment. Even our existence is given to us second by second, never all at once. What would it be like to have every moment of your whole life happen right now? Impossible to imagine, you say. That is why God portions out our lives into one day at a time, one minute, one nano-second. What is my point?

Underneath all these hopes and wants and desires, mingling with them and undergirding all of them, there silently nestles the desire for God.

Every human being is blest with this longing. God is the only one who can quench our deepest thirst, the only one whose love can create us and keep us. We want the beloved one, whose arms hold us gently in safety throughout the dangers. We yearn for this as we trace our way through time.

Sometimes you and I employ substitutes as an escape from that desire. Fast living. Fast food, fast cars, convenience, comfort, unrestricted sexual fulfillment (without responsibility), and the "right" of complete freedom to do whatever we want to do, whenever we want to do it. If we can remember what it was we wanted.

Wisdom says in the First Reading, "Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed! Forsake foolishness that you may live." Stop thinking that your life will ever make sense if you fill it with piles of stuff and forget the one thing you need the most: closeness to God and closeness through God to everyone and everything else.

In the Gospel Jesus gives us ultimate food and drink. It is actually the most simple gift of all: bread that is his body and drink that is his blood, poured out for us.

We need to calm down and receive peacefully this body and blood of Christ into our own fleshly selves. That way we can allow our realest hunger and thirst at Sunday Mass—not instead of the other needs, but undergirding them. We eat the bread which Christ calls "true food," the blood which he makes "true drink."

These nourish the moment-by-moment course of our lives.

If we let them.

John Foley, SJ

*You are invited to email a note to the author of this reflection: Fr. John Foley, SJ
Fr. John Foley, SJ, is a composer and scholar at Saint Louis University.
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PARISH DIARY FOR THIS WEEK

Day	Date	Time	Event
Sun.	19/08/18	9:30am	Kidz Word at St Gerard's Church
		10:15am	Children's Mass no Kidz Word at OLHC Epping
		11:15am	PMR Carlingford Baptism Preparation Meeting
		2:30pm	PH Epping Confirmation Session 3
		6:00pm	PMR Carlingford Antioch gathering
Mon	20/08/18	9:00am	PH Epping Little Engines Playgroup
		9:30am	PH Carlingford Gerry's Playgroup
		9:30am	Mass at St Gerard's Church
		7:30am	CH Carlingford Rosary Group
		7:30pm	PMR Carlingford SvDP meeting
Tue.	21/08/18	12:15pm	Mass at Our Lady Help of Christians' Church
		3:00pm	PMR Carlingford Confirmation Session 3
		7:00pm	CH Carlingford Adult Choir Practice
		7:30pm	SvDP Meeting at Epping
Wed.	22/08/18	9:30am	Mass at St Gerard's Church
		10:00am	St Gerard's School—Classroom Mass Yr. 6
		10:00am	Healing Mass at OLHC Church Epping
		7:30pm	PMR Carlingford—PFC Meeting
		9:30am	Mass at St Gerard's Church
Thur.	23/08/18	9:30am	Mass at St Gerard's Church
		10:00am	NO Exposition or Benediction this week
		10:00am	Mass at Cheltenham Girls High School
		10:15am	St Gerard's School Classroom Mass Yr. 3/4B
		12:15pm	Mass at Our Lady Help of Christians' Church
Fri.	24/08/18	9:30am	Mass at St Gerard's Church
		10:00am	PMR Carlingford Scripture Reflection
		12:15pm	Mass at Our Lady Help of Christians' Church
		7:00pm	PH Carlingford CANA Youth Group
Sat.	25/08/18	9:15am	Mass at Our Lady Help of Christians' Church
		9:30am	Antioch Retreat Day
		9:45am	Exposition & Reconciliation
		10:15am	Benediction
		2:30pm	PH Carlingford Confirmation Session 4
		5:00pm	Vigil Mass at OLHC Church
		5:00pm	Reconciliation at St Gerard's
		6:00pm	Vigil Mass at St Gerard's

PARISH STAFF

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Email: kids.sacrament@eppcarl.org.au

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Marcella Letteri
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Cana Youth Group
Ashleigh Belic
Ph.: 0430 120 015

What is Alpha?



Alpha is an opportunity to explore life and the Christian faith, in a friendly, open and informal environment.

Alpha is not so much a *course*, but an experience! Gathering once a week over a ten-week period, each Alpha brings together people from every walk of life. We begin each Alpha gathering by sharing a meal.

No matter where Alpha takes place, the format is the same. We eat together, we listen to a talk and then we gather together in small groups for discussion. Over 29 million people across the globe have done Alpha.

Who is Alpha for?



Alpha is for everyone and anyone. The beauty of Alpha is that there are no questions that are too hostile, too silly or too simple. Alpha has no prerequisites whatsoever. We come together with one another as we are, free to be ourselves.

August Safeguarding Message

"A child—focused complaints process is an important strategy for helping children and others in institutions to make complaints." (Royal Commission, Final Report 2017).
This means;

- The process is not slow in addressing the concern/complaint,
- children know who to speak to if they have a concern/complaint,
- children are listened to, they are believed, they are supported and
- children feel comfortable and empowered by the complaints process.

Celebrations this Week— 20th Week in Ordinary Time

Monday—Memoria, St Bernard
Tuesday- St Pius X Pope
Wednesday- Memoria The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Friday—Feast St Bartholomew

Date	Mass	Epping	Mass	Carlingford
25/08/18	5:00pm	Fr Peter Dowd	6:00pm	Fr Joey Frez
26/08/18	8:30am	Fr Peter Dowd	7:45am	Fr Joey Frez
26/08/18	10:15am	Fr Peter Dowd	9:30am	Fr Joey Frez
26/08/18	6:00pm	Fr Peter Dowd		

Have you moved to the Epping area recently?

If you have become our neighbour, we invite you to meet local people over a meal at Alpha. If you see someone is new, please invite them to come with you to the first evening session ~ "Come and See".

My family moved to the area and we wanted to meet people. My husband went to the recent evening Alpha in Carlingford and I went to the morning Alpha at Epping. One of the fruits of going to Alpha is getting to know parishioners in a deeper level – not just their faces.

I learned that a lot of us really long for that personal relationship with God and with each other. We all want to belong (not just to any group) but to God's family – whether that be a small group or a big church community. For me the whole experience of going to Alpha is a great blessing as I watched those videos and most especially listening to out group discussions and praying for one another.

Please extend my thank you to those who lead our group and to everyone for their sharing of their experiences of life with all of us. God bless you.. (Maria S)



Children's Sacramental Journey Confirmation 2018

This weekend, the children will be presented with the Creed at all weekend Masses. During the week, we explained to the children what it means to be receiving the Creed, what they are saying 'Yes!' to, and by professing their faith, they are saying 'I believe!' Please keep these children and their families in your prayers as they continue on this journey to learn more about our beautiful faith.

Time flies, as we move into Session 3 this week – Life in the Spirit. We help the children understand what spiritual growth means by talking about the Holy Spirit, how their love and their faith can grow. God plants seeds in their hearts so they can grow to become people who love greatly and learn to trust in God even when things are difficult. We discuss the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Sower. We teach them they can grow spiritually through prayer, bible stories, learning from people around them and using their gifts for parish ministries to love and serve others. There is also a Wishing-Tree activity where the parents get to tell their children what fruits of the spirit they hope to see grow in them.

The group sessions are family-centred and encourage parent-child interaction with activities to help children explore the key concepts of the sacrament in an age-appropriate and fun way. Upon completion of the four sessions, Candidates will celebrate Confirmation in our parish on Saturday, 8th September.

We always like to hear from you! If you have any queries or would like more information regarding your child's sacramental journey within our parish, please feel free to drop us a line.

Lynn Siau
Children's Sacramental Co-ordinator
0407 255 593
kids.sacrament@eppcarl.org.au

PARISH FINANCE COMMITTEE will meet **this Wednesday 22nd August**, in the parish meeting room at Carlingford commencing at 7:30pm.

EPPING HEALING MASS Our Healing Mass will take place on **Wednesday, 22nd August at 10:00am** in the Church. Morning tea will be served at the conclusion of Mass in the meeting room. Catering: Genevieve & team.

CLASS MASS Yr. 6 Class Mass this **Wednesday 22nd August at 10:00am** at St Gerard's. All class families are welcome!

CLASS MASS Yr. 3/4B Class Mass this **Thursday 23rd August at 10:15am** at St Gerard's. All class families are welcome!



GROG SESSIONS HELD IN CHURCH HALL

A whistle-blower, who wishes to remain anonymous, has revealed, the existence of weekly GROG Sessions, held in the Meeting Room at St. GERARD'S Church, Carlingford.

According to the information supplied, a small group assembles each Friday after the 9:30 am Mass at St. Gerard's. Documents reveal that the group, *while on church property*, participates in arcane rituals. These involve prayers and incantations, listening to recordings obtained from THE INTERNET, reading commentaries provided by a variety of sources, (some of which reveal tendencies towards approaches that some may deem mildly heretical), participating in discussions, spending time meditating and culminating in a carousal in the Tea Room.

Discussions with some of the participants confirm the details of the Sessions, but all stressed that the activities help in gaining a deeper understanding of the Gospel for the coming Sunday. It transpires that the term GROG for the weekly sessions is an acronym of '*Group Reflecting on the Gospel*' and that all the activities, including the carousal, are directed towards this end.

It is hoped that the GROG Sessions may be seen as a laudable component of the Faith Development activities of the Parish and that Parishioners might consider joining in the Sessions.

It is certain they would be warmly welcomed.



CHARITABLE WORKS FUND APPEAL

Thank you for supporting the August Charitable Works Fund Appeal highlighting the CatholicCare Hospital Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care Practitioner Program – where five Pastoral Care Practitioners reach over 3,000 patients, 700 families and over 180 hospital staff each year across seven hospitals in our Diocese.

The Charitable Works Fund is 100% tax deductible and 98.25cents of every dollar goes to CatholicCare Hospital Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care Practitioner Program – where five Pastoral Care Practitioners reach over 3,000 patients, 700 families and over 180 hospital staff each year across seven hospitals in our Diocese.

- Confraternity of Christian Doctrine – creating and updating the curriculum and training catechists who minister to public school students across the Diocese.
- St Lucy's School – for primary school students with disabilities.
- S Edmund's School – for secondary school students with disabilities.
- Ephpheta Centre – serving the Catholic deaf community.

SHORTFALL AFTER SECOND WEEK \$7,694

Envelopes can be found in the pews. Please give generously as any shortfall from this appeal will have to be made up from normal parish funds – please support the appeal so that we can avoid this happening. Our Parish quota for this Appeal is \$17,064.

Year of Youth 2018

CANA YOUTH GROUP

If you're in **Years 7-9** come along for a night Jam-packed with **FUN & FAITH!**
EVERY FRIDAY night of the **School Term**,
7:30pm - 9pm. In the Parish Hall @ Carlingford

It's a great place to catch up with old friends, and meet some new ones!
Please remember that a small donation when you come to the meeting would really help out with the costs of the night. Thanks.

Ring Ashleigh for any further information
0430 120 015



OUR PARISH ANTIOCH COMMUNITY:

Antioch is celebrating the Year of Youth!
You are part of **Generation Us**
Come & see...

Open day retreat
Saturday 25 August
8:30am-7:30pm @ OLHC Epping
Invite your friends for **FREE food, faith-filled talks & fun games!**
for more info or to register contact:
Donna 0498 935 580 (dm-d@outlook.com)

"It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians."
~Acts 11:26



The Accidental Prison Chaplain (Rev Fr Peter Carroll MSC)

Tracey Edstein spoke to Fr Peter Carroll msc, Chaplain to the Corrective Services and Chair of the Australian Catholic Prisoners Pastoral Care Council which advises the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life.

The world 'accidentally' occurs often in Peter Carroll's conversation. He has a warmly disarming manner and it's easy to see why prison ministry suits him, although he says it happened without design—like his priestly vocation as a Missionary of the Sacred Heart.

Sydney's Carroll family gave birth to many priestly and religious vocations so the idea was not foreign to Peter, but he did work in a bank for some years post-school. He says, "I haven't had a 'zap moment' yet—I'm waiting for it!" but hearing a visiting MSC priest speak about vocations sparked something. "I went to a weekend and that was it." He was ordained in 1981 after formation at Yarra Theological Union, Melbourne.

Peter describes himself as "practical rather than a student—my life has been quite pastoral". Having worked in parishes, on school retreat teams and in ministry to Aboriginal communities, he says, "I didn't choose prison ministry—it kind of chose me...I had worked voluntarily in prisons after an Aboriginal mother asked me to visit her daughter in prison. That was an introduction to the ministry, so when Bishop David Cremin asked me to take it on officially, I agreed."

As a chaplain to several prisons, Peter visits those who ask to see a priest, or those whom he's asked to visit, but is also generally available—to be a listening ear, a source of practical support and a sacramental minister. He describes his ministry as "wandering with intent!"

While he doesn't read individuals' sentencing remarks—which determine how prisoners are assessed and to which prison they are sent—Peter knows that many of those he meets have been convicted of sexual offences. "They're telling me their story—it's so important for them to be listened to without being judged. In prison environment they're not telling their story but talking about their offence." In fact, programs for sexual offenders have the highest effectiveness in reducing recidivism.

Peter believes strongly in restorative practice. "Prisoners with a long sentence don't just their time'. They are required to complete a program as they approach release, but is there nothing that can be done earlier to assist rehabilitation? The authorities prefer that once a prisoner's completed a program, he or she doesn't return to the prison environment where—as is often said—they might well learn to be a better criminal."

Peter can tell story after story. One concerns a young man in prison because he breached an AVO. His explanation? "I just don't push the pause button." Peter suggested that meditation would help; "Yes, I've been told that," was the response. "Well, if you start now it will help you when you're released."

One of Peter's regular tasks is accompanying prisoners on day leave as release approaches. The period immediately after release is critical, as many ex-prisoners are no longer in touch with family and former associates and in fact their closest connections may well be 'inside'. Also, the world has changed while they're been living the regulated life of gaol—prisoners don't have mobile phones, Opal cards, email addresses...Finding accommodation is vital and Peter has networks to assist with this need. Cana Communities, which have a reputation for 'loving people back into life', are just one way of meeting this need. **"It's about relating, belonging, connecting, providing opportunities."**

The Gospels speak of care for those on the margins and Pope Francis echoes this, in word and deed. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim the release of captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19). A recently released man or woman may well be 'free', but poor, blind to opportunity and promise, and oppressed.

Each year on Holy Thursday Pope Francis visits inmates of a prison and washes their feet. He preaches the gospel of service on his knees, with basin, water and towel. As a Missionary of the Sacred Heart, Peter Carroll's mission is 'To be on earth the heart of God'. He maintains parish connections and presides regularly at the 'Call to mercy' Mass at Erskineville which is like any Mass, open to all who would come but is Peter's answer to prisoners or former prisoners who ask, "Where do you say Mass?"

He believes strongly that parishes have a part to play in welcoming those who have served their sentences and wish to contribute again to society. He says, "The Jesuit Social Services report, 'Dropping off the edge' (2015) says that we know the postcodes, the villages from where people will go to prison—so what are we doing with that knowledge? Can Catholic parishes somehow engage on this level?"

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