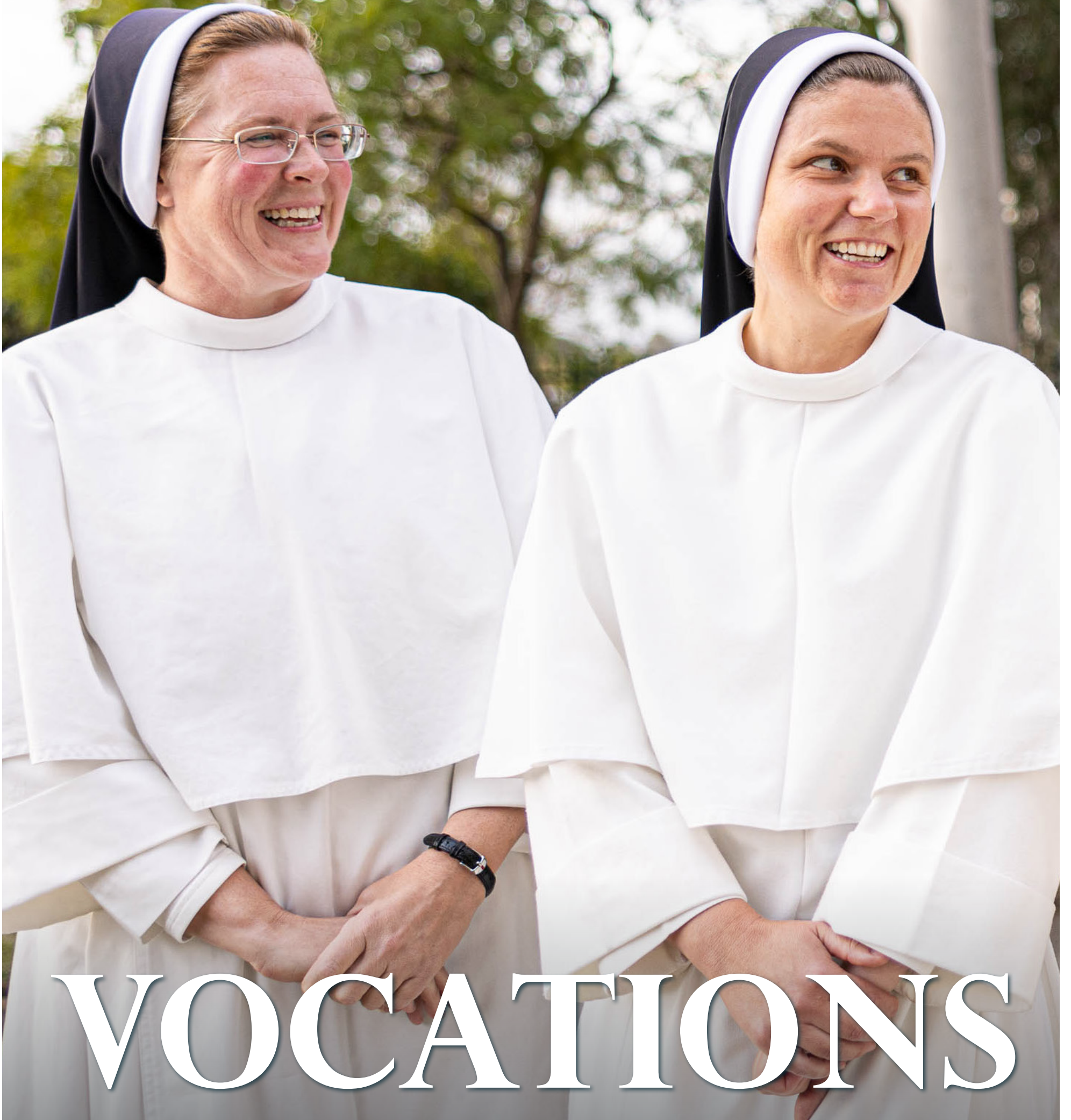


2023 |

THE Catholic Weekly



VOCATIONS

God calls or invites you to a particular vocation: single life, marriage, priesthood or consecrated life. Although each of us must make a decision about our vocation, that choice is a response to an invitation from God.

IMAGE: DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST CECILIA



VOCATIONS

RELIGIOUS ORDERS



PARISH LIFE

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THEOLOGY INSTITUTES

CATHOLIC VOCATIONS 2023

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Religious sisters celebrating 50th jubilee

“Each day is a step we take towards eternity.”

– Venerable Mother Catherine McAuley

The Religious Sisters of Mercy were founded in 1831 in Dublin, Ireland by Venerable Catherine McAuley. Years later, responding to the renewal called for by Vatican II, a group of seven Sisters established a new foundation, the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan, which was approved as a Pontifical Institute by the Holy See in 1973. We are delighted to be celebrating our 50th Jubilee this year and will be hosting special events at our convent throughout the year in thanksgiving.

We are an active-contemplative Community which means that our apostolic work of comprehensive health care flows from our primary work of prayer.

Our spirituality can be summed up by the Mercy cross worn by each Sister: the white cross represents the mercy of God and the black part represents the misery of mankind: there is no corpus on the cross because the Sister of Mercy is called to be a convergence point between the mercy of God and the misery of mankind in striving to be a servant of God’s mercy in the process of her own continual conversion. In addition to professing vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, we profess



Sr Lydia Marie Allen receiving her Australian citizenship.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

a fourth vow of service to the poor, sick and ignorant. In Sydney, our apostolic service is in tertiary education and healthcare where three Sisters are currently assigned: Sr Mary Julian Ekman, a lecturer at the University of Notre Dame; Sr Lydia Marie Allen, a pastoral care worker within the Archdiocese of Sydney, and Sr Maliya Suen, a medical practitioner at Ochre Medical Centre

Lithgow. We also have several other Australian Sisters serving overseas in Rome and the United States.

Our convent in Sydney is in Camperdown. Those who would like to join us in prayer or who have any questions about our Community, are most welcome to contact Sister Mary Julian at pacific.rsmofalma@gmail.com or to visit our website: www.almamercy.org



Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma



Above (from left to right): Sister Maliya Suen, RSM, Sister Mary Julian Ekman, RSM, Sister Lydia Marie Allen, RSM. Top right: Sister Mary Rafqa Boulos, RSM and Sister Maria Ancilla Gabriel, RSM in Alma. Bottom: Our novices in Alma with Mother Mary Christa Nutt, RSM (Superior General) and Mother Mary Judith O'Brien, RSM (Vicar General).

Phone: 02 9557 2398 | Email: pacific.rsmofalma@gmail.com | To learn more about us, please visit our website: www.rsmofalma.org

Spirit of humility



The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul is an international Roman Catholic Religious Congregation of Women who have dedicated their lives to God, in community, for the corporal and spiritual service of those in need and experiencing poverty. It was founded in Paris, France where it has its headquarters. The world-wide Company is divided into a number of distinct Provinces across 96 countries.

The congregation was founded by St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac in 1633 in France. They worked together for 35 years to help improve the lives of all who suffered from poverty and rejection. Their work grew and continued to spread throughout the world. The Sisters are called to live their Christian vocation in a spirit of humility, simplicity and charity. As women of faith and members of a values-driven Religious

Community, their life of service aims to be non-judgemental and inclusive of all people and is underpinned by Gospel values which include: Respect for each person's dignity and rights; kindness and compassion; empathy, holistic care; empowerment and solidarity for justice. Daughters of Charity see the face of Christ revealed to them in the faces of the people they encounter, especially those most in need.

In 1926, the Daughters of Charity established their mission in Australia, with the first foundation being in Orange. The sisters have responded to various needs of people as they arose and have ministered in many different places from Western Australia to Queensland. They are currently on mission in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, where they are involved in health care, pastoral care, disabilities, homelessness and refugees.



Daughters of Charity
of St Vincent de Paul

ROSALIE RENDU PROVINCE



Reaching out to those in need,
wherever they may be

Daughters of Charity are women given to God in community for people living in poverty. As Daughters of Charity we are committed to sharing the Good News of the Gospel with those around us who are carrying the poverties of this Third Millennium. We try to do this by our presence and through loving, practical Vincentian service.



*The Charity of
Christ Crucified
Urges Us*

Let us abandon ourselves to the Providence of God and be very careful not to run ahead of it. - St Vincent de Paul

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www.daughtersofcharityrosalierendu.org

Order of St Paul the First Hermit



**SOLUS CUM
DEO SOLO**

You did not choose me, but I chose you!

John 15:16

The Order of St. Paul the First Hermit is a monastic order founded in the 13th century. The Order arrived in Australia in the 1980's and has established two monasteries and taken on the care of several parishes.

Our life and mission is focused on:

- The contemplation of God in solitude
- Love of the Divine Liturgy
- Living the Evangelical Counsels
- Spreading Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Apostolic activity through the pastoral guardianship of both Shrines and Parishes

vocations@paulinefathers.org.au
www.paulinefathers.org.au/vocations
www.facebook.com/paulinesaustralia

Vocations Director
PO Box 226
Moss Vale NSW 2577

Order of St Paul the First Hermit



Fear not; we are not hermits! St. Paul is the Hermit, whilst we are monks. In fact, we are one of the youngest Orders of monks, which is still relatively old. We were founded in the 13th Century in Hungary by Blessed Eusebius. St. Thomas Aquinas gave a good word for Eusebius and his monks when the Holy See approved us. We wear a white habit that many people mistake for a Dominican one - it was all the rage in the 13th century.

We are one of the few monastic Orders in the Latin Church that does not follow the Rule of St. Benedict. We follow the Rule of St. Augustine. The Order mainly stayed in Central Europe, Hungary, Poland, Croatia and Germany throughout the centuries. Our main monastery is Jasna Gora in Czestochowa, Poland, where hangs the Black Madonna. We are her custodians. It is also a fortress with walls and canons. It is the heart of Polish pilgrimages, a centre of liturgy and a place of frequent confessions.

In 1981 we came to Australia. Fr. Augustine Lazur was the founder of our Australian Province. He set up the Shrine at Penrose Park (Berrima). We also founded the Shrine of Our Lady Help of

Christians, "Marian Valley", in Canungra in the Gold Coast Hinterland. The Archdiocesan Shrine to St. Benedict in Smithfield has also been entrusted to our care. We serve in Moss Vale, Smithfield, Merrylands, and Nerang Parishes. Bishop Columba of Wilcannia Forbes is also a member of our Order.

There are twenty of us, one seminarian, four brothers, 14 Priests and 1 Bishop. Although many of the first Paulines in Australia were from Poland, many Australian men have joined our Order, and not only! We have members from PNG and New Zealand. Currently, we have four young men in various stages of formation.

So, what do we do? As sons of St. Paul the First Hermit, we spend time alone with God in Prayer. As monks, we pray liturgically and live a poor and industrious life.

As the custodians of Shrines, we spread devotion to Our Lady. As priests, we serve the Church in parishes, preaching and hearing confessions. If you hear the Lord's or our Lady's call to serve, knock on the Monastery Door. Be a priest, be a brother, do it for the Lord and the Salvation of your Soul!

Missionary vocation



Fr Niran Veigas SVD (left) celebrates Palm Sunday Mass on Bathurst Island with Bishop Charles Gauci and Fr Hung Nguyen SVD. PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

It is a world away from Fr Niran Veigas SVD's previous missionary assignment in Russia to his new assignment in the Tiwi Islands, but the Indian-born priest is embracing the new challenge and looking forward to knowing the people and helping to make a difference in their lives.

Fr Niran was born and raised in a Catholic family in the city of Mangalore, in southwest India and says he began discerning the possibility of being a priest as a young boy.

"After getting to know the charism of various congregations, I found the SVD's charism, of being frontier missionaries, attracted me," he says.

He joined the Divine Word Missionaries in June 1999, making his first vows in 2006, his final vows in 2012 and being ordained a priest on May 3, 2013.

Soon after his ordination, he arrived in Russia for his first missionary assignment, beginning with language studies and then

taking up an assignment to St Nicholas Parish at Volgograd, where he ministered for about eight years.

"As soon as I landed in Russia it was a new land and a new experience for me," he says. "I felt dumb, as I did not know Russian. I could not communicate with anyone, so this challenged me to learn the language quickly. Once I was able to communicate with the language, I could experience the warmth of the people.

Apart from his parish ministry Fr Niran was also involved in ministry to support International Students.

Fr Niran says while he remains indebted to the SVD URAL region (Russia) for giving him opportunities to grow, he is enjoying his new assignment in the Tiwi Islands just north of Darwin.

"During my nine months on the Tiwi Islands, I have learned about various aspects of the Tiwi culture. For instance, I discovered their unique style of painting, which reflects their way of life and culture. The Tiwi people also have a strong connection to the land and sea, as reflected in their hunting and fishing practices. Additionally, I learned about their unique language and dialects, which have been preserved over the years and are still spoken today," he says.

"Over these months, I have experienced the Tiwi people's warm welcome, and I have come to appreciate how deeply their traditions and customs are rooted in their way of life.

As a Divine Word Missionary, I feel it is fitting for our charism to work with First Nations people. Our missionary approach should be rooted in their culture.

Though there may be many challenges, we are here to walk alongside others and contribute to this mission."

THE LOVE OF CHRIST IMPELS US

2 Cor 5:14



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ROOTED IN THE WORD
COMMITTED TO HIS MISSION

STORY

A golden age for vocations, says US seminary rector



Fr Carter Griffin

■ Marilyn Rodrigues

THE CHURCH is seeing a golden era for priestly vocations with modern seminary formation better in some ways than it has ever been, said a US seminary rector during his recent visit to Sydney.

Fr Carter Griffin is the rector of Saint John Paul II Seminary in Washington DC and was the keynote speaker at the Australian Catholic Diocesan Vocation Directors Conference at the Seminary of the Good Shepherd held in Sydney in July.

Author of *Why Celibacy?: Reclaiming the Fatherhood of the Priest*, Fr Griffin told *The Catholic Weekly* that seminaries are seeing the fruits of St John Paul II's vision for priestly formation in his 1992 document *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (I will give you shepherds).

"He was a trailblazer for us with this sort of magna carta of seminary formation 30 years ago and you can almost see year by year how our formation of

men for the priesthood has continued to improve and to flourish," Fr Griffin said.

"Ironically, it's happening precisely when people think that seminaries are places where men are poorly formed, or worse, due to the effect of the sexual abuse crisis in the church.

"But seminaries are probably healthier now than they have been in hundreds of years—and maybe ever.

"I think the ravages in recent decades have purified us in many ways and also purified the intention and goodwill of seminarians, and the 97 percent of priests who are faithful and no longer receive the social esteem or respect that they may once have."

In his keynote addresses Fr Griffin spoke of celibacy as gift and a source of life for priests and the people they serve, and outlined the virtues essential for a man entering a seminary, as well as the challenges.

Some "red flags" should immediately disqualify a man for priesthood, but vocations directors, seminary formators and bishops need to look for signs of chastity, humility, piety and fortitude, even if underdeveloped at the start of formation.

These will enable a priest at ordination to be an authentic spiritual father equipped to guide, care for and seek to work with the people entrusted to him. Sincerity and honesty are the most important attitudes to look for especially as men can enter the seminary with problems such as dysfunctional family life, a level of smartphone addiction or "baggage" from previous relationships, he said.



Fr Carter Griffin was the keynote speaker at the Australian Catholic Diocesan Vocation Directors Conference held at the Seminary of the Good Shepherd, Sydney. PHOTO: GIOVANNI PORTELLI

Sisters of St Paul de Chartres Australia

■ Sr Monica Nguyen

My family is a traditional catholic one in Vietnam. I was born as the youngest girl of seven children. At the age of twenty-four, responding to God's invitation, I joined the novitiate of the Australian District of the International Congregation of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres (S.P.C.).

At first, I did not fully understand the life of a consecrated religious and I knew nothing about Australia. After a period of formation during which I was guided by the spiritual formators, I gradually began to understand more about the meaning and the purposes of my vocation as a SPC Sister in Australia. Moreover, I have also grown stronger in my conviction that is God's will for me.

In 2021 during the Covid pandemic restriction, I made the Perpetual Profession. None of my family members could come from overseas to be present to share my joy. Yet there were our Sisters, friends, residents and staff of our aged care residential centre in Boronia Heights, Brisbane. They gave me great encouragement with the experience of companionship at the important point of my religious life.

Earlier this year, I was given the privilege of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with our Sisters and the staff of our St. Paul's International College. We visited many significant places in the life of Jesus Our Lord, from His birth to death on Calvary. Each place I visited has made a deep impression on me. The most unforgettable was Mount Tabor, the location of Jesus' Transfiguration.

I was struck as I could imagine the fatigue and difficulty experienced by Jesus and His disciples as they walked up Mount Tabor over 2000 years ago. Yet, the disciples found fulfilment and joy when they were given the scene of the glorious transfiguration of Jesus, their Master. Overwhelmed with excitement and joyful surprise, Peter burst out with a request: "Lord, it is good for us to be here and build three tents." (Mt.17:4). Coming down from the mountain, I was wondering why Jesus took His disciples to the top



Sister Monica in the Holy Land with Mt Tabor in the background.

of Mount Tabor by foot in the tough and rugged path. After prayerful reflection, I perceived the purpose of Jesus—as He had chosen them to follow Him, He gave them the strength to overcome any hardship to carry out their mission. From then on, I have always reminded myself that living the religious

consecrated life is not always easy, but I must overcome any trial with God's power and not just by my own strength. This requires firm trust in the One who is leading me all the time. He gives me grace to reach each milestone until I reach the goal. With trust in Him, I believe that I can overcome all challeng-

es. Moreover, I have the support of my Sisters in the SPC community to whom I am most grateful. I pray that more young ladies will listen to God's call and respond courageously so as to experience inner peace and joy through an intimate relationship with the Lord in the Consecrated Religious Life.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



Sisters of
St. Paul de
Chartres
Australia

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Columban Fr Peter O'Neill - Oceania Regional Director

Columban Seminarian testimony:

My name is Iowane Naio, from Fiji. I am a 4th year theology student living at the Columban House of Studies, Manila, Philippines. Together with Marvin, one of the other Columban seminarians, I am engaged in pastoral work at a local parish in Manila. I would describe my pastoral experience as being, "planted in rich soil." In the beginning, Marvin and I needed to identify an entry point into this project. After a few pastoral visits and moments of shared reflection, Marvin and I sensed the importance of inspiring more people to become active participants in the community. So, we decided to organize a home visitation ministry. People were happy to welcome us, they were very excited about the journey ahead. As I immersed myself in the community, I gradually became aware of my own gifts, which were emerging because of these encounters. I also began to observe seeds of ministry sprouting around me, and this gives me hope and inspiration for the future.

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DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST CECILIA

To contemplate and to give to others the fruits of our contemplation



Founded in Nashville, TN in 1860

Established in the Archdiocese of Sydney in 2007 and the Archdiocese of Melbourne in 2018. To learn more, visit nashvilledominican.org, find us on facebook @dominicansistersaustralia, or contact the sisters at sydney@op-tn.org or melbourne@op-tn.org

Giving their 'yes' to the Lord



World Youth Days have become a great gift to the Church and a lasting legacy of St. John Paul II. This grace-filled gathering came to Sydney, Australia in 2008, with the world convening on the beautiful shores of the "Great Southland of the Holy Spirit" to welcome Pope Benedict XVI and the youth of the world. In preparation for WYD 2008, Cardinal George Pell and then Auxiliary Bishop Anthony Fisher, OP, invited the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia to the Archdiocese of Sydney to assist in the archdiocesan World Youth Day Office. At the conclusion of World Youth Day, the invitation was extended for the community to remain in the Archdiocese to become involved in teaching and university chaplaincy. In Sydney, the sisters currently teach at Trinity Catholic College and St. Peter Chanel Catholic Primary School. The sisters also serve on the chaplaincy team at the University of Sydney, at the Sydney Centre for Evangelisa-

tion, and at the Seminary of the Good Shepard. In 2018, the Congregation was invited by Archbishop Denis Hart to open a second convent in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The sisters serve at St. Bernard Parish Primary School and the university chaplaincy for the Archdiocese. The sisters are involved in numerous initiatives to promote the new evangelisation, support family life and vocations. Throughout the year, the sisters host vocation retreats and various retreats for women. They have also been blessed with opportunities to travel throughout Australia, New Zealand, and beyond, witnessing to religious life and giving talks. Since the community began its mission in Australia in 2008, numerous young women from Australia have given their 'yes' to the Lord in responding to His call to religious life as a Dominican Sister of St. Cecilia. The Congregation is grateful to be serving in the Archdioceses of Sydney and Melbourne.

Albert's aspirations for v

Believing that marriage and family was his destiny, it wasn't until Albert found

“ During the course of my aspirancy, I had the privilege to be at the diaconate and ordination of Fr Sheldon, whilst also serving in these times, which has also helped me think about the life of a religious and the example that he himself gives.



■ Albert Saju

As a young boy, I was very sure of the path that I was called to, which was for marriage and family life. Even though whilst growing up in a Catholic school and high school, priesthood was not even slightly regarded due to the fact of stigma that individuals magically wake up and change into a priest.

Also, the fact about obedience, discipline, and studying for another nine years was something scary to think about for a teenage boy in high school trying to escape all his studies.

Around 2015 my family moved to Moorebank to be near the Syro Malabar Qurbana which was being conducted in St Joseph's Moorebank at the time, where there was catechism before masses which has helped me form myself closer to my faith.

During this period, even though I was a Sunday church-goer and the help of the catechists, I would still lacked faith, a conversation between God and the ability to find peace within myself.

In the year 2020, the Somascan's Fathers arrived in Moorebank and Holsworthy parishes. At the time, I

“

I became very eager and excited to understand everything about Mass like a fire in my heart pushing me more and more.”

- Albert Saju

was working in Domino's when one of my co-workers who was also a parishioner at Moorebank invited me to Tuesday nights formations with Father Christopher De Sousa CRS.

I had briefly met Father Chris and Father Matthew Velliyamkandathil CRS at the time in affiliation with the Syro Malabar youth movement, and also due to them being my local parish priests.

As time went through I started becoming more involved with the Somascan Movement.

Furthermore, I was once called to serve as a candle bearer for a big solemnity, where I felt so at peace that I believe that the flames for my vocations truly began giving extra

focus during Mass and being attentive within Mass like I never had.

I slowly began falling in love with serving the Lord in Mass as a candle bearer and wanted to learn everything about serving within the church.

I became very eager and excited to understand everything about mass like a fire in my heart pushing me more and more.

With the help of our postulants

Michael Iezzi and Matthew Frijo and other fellow youth, I was taught to understand the role of a server and learned everything to do with serving.

I felt at peace and was eager to move the next step with my service to the church which was becoming an acolyte for our parish in 2022.

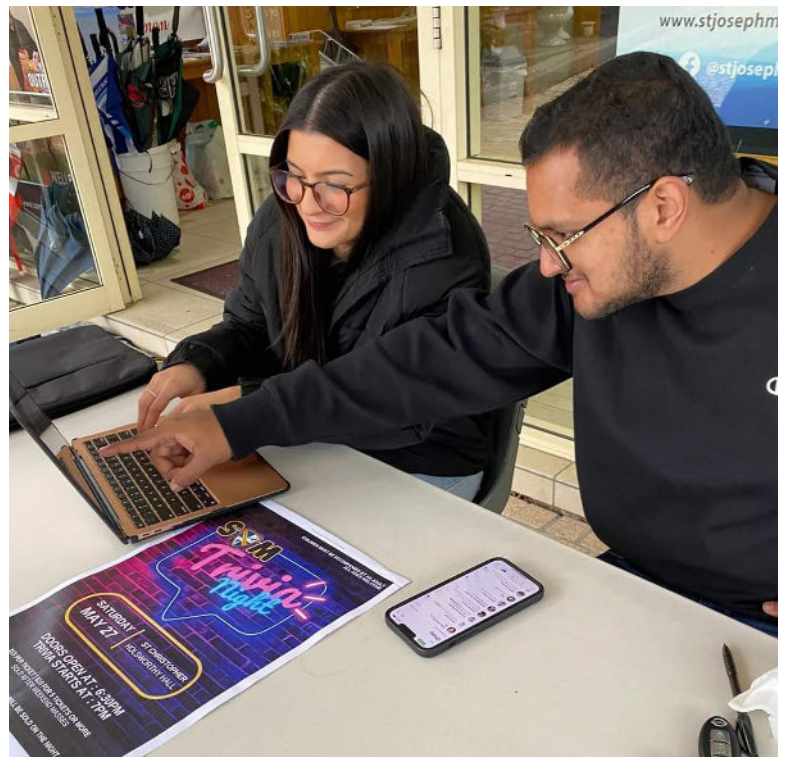
During this time, I would also have conversations with Fr Chris in which the idea of aspirancy be-

came a recurring theme that we discussed. With the encouragement of the Somascan Fathers, and Somascan postulants Michael and Matthew, I decided to join the Somascans as an aspirant in 2022.

Currently, I feel great about my aspirancy and have been preparing myself for World Youth Day 2023, as it is a pilgrimage for discernment and it is more encouraging as Fr Chris and Fr Sheldon Burke CRS

vocation and for others

...the Somascan order that a call to become an aspirant with them was very real



have found their vocations in this pilgrimage.

During the course of my aspirancy, I had the privilege to be at the diaconate and ordination of Fr Sheldon, whilst also serving in these times which has also helped me think about the life of a religious and the example that he himself gives.

I was able to also understand community life through my come-

and-see experience and sharing a lot of time and moments with Fr Chris, Fr Matthew, Fr Sheldon, and also with our Perth Somascan Fathers and youth.

As I prepare for World Youth Day 2023 I pray that a lot of vocations may become clear to a lot of the youth attending who are currently struggling to accept the call of their vocation and answer them without fear.

Albert taking some time out with other fellow Somascans, top left. Helping lead a procession at St Joseph's Parish, Moorebank, main. Organising the popular trivia night with fellow parishioner, top right. With Fr Mathew Velliyamkandathil CRS, above.

PHOTOS: SOMASCANS

Why pray for priests? We need our shepherds

“

The faithful are given the grace by God to support priestly vocations through the gift of prayer.”

- Fr Daniele Russo

■ Fr Daniele Russo
Director of Vocations, Sydney

In August of each year, the Church in Australia celebrates National Vocations Awareness Week. This period is dedicated to praying for more vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. As the Feast of Saint John Vianney occurs on the 4th of August, we can offer some reflections on why it is essential that we pray for more priests in the Church.

The faithful are given the grace by God to support priestly vocations through the gift of prayer; both to sustain priests and to increase their number. When Jesus saw the problem of “harassed and helpless... sheep without a shepherd” he immediately provided the solution by choosing to invoke the prayers of the Church; “pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:36-38)

There is a need for priests, and we have – all of us – been given the grace and mandate to meet that need.

However, we can also expect an intrinsic logic to Our Lord’s request.

When Jesus asked us to pray for more priests, he was simultaneously expressing a desire of his own heart. He wants priests because his heart was overwhelmed with compassion for the sheep of his flock. When we pray for more priests, we conform the desires of our heart to those of Christ – to love what he loves.

At the same time, when Jesus asks us to pray for priests, he is asking the Church to see in the priest his own spousal love.

The Church plays the role of the bride in the story of salvation. Whereas priests live out their vocations after the pattern of the bridegroom and are invited to lay down their lives for their flock, the Church is called to welcome the unconditional love of her bridegroom and return that love in kind.

In a similar vein, when she prays for priests, the Church expresses her craving, not just for *alter Christi* - other Christs - but for *alter corda Christi* - other hearts of Christ:

“The priest is a gift of the Heart of Christ...From it originates the vocation of those men who, won over by the Lord Jesus, leave all things to devote themselves without reserve to the service of the Christian people, after the example of the Good Shep-



PHOTOS: GIOVANNI PORTELLI

Vocation
Centre

herd.” (Benedict XVI, Angelus Message, June 13, 2010).

At each year’s Chrism Mass, the local ordinary invites the faithful to pray for their priests;

“that the Lord may pour out his gifts abundantly upon them, and keep them faithful as ministers of Christ, the High Priest, so that they may lead you to him who is the source of salvation.”

Whether by praying for more priests, or for those already serving in the vineyard, it is essential to the mission and holiness of the Church that she find in the priesthood an expression of the spousal love of Christ himself, who laid down his life for his flock.

Holy Curè of Ars, you have become an outstanding model for priests of the whole world. Give our priests a love for the Church, apostolic zeal, and steadfastness in trials. Awaken in the hearts of young people an aware-



ness of the splendour of the priesthood and the joy of responding to the call of the Good Shepherd. Saint John Vianney, intercede for us to God. For you, humble and faithful pastor, may we be granted an abundance of priestly vocations to serve the people of our diocese. Amen.

“

When Jesus asked us to pray for more priests, he was simultaneously expressing a desire of his own heart. He wants priests because his heart was overwhelmed with compassion for the sheep of his flock.”

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Belonging to Jesus is the real Sister Act

■ Debbie Cramsie

Three young women are a real sister act, and while from different parts of Australia, have one major similarity—they belong entirely to Jesus.

Sr Anna Ruth, Sr Elena Marie and Sr Mariam are Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia and represent the increasingly international flavour of the community of more than 300 worldwide.

With a motherhouse around 15,000km away in Nashville, they recently enjoyed some rare time with family and friends back home.

While all agree there is much to miss about life down under, more importantly it's the vocation not location that matters.

Home is where the heart is and for them that's with the Lord.

Over the past 10 years the sisters in their traditional long white habits have become more visible in Australian parishes, schools, and universities, as well as participating in youth festivals and offering "taster weekends" for those



Sister Anna Ruth will be returning to America for another school year, but feels blessed to have come back to Australia, if only for a short time.

IMAGES: ALPHONSUS FOK

discerning religious life.

So who are these sisters and what did they discover after being away from home for so long?

Born in Wagga, Sr Anna Ruth said she always loves

returning to her hometown where its natural beauty is a constant reminder of God's gifts.

"Wagga is a lovely place that has grown a lot since I grew up there and continues

to do so," she said. "I was particularly struck by the fidelity of daily massgoers. They are cold, dark mornings in Wagga in winter, but there were often 30 or more people up early to celebrate the Mass which was really inspiring.

"Though they can be a bit of a pest, one thing I love about early morning Mass in Australia is the chorus of birds that join in, especially the local magpie population.

"As a special treat I also spent a few days on the south coast in mum's hometown outside of Bega, and I must say there is nothing like Australia's beaches.

"I am returning to America for another school year, teaching 5th grade in Virginia, and feel so very blessed to come back to Australia, if only for a short time."

Sydney's WYD in 2008 was where Sr Elena Marie first thought about a religious vocation.

Growing up in Adelaide and completing a graduate degree researching the effects of dietary supplements on children's development, she took part in a retreat for Encountering Christ and entered the congregation not long after.

"I was raised Catholic and very involved in my parish, helping with Vinnies, preparation for sacraments as well as the parish youth group, but it wasn't until I attended WYD that the idea of a vocation came to me," she smiled.

"I visited the sisters and took part in a retreat and shortly after, started discerning religious life.

"I was originally missioned in Sydney where I taught at the University of Notre Dame before returning to Nashville in 2020 where I have been teaching psychology at Aquinas College.

"Returning to Australia I

“

I was particularly struck by the fidelity of daily massgoers. They are cold, dark mornings in Wagga in winter, but there were often 30 or more people up early to celebrate the Mass which was really inspiring."

- Sr Anna Ruth



Sister Mariam



Sister Elena Marie



Sister Anna Ruth

miss the ocean, the gum trees and the people but it also makes me realise how much I miss the motherhouse and the sisters, it really is such a joy to be there!"

Belonging entirely to Jesus has without doubt been the best part of Sr Mariam's vocation.

The Sydney-born sister said it was during her time studying commerce and French at Macquarie University that she "encountered the love and mercy of God which changed her view on life".

"It was during my first year that I was touched by God's love and goodness," she said.

"Around the same time my best friend said she was discerning her vocation, and the thought of religious life entered my mind.

"I met our sisters at a youth conference and was immediately fascinated by them, and after visiting their Regents Park convent found that I was drawn to Dominican life and entered the community in 2014.

"For the past few years, I've been blessed to serve in Carmel, Indiana, where I am teaching religion.

"Without doubt the best part of my vocation, is that I belong entirely to Jesus, he is my Lord and my spouse, whom shall I fear?"

"Reflecting on my life I would say the amount of joy that comes with doing God's will continues to surprise me.

"Every time I respond to his grace and am receptive to a prompting of the Holy Spirit, I am always blown away by the amount of joy which follows."

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Religious literacy for today's world



The most fundamental vocation is the one that comes with baptism. Living the baptismal vocation today comes with increasing challenges. Society does not foster or support Christian faith in the way it did in previous generations.

All the baptised need support in living their faith. Many people are looking for ways to deepen their faith and expand their religious and theological literacy. A theological education has the potential to give them confidence about what they believe and how to speak about it. It gives them confidence in the face of challenges to the faith. The Catholic Institute of Sydney (CIS) has been involved in theological education for around 130 years, first at St Patrick's College, Manly and since 1995 at Strathfield. Since 1954 it has offered ecclesiastical awards approved by the Holy See (the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome); and since 2021 it has offered civilly accredited awards as a Partner Institution of The University of Notre Dame, Australia. The ecclesiastical

awards offered by the Institute include the five-year STB (Baccalaureate of Sacred Theology), the STL (Licentiate in Sacred Theology), and the STD (Doctorate in Sacred Theology).

Those looking to deepen their faith or to expand their theological literacy have a number of study options. They may choose a short course at graduate certificate level or a degree course. They can also choose to specialise by choosing course units in biblical studies, theology, philosophy, church history or pastoral theology. CIS is the place of study for those with a vocation to priesthood who are at a diocesan seminary or in a religious order. Those with a vocation to the permanent diaconate also study there. Other students come from all walks of life and professions. Some are looking for professional qualifications, others are primarily taking the course for personal enrichment. CIS cares for the vocation of all the baptised. Students study in a supportive environment where faith is nurtured and theological literacy is learnt alongside others.



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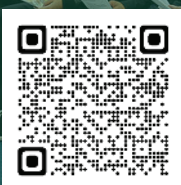
AUGUSTINIANS OF THE PROVINCE OF AUSTRALASIA

Rejoicing in Christ's invitation to be his friends, we Augustinians, through our living of community life, in oneness of mind and heart, search for God and serve God in humanity.

www.osa.org.au



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Following Jesus Christ in the way of St Augustine



“ We believe that our religious way of life continues to offer something of value to the society in which we live.”

The Augustinians in Australia humbly seek to follow Jesus Christ in the way of St Augustine. The Gospel is core to our way of life. Those qualities of Christian life emphasised in the spirituality of St Augustine are important to our way of life:

- A strong sense of *communion* - relationship, friendship, fraternity at the heart of being Church and the essence of what it means to be human.
- Attention to the *inner life* - knowing that we are carried by grace within the very depths of who we are, in prayer being aware we are infinitely loved.
- *Service motivated by love* - to love Christ is to love where Christ is to be found in humble service.

Our religious vocation is at the core of who we are.

Since the mid 13th Century, our Order of friars have served in ministry throughout the world in many various ways. That ministry in Australia has been continuous since 1838.

Today Augustinians of the Australian Province

minister with joy and commitment as school chaplains, pastors in parishes, ministry among indigenous Catholics, ministry among refugees and urban migrants overseas and supporting the growth of the Order in other countries in the Asia Pacific region. We do so with a strong belief in respect for the dignity of all.

In all of this the Augustinians are conscious that we work with the broader church community and value the partnership with those with whom we work.

In Australia, the Augustinians currently serve in New South Wales - ManlyVale, Brookvale and St Clair -Parramatta; in Queensland, we are ministering in Brisbane and Mareeba-Far North Queensland; and in Victoria, we are ministering the parish community of South Yarra.

Trustfully the Augustinians believe that our religious way of life continues to offer something of value to the society in which we live. We are open to welcome and support in discernment those who believe that they may be drawn towards life with us.

From Olympic hopeful to Sister of Life

“

Growing up I never saw a nun. It was not even on my radar. If anything, it terrified me, something that was so distant. I honestly didn't even think people were doing this anymore, at least not willingly or happily.”

- Sr Mary Grace

■ Marilyn Rodrigues

Support was Sister Mary Grace's daily bread when growing up on Sydney's northern beaches but as a young adult God opened up her heart to something much greater.

Known also to many Australian Catholics as Jessica Langrell, the Sister of Life spoke to *The Catholic Weekly* by Zoom from her convent in the Bronx in New York.

She's preparing to make her final vows, age 33, on 5 August along with seven of her friends from the community—and also celebrates 10 years in religious life this year.

The Sisters of Life were founded by young Catholic women in New York in 1991, to protect and enhance the sacredness of every human life.

Sr Mary Grace says only God could have pulled her to a convent 16000 kms away from her beloved family, friends and Sydney beaches and even a chance of representing Australia at the Olympics.

“I wouldn't be here if I didn't have a strong pulling,” she agreed.

“Growing up I never saw a nun. It was not even on my radar. If anything, it terrified me, something that was so distant. I honestly didn't even think people were doing this anymore, at least not willingly or happily.”

“And that's the mystery of God's plan for each one of us.

“God wants our happiness, he wants our joy and he's called us to love in particular and unique ways, and I think we're all waiting for our hearts to come alive in love.”

Vibrant and with wisdom beyond her years, Jessica was one of the first organisers of Sydney's popular event series for young adults, Theology on Tap, which her brother Patrick began in 2007.

She later served in campus ministry at the University of Notre Dame, where she obtained her theology degree.

When World Youth Day came to Sydney in 2008 she met members of a new congregation—the Sisters of Life,



“ His deepest desire for me was that my deepest desire come about, and he was not prepared to settle for the Olympic dream—he was going for everything.”

from New York's Bronx district—and never imagined she would follow them all the way back, five years later.

Just out of school, the sports-mad teenager was hoping for a career as a professional athlete but was also thinking of journalism, teaching or politics.

She also dreamt of having a big family and coaching her own football team.

But her conversations with the visiting sisters, whose congregation has an average age in the mid-30s, struck her powerfully.

“It wasn't their vocation, it was that these were women who were really alive and in love with God,” she explained.

“God was real to them, he was alive, he was making a difference in their life, and it wasn't just about being a good Catholic.”

“That to me was such a beautiful thing to witness and I noticed when I first saw it that I was lacking that in my own heart.”

Though “not hit with an instant vocation lightning bolt” she began to pray differently from that time, and while she studied, worked and socialized, she says she also encountered the Lord in her heart. “I started to really talk

to God about what was going on inside me. And I was like, ‘What just happened there? Who are you? Are you real? Can you make that difference in my life?’

“I don't want to just follow you on a rule-basis; is there more to life than just living a good life and fulfilling all my dreams? What are your dreams for my life?”

“I wasn't having pious thoughts or great prayer experiences. I just really woke up to the fact that I had a heart and really great desires, and I think God wants them to come true.”

In her early 20s two opportunities became clear. She arranged to spend a month with the Sisters of Life to discern whether she had a religious vocation, and she also tried out for Australia's first-ever Olympic women's rugby sevens team.

She got the call to say she had made the Olympic training team as she waited to board her plane to New York.

“They said, ‘We like what you've got and could you put aside the next two years for this,’” she said, shaking her head.

“I could not believe the timing. It was hard not to think that God was teas-



Sr Mary Grace and Sr Leonie Therese enjoying a day of leisure in Maine in July 2023, top. Sr Mary Grace with Sisters after Profession of First Vows at Villa Maria Guadalupe Retreat House in August 2018, top right. PHOTO: COURTESY OF SISTERS OF LIFE. Sr Mary with a missionary from Damascus Equip Conference in Columbus, Ohio, above. PHOTO: COURTESY OF DAMASCUS.

ing me, honestly. I was like, ‘You've got to be kidding me!’

“But God knew it was exactly what I needed. He wanted to show me, ‘This is your greatest desire in life, what you think will bring you most meaning, now let me tell you about your heart and show you who you really are.’”

That month she grappled with all of her hopes and fears about religious life, writing out “pages and pages” for and against.

But in a moment at prayer she understood that God was only asking her to discover her own deepest hopes.

“It sent this flood of freedom through me, as I realised not that God was calling me

to be Sister of Life as such, but God wanted to hear from me what I really wanted, which was to love him and serve him, as I saw these sisters did,” she said.

“His deepest desire for me was that my deepest desire come about, and he was not prepared to settle for the Olympic dream—he was going for everything.”

“I had a tremendous upbringing in a very devout Catholic family that I'm so grateful for, which set me up for this.”

“And what I needed was a moment in my life to realise that it wasn't just about what I did as a Catholic, it was who I was in relationship with and

that God knew me, loved me, and was all about me living a full and alive life.”

Now ministering in the institute's Evangelisation Mission and co-hosting its podcast *Let Love*, each day Sr Mary Grace fights what she sees as an ever-growing contempt for life, with contemplation of God's love for each person she meets.

She made her first, temporary vows in 2018 and has spent three years in Canada serving vulnerable pregnant woman and women suffering after an abortion.

She still loves sport and will run on a treadmill, go for walks with fellow sisters, play basketball or the latest craze,

A new and fast-growing religious institute



SISTERS OF LIFE

THE SISTERS of Life are one of the world's newest and fastest-growing religious institutes with eight new members, including Sydney's Sr Mary Grace, making their final profession in August.

The sisters take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as well as a fourth vow unique to them, to protect and enhance the sacredness of all human life.

The US-based institute was founded in 1991 by several young Catholic women in response to a call from Cardinal John O'Connor, at that time the archbishop of New York, but anyone can offer to be a "co-worker" in their mission.

Their charism is lived out primarily through prayer for women with a crisis pregnancy and offering them support.

They also run retreats, a hope and healing ministry for people who have experienced an abortion, and an evangelisation ministry, which takes them around

“I have been amazed to see the fidelity of God, especially in our hope and healing mission, where the women who are courageous enough to share their hearts with Jesus, live in ways they could never think possible.”

the country and the world sharing their life and message. “We have sisters who will receive calls or will visit women in crisis throughout the day, simply listen to them, have a cup of tea and see how we can come around her and support her to make a decision encouraging freedom and not a decision made out of fear and isolation,” says Sr Mary Grace SV.

“It's amazing what can happen when a woman knows she's loved and that people will be there for her.

“I've seen many times that when a woman is believed in, seen, and promised support she can move through anything.” Sr Mary Grace believes many more women suffer

alone after having an abortion than is recognised.

“But the truth is that God's love and mercy is infinite and outweighs any sin or regret we have, and there is so much hope and healing in store for these women,” she said.

“I have been amazed to see the fidelity of God, especially in our hope and healing mission, where the women who are courageous enough to share their hearts with Jesus, he not only heals and restores but makes new, and actually brings light to these women's lives in ways they never could think was possible again.”

With several hours devoted to Mass and prayer each day, Sr Mary Grace describes the Sisters of Life as the most con-

templative an active religious community can be.

“I think that's because of the work that we engage in,” she said.

“There is a spirit of contempt for life in the world, the enemy is real and there's a real effort to destroy life that we see manifested in many forms across the world.

“Assisted suicide and euthanasia, abortion, human trafficking, or just a loss of faith and rejection of God and the damage that does to someone—there are many attacks on the human person.

“So for us as sisters in order to be faithful to the cause of life we need to be faithful to the source of life, and so our primary mission is to pray because we know that's where the real power is.”

The sisters form part of a global pro-life network and value their contacts in Australia, who they can call on to assist a woman who has reached out to them for help online.

For more information see sistersoflife.org

pickleball, in her free time.

“One of the gifts of the religion vocation is that while I say ‘no’ to my own immediate family and the possibility of having my own children, that giving up is always for a great ‘yes,’” Sr Mary Grace explained.

“God asks some people, ‘Would you offer up the gift of having your own children so that you can look at every single human being as if you were that person's mother,

that child or woman before you, this elderly man you're visiting in hospital or the person you're walking by on the street?’

“That is not possible on a human level, but God makes it possible and I've been amazed at the people I have loved as if they're my own.

“For me that is one of the biggest testimonies of God's grace and power and infinite love; when I can be sitting with a woman who's sharing

the depths of her pain and suffering of experiencing an abortion, everything she's been through and the pressures she was experiencing, and while listening actually experience in my own heart and my own being such a compassionate love for her, actually experiencing the Lord's mercy and kindness for her, and receiving her in that way. “That's the beauty of God, that he actually chooses each one of us to be instru-

ments and carriers of his life and love to others, whether we are ordained or religious or married or single.

“So, while my final profession is about my relationship with the Lord and my whole life's purpose, my commitment to religious life is basically a public witness to everyone who participates in it to the way God looks at every single soul, and why we're all here and where we're all going.”



THE CALL

The Call

These are short videos of vocation stories.



Bishop Richard Umbers



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Bon voyage, the next big step in life

■ David McMahon

Samuel Vermeulen is at a departure gate at Sydney airport and we're talking about the next big step in his life. He's preparing to enter the Australian Jesuits and is heading off to begin his novitiate in the Philippines. He says profoundly: "The heart of Jesuit spirituality is realising how much God has given you."

"I was probably about 19 or 20 when I started to really understand where my life was going. There were many different factors - all seemingly separate but still inter-connected in a way - that brought me to the Jesuits. The starting point of that journey was my fierce interest in what I would describe as Christian radicalism from a young age, even before I was Catholic.

"I was very inter-church when I was young. I grew up Pentecostal but then I fell off the Pentecostal train after being drawn to the social implications of the Gospel and the Church. I think my conversion to Catholicism at 17 was prompted by a desire to follow the social teaching of the Catholic Church, a big inspiration in the process of my conversion. I had a significant interest in Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement and I was also influenced by the late Jesuit, Fr Daniel Berrigan, who had links with them. His peace



activism, for which he spent a total of seven years in prison, was part of his consistent ethic of life which led him to protest against war.

"When I started discerning religious life, I had a pretty natural leaning towards the Jesuits. I had friends involved in politics and friends who identified as queer, so I found that trying to navigate that in a Christian way was really difficult. As a young person dealing with a lot of very chal-

lenging things in the secular world, I found that the Jesuits were the ones who were consistently talking about these things in a way that was not just faithful but charitable as well. That said, the Jesuits helped me find my way through those important issues. That was an added attraction to the Society.

"I always had an interest in missionary work and that was a big motivator for me. My grandfather was

a missionary in Papua New Guinea and he was a very big influence on me. He didn't showboat it around or anything, but his experiences were a significant part of our family history. Zeal for the Gospel was always present in my family.

"I grew up with a very white upper middle-class kind of Christianity and then when I started taking the Christian faith seriously, I realised that it was quite radical in terms of not just

“

I grew up Pentecostal but then I fell off the Pentecostal train after being drawn to the social implications of the Gospel and the Church.”

- Samuel Vermeulen

loving the poor but loving your enemy as well. It was about loving those who are regarded by some as quite difficult to love - the dispossessed, the widow, the orphan.

"I think that was why I started gravitating towards Christians who were conscious of that. I was lucky enough to meet young Catholics who also had that concern. I spent time in other churches too - a Lutheran Church and a house Church as well. But Christian radicalism and that side of things isn't just restricted to political activism. It needs to be strongly tied to spirituality and mysticism as well, which I found was more the case in the Catholic Church.

"At this pivotal point in my life and exploring my vocation, what really drives me is a combination of all those factors. I know whatever happens next, it won't be me doing the guiding or making the decisions, it'll be God."



Jesuits: Contemplatives in action



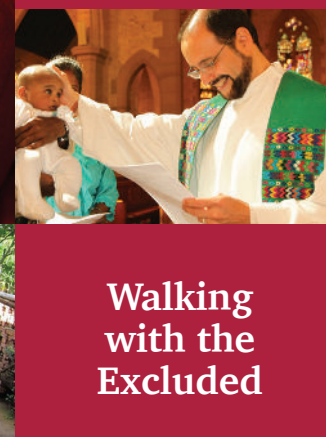
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