

Monty & Eltham

The Catholic Parishes of
St Francis Xavier & Our Lady Help of Christians



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging of the Kulin Nation.

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

Reflection:

The first reading began with the command to Moses that God's people be holy as God is holy. Today's gospel concludes with Jesus' demand that his disciples "be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect". This brings to a close the series of six antitheses in which Jesus contrasts the traditional teaching of the Law and the Prophets with what he now teaches on his own authority.

The final two concern revenge and love of enemies. The Old Testament maxim "eye for eye and tooth for tooth" had the positive purpose of limiting retaliation to the measure of the original offence. Jesus now calls for a response of generosity to those who make unjust demands. Such unexpected behavior would have the potential to disconcert and disarm one's opponents.

Jesus' concluding decree is that we should love our enemies. It's to be noted that nowhere in the Old Testament is there a directive to hate one's enemies, though it was understood that Israel would hate those who hate God (Psalm 138/139:21). Here Jesus speaks of loving and praying for those who are actively hostile, just as God displays indiscriminating benevolence for all. As the New Testament as a whole and Paul in particular makes clear, to be perfect like God is not a human achievement but God's work in us.

Break Open the Word 2023

The Sacred journey of 100 days begins on Wednesday

From Ash Wednesday to Pentecost Sunday - February 22nd. till May 28th.

In the middle of this journey we have 'Holy Week' which begins with Palm Sunday on April 2nd. and concludes on Easter Sunday, April 9th.

'Fire' is the sacred symbol linking the seasons of Lent & Easter together culminating in the sacred Fire of the Easter Vigil and the lightning of the Easter Candle - Christ our Light.

Ash Wednesday Masses

Eltham - Our Lady Help of Christians Church 9:30am

Montmorency - St. Francis Xavier Church 7pm.

This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community.

For more information visit pol.org.au/eltham or pol.org.au/montmorency.

We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.



PARISH TEAM & INFORMATION

OUR PEOPLE & OUR CONTACT DETAILS



Parish Priest

Michael Sierakowski - Moderator

michael.sierakowski@cam.org.au

Parish Office

86 Mayona Road

9435 4742

Tue - Fri 9am-3pm

montmorency@cam.org.au

Kate Kogler:

Parish Secretary

eltham@cam.org.au

Peter Williams:

Child Safety Officer

SFX&OLHC.ChildSafety@cam.org.au

Website:

www.pol.org.au/montmorency

www.pol.org.au/eltham

(pol stands for Parish OnLine)

Facebook:

[St Francis Xavier Parish Montmorency](#)

Monty & Eltham Newsletter & Facebook items:

eltham@cam.org.au

Schools

St Francis Xavier Primary School

Principal: Philip Cachia: 9435 8474

principal@sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

www.sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

Holy Trinity Primary School

Principal: Vince Bumpstead: 9431 0888

principal@htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

www.htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School

Acting Principal: Mark Pinkerton: 9439 7824

school@olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

www.olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

RECONCILIATION

available upon request
please call the Parish Office 9435 4742

Collections: 29 Jan & 5 Feb 2023

	OLHC	SFX	
Thanksgiving	\$187.00	\$1,233.00	
Presbytery	\$933.00	\$872.80	
Stewardship Offering			
Month	OLHC	SFX	Total
November	\$6,056.61	\$8,746.00	\$14,802.61
December	\$6,257.77	\$11,796.00	\$18,053.77
January	\$7,248.10	\$8,760.60	\$16,008.70

Monty & Eltham Calendar of Events

Saturday 18

12:00pm Baptism: Miles, Solomon

Montmorency

6:00pm Mass

Montmorency

Sunday 19

8:30am Mass

Montmorency

10:00am Mass

Eltham

12:00pm Baptism: Lily

Eltham

Tuesday 21

9:30am Mass

Montmorency

10:00am Craft Group

Montmorency

11:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry

Eltham

Wednesday 22 - Ash Wednesday

6:30am Meditation

Montmorency

9:30am Ash Wednesday Mass

Eltham

10:30am ASRC Food Collection

Montmorency

12:00pm SFX School Liturgy

Montmorency

7:00pm Ash Wednesday Mass

Montmorency

Thursday 23

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion

Montmorency

Friday 24

9:30am Mass

Eltham

Saturday 25

11:00am Baptism: Orlando

Montmorency

6:00pm Mass

Montmorency

Sunday 26

8:30am Mass

Montmorency

10:00am Mass

Eltham

12:00pm Baptism: Josiphina

Eltham

Tuesday 28

9:30am Mass

Montmorency

7:30pm Small Church Community

Montmorency

Wednesday 1 March

6:30am Meditation

Montmorency

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion

Eltham

10:30am ASRC Food Collection

Montmorency

1:00pm Small Church Community

Montmorency

7:30pm Small Church Community

Montmorency

Thursday 2

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion

Montmorency

2:30pm Mass

Calvary Lower Plenty Garden Views

Friday 3

9:30am Mass

Eltham

Saturday 4

2:00pm KADASIG General Meeting

Montmorency

6:00pm Mass

Montmorency

Sunday 5

8:30am Mass

Montmorency

10:00am Mass

Eltham

Tuesday 7

9:30am Mass

Montmorency

10:00am Craft Group

Montmorency

11:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry

Eltham

Wednesday 8

6:30am Meditation

Montmorency

Support Montmorency Parish by giving with CDFpay

Simply scan the QR code with your mobile phone and in a few easy steps you can safely and securely give to your parish.



Support Eltham Parish by giving with CDFpay

Simply scan the QR code with your mobile phone and in a few easy steps you can safely and securely give to your parish.



Türkiye / Syria

Plea for lifting of sanctions as devastating quake takes its toll

ELLEN TEAGUE

The death toll from the two devastating earthquakes that hit Türkiye and Syria on 6 February is continuing to grow, with at least 37,000 (xxx as at 17 Feb) dead and tens of thousands injured.

In Türkiye, Bishop Paolo Bizzeti, apostolic vicar of Anatolia, said the huge numbers of buildings crumbling and the frantic attempts to rescue survivors presented “an opportunity to rethink our lives together”. Charity networks including Caritas are all helping the affected communities.

Bishop Bizzeti reported that Iskenderun’s cathedral had collapsed and Syrian Orthodox and Orthodox churches had been destroyed. Antakya, the heart of Turkish Christianity, is largely destroyed. It is also home to one of southern Turkey’s oldest Jewish communities, and a synagogue was damaged in the quake.

In Syria, Chaldean Bishop Antoine Audo of Aleppo said that, after 12 years of war, “this is a new tremendous bomb, lethal and unknown”.

Many people are living on the streets or in their cars, afraid of further tremors. He said: “Melkite Greek Catholic Archbishop Georges Masri of Aleppo has been pulled out alive but his vicar is still under the destroyed building.”

The Middle East Council of Churches called for the immediate lifting of sanctions against Syria and for access to all resources. Archbishop of Westminster Cardinal Vincent Nichols has offered prayers and “sincere condolences” to members of Chaldean Catholic Church, which has substantial numbers of members in both Syria and Türkiye.



BISHOP ROBERT RABBAT'S

SYRIAN EARTHQUAKE APPEAL

PLEASE DONATE NOW

The recent Syrian earthquake has hit people who were already displaced in a region that has been devastated by more than a decade of civil war. Yet again, we are seeing people fleeing and desperate for shelter in freezing winter conditions. We want to help provide that light in the deepest darkness, to get through this devastating disaster.

MCF DGR ACCOUNT

Ref: Syrian Appeal
BSB: 062784
Account: 100011493

All donations are Tax Deductible.
For a receipt please email
mcf@melkite.org.au
or contact on (02) 9750 5514

Melkite
iCare



LGBT Community / Francis calls for the decriminalization of homosexuality

Pope says it is a sin to condemn gay people

**PATRICK HUDSON,
CHRISTOPHER LAMB
and MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS**

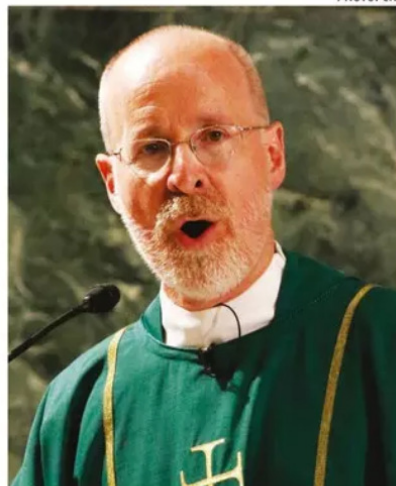
Pope Francis has reiterated his call for the decriminalization of homosexuality, stating that to condemn gay people, as some clergy do, is a sin.

Speaking on the flight from Juba to Rome after his ecumenical pilgrimage to South Sudan, the Pope said that gay people “are children of God, and God loves the, he accompanies them”.

“To condemn someone like this is a sin. To criminalise people with homosexual tendencies is an injustice,” said Francis. “I am not talking about groups but people. You can say ‘they make groups ...’, but they are people. Lobbies are another thing, but they are people.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who was also on the flight, said he would “quote the Holy Father” at the Church of England’s general synod this week during debates on the blessing of same-sex marriages.

The Pope was responding to questions about his remarks in an



Fr James Martin SJ

Associated Press interview last month in which he called for the decriminalization of homosexuality while seeming to suggest it was still a sin.

In the United States, following the interview, Fr James Martin SJ, a priest who leads an apostolate to the LGBT community, published a note from Francis clarifying those comments.

“When I said [homosexuality] is a sin, I was simply referring to Catholic moral teaching, which says that every sexual act outside of marriage is a sin,” the Pope wrote. “Of course, one must also consider the circumstances, which may decrease or eliminate fault. As you can see, I was repeating something in general. I should have said, ‘It is a sin, as is any sexual act outside of marriage’.

“This is to speak of ‘the matter’ of sin, but we know well that Catholic morality not only takes into consideration the matter but also evaluates freedom and intention; and this, for every kind of sin.”

The debate over the Pope’s remarks has accompanied controversy surrounding comments by the Bishop of San Diego, Cardinal Robert McElroy, in an article for *America* magazine.

McElroy stated his conviction that not all sexual sins were grave enough to warrant abstaining from Communion, and he questioned the pastoral consequences of the traditional distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts.

In his address to the European continental assembly of the Synod of Bishops meeting in Prague this week, a Czech priest and philosopher argued that synodal renewal is a decisive moment in the history of the Church / **by Tomáš Halík**

The way, the truth and the life

At the beginning, when Christians were asked what was new about their practice, whether it was a new religion or a new philosophy, they answered: “It is the way. It is the way of following the one who said: I am the Way.”

The Church as a communion of pilgrims is a living organism, which means always being open, transforming and evolving. Synodality, a common journey (*syn hodos*), means a constant openness to the Spirit of God, through whom the risen, living Christ lives and works in the Church. The synod is an opportunity to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the Church today.

The Church is a mystery; we know where the Church is, but we do not know where she is not. We believe and confess that the Church is a mystery, a sacrament, a sign (*signum*) - a sign of the unity of all humanity in Christ. The Church is a dynamic sacrament, it is a way to that goal. Total unification is an eschatological goal that can only be fully realized at the end of history. Only then will the Church be completely and perfectly one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Only then will we see and mirror God fully.

The task of the Church is to keep the desire for this goal ever present in human hearts, and at the same time to resist the temptation to regard any form of the Church, any state of society and any state of religious, philosophical or scientific knowledge, as final and perfect.

We must always distinguish the concrete form of the Church in history from its eschatological form; that is, we must distinguish the Church on the way, the

Church struggling (*ecclesia militans*), from the victorious Church in Heaven (*ecclesia triumphans*). To regard the Church in the midst of history as the perfect *ecclesia triumphans* leads to triumphalism, a dangerous form of idolatry. Moreover, the *ecclesia militans*, if it does not resist the temptation of triumphalism, can become a sinful militant institution.

We confess with humility that this has happened repeatedly in the history of Christianity. These tragic experiences lead us now to the firm conviction that the mission of the Church is to be a source of spiritual inspiration and transformation, fully respecting the freedom of conscience of every human person and rejecting any use of force, and form of manipulation.

Like political power, moral influence and spiritual authority can also be misused, as the scandals of sexual, psychological, economic and spiritual abuse in the Church have shown us, especially the abuse and exploitation of the weakest and most vulnerable.

The permanent task of the Church is mission. If we take seriously the principle of synodality, then mission cannot be understood as a one-sided process but rather as accompaniment in a spirit of dialogue, a quest for mutual understanding. Synodality is a process of learning in which we not only teach but also learn.

The call to open the “courtyard of the Gentiles” within the temple of the Church, to integrate the seekers, was a positive step on the path of synodality in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Today,

however, we need to go further. Something has happened to the whole temple form of the Church and we must not ignore it. Before his election to the See of Peter, Cardinal Bergoglio recalled the words of Scripture: Jesus stands at the door and knocks. But today, he added, Jesus knocks *from within*. He wants to go out and we must follow him. We need to go beyond our current mental and institutional boundaries, to go especially to the poor, the marginalized, the suffering. The Church is to be a field hospital - this idea of Pope Francis needs to be developed further. A field hospital must have the backing of a Church that is able to offer competent diagnosis (reading the signs of the times); prevention (strengthening the system of immunity against infectious ideologies such as populism, nationalism and fundamentalism); and therapy and long-term recovery (including the process of reconciliation and healing of wounds after times of violence and injustice).

This very serious task, the Church urgently needs allies - its journey must be shared, a common journey (*syn hodos*). We must not approach others with the pride and arrogance of the owners of truth. Truth is a book that none of us has yet read to the end. We are not *owners* of truth, but *lovers* of truth and lovers of the only One who is allowed to say: I am the Truth.

Jesus did not answer Pilate’s question with a theory, an ideology, or a definition of truth. But he *testified to the truth* that transcends all doctrines and ideologies; he revealed the truth that is happening, that is alive and personal. Only Jesus can say: *I*

am the Truth. And at the same time, he says: I am the way and the life.

A truth that was not living and not a way would be more like an ideology, a mere theory. Orthodoxy must be combined with *orthopraxy* - right action.

And we must not forget the third, deeper dimension of living in truth. This is *orthopathy*, right passion, desire, inner experience - spirituality. Above all, it is through spirituality - the spiritual experience of individual believers and of the whole Church - that the Spirit gradually introduces us to the wholeness of the truth. These three need each other. Although orthodoxy (right ideas) can be intellectually attractive, without orthopraxy (right action) it is ineffective, and without orthopathy (right feeling) it is cold, callow and shallow.

The new evangelization and the synodal transformation of the Church and the world constitute a process in which we must learn to worship God in a new and deeper way - in Spirit and in truth. We must not be afraid that some forms of the Church are dying: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). We must not look for the living among the dead.

Triumphalism, the worship of a dead God, must be replaced by a humble kenotic ecclesiology. The life of the Church consists in participating in the paradox of Easter: the moment of self-giving and self-transcendence, the transformation of death into resurrection and new life.

The Church participates in the transformation of the world above all through evangelization. The fruitfulness of evangelization lies in inculturation, the incarnation of faith in a living culture, in the way people think and live. European Christianity was considered a paradigmatic example of inculturation: Christianity became the dominant force in European civilization. Gradually, however, the drawbacks and shadows of this

type of evangelization became apparent. Since the Enlightenment, we have witnessed in Europe a certain "exculturation" of Christianity, a secularization of culture and society. This has not caused the disappearance of Christianity, as some expected, but its transformation. Certain elements of the Gospel message that had been neglected by the Church during its association with political power were incorporated into secular humanism. The Second Vatican Council attempted to put an end to the "culture wars" between Catholicism and secular modernity and to integrate precisely these values (e.g. the emphasis on freedom of conscience) into the Church's official teaching through dialogue. (Hans Urs von Balthasar spoke of "robbing the Egyptians".)

The first sentence of *Gaudium et Spes* sounds like a marriage vow: the Church promises the people of our times love, respect and fidelity, solidarity and receptivity to its joys and hopes, griefs and anguish. However, this courtesy was not met with much reciprocity. To "modern man", the Church seemed too old and unattractive a bride. Moreover, the Church's benevolence towards modern culture came at a time when modernity was coming to an end. The new postmodern age has been characterized in particular by the paradox of globalization - on the one hand, near universal interconnection, on the other, radical plurality.

The darker side of globalization is showing itself today. Consider the global spread of violence, from the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 to the state terrorism of Russian imperialism and the current Russian genocide in Ukraine; pandemics of infectious diseases; destruction of the natural environment; and destruction of the moral climate through populism, fake news, nationalism, political radicalism and religious fundamentalism.

Teilhard de Chardin was one of the first prophets of globalization.

He argued that the culminating phase of the process of globalization would not arise from some automatism of development and progress, but from a conscious and free turn of humankind towards "a single force that unites without destroying". He saw this power in love as understood in the Gospel. Love is self-realization through self-transcendence.

I believe that this decisive moment is happening right now and that the turn of Christianity towards synodality, the transformation of the Church into a dynamic community of pilgrims, can have an impact on the destiny of the whole human family. Synodal renewal can and should be an invitation, encouragement and inspiration *to all* to walk together, to grow and to mature together.

If the Church is to contribute to the transformation of the world, it must itself be permanently transformed: it must be *ecclesia semper reformanda*. If reform is to bear good fruit, it must be preceded and accompanied by a revitalization of the "circulatory system" of the body of the Church - and that is spirituality.

Jesus tells us the same thing he told the exhausted fishermen he met on the shores of Lake Gennesaret: try again, go to the deep.

"Why are you afraid - don't you have faith?" Jesus says in all storms and crises. Faith is a courageous journey to the deep, a journey of transformation (*metanoia*) of the Church and the world, a common journey (*synhodos*) of synodality. It is a journey from paralyzing fear to foresight, prudence, discernment, openness to the future and receptivity to God's challenges in the signs of the times.

Tomáš Halík is professor of sociology of religion at Charles University, Prague. He was awarded the Templeton Prize in 2014. Visit thetablet.co.uk for the complete text of Halík's address to the European continental assemble.

Roster for THIS WEEKEND: 18/19 February 2023	
Boyd, Mary	PRYR
Castellanos, Rodrigo	E10:00
Cotter, Anne	W8:30
Davidson, John	W8:30
Donnellan, Denice	E10:00
Dunell, Linda	E10:00
Haines, Geoff	E10:00
Haines, Geoff	H10:00
Haines, Jan-Marie	H10:00
Heyhoe, Margaret	C10:00
Maynes, Phil	W6:00
McAlear, Peter	ASRC
Reardon, Kathy	ASE
Reardon, Peter	E10:00
Rigg Family	PRSE
Rodriguez, Carlos	W6:00
Scully, Greg	R10:00
Scully, Helen	ASE
Roster for NEXT WEEKEND: 25/26 February 2023	
Armstrong, Miranda	E10:00
Bacani, Brian	W6:00
Ballenger, Nima	E10:00
Bowyer, Darrell	ASRC
Bowyer, Rosemary	ASRC
Bylsma, John	H10:00
Bylsma, Zvonka	H10:00
Davidson, John	PRYR
Dopheide, Marlis	C10:00
Dunell, Linda	ASE
French, Jossie	W8:30
Haines, Jan-Marie	E10:00
Illiffe, Yvonne	E10:00
Love, Philip	W8:30
McEwen, Christopher	R10:00
Reardon, Kathy	E10:00
Rough Family	PRSE
Saltamacchia, Carmel	ASE
Williams, Peter	W6:00

ASE = Altar Society @ Eltham; C = Commentator; E = Euch. Minister;
H = Hospitality ; PRSE = Pilgrim Rosary Statue @ Eltham;
W = Minister of the Word; R = Reader



Pastoral Care Appeal 2023 This weekend is the Pastoral Care Appeal. Donations from our parish community will help the Chaplaincy programs to support the most vulnerable people in our community. Your support and generosity will ensure that Catholic Chaplains can continue to be the messengers of God's mercy, love and compassion. Parishioners are encouraged to offer prayers and financial support to help provide continued spiritual and emotional comfort to individuals and families in Victoria facing, illness, pain, loneliness, grief and death. You can donate using the envelopes available or online at www.catholiccarevic.org.au or call (03) 9287 5513.



HELP SYRIA. *Aid to the Church in Need* (ACN) has launched an emergency appeal for the people in northern Syria desperate for help following the devastating earthquakes. ACN is begging for funds to support their long-time local project partners on the ground in Syria.

To read more about what ACN is doing and to make an offering please visit

www.aidtochurch.org/syriaearthquake

or scan the QR code.



DONATE NOW

caritas.org.au/project-compassion
1800 924 413
#ProjectCompassion

Want to put your faith into action? Volunteer to be a Caritas Australia Ambassador!

Caritas Australia is the Catholic agency for international aid and development, working to alleviate poverty and bring hope and justice to marginalised communities throughout the world.

We're inviting a parishioner to volunteer to help coordinate Project Compassion in your parish community. The volunteer Caritas Ambassador can do as much as they are comfortable with, for example distributing Project Compassion boxes or envelopes to parishioners, showing the Project Compassion films and/or giving a short talk (examples available).

Many other opportunities also arise during the year should you be keen to continue helping your parish community to put their faith into action, in solidarity with some of our world's most vulnerable communities.

To find out more or register your interest, please email education@caritas.org.au



Let us pray for all those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith ...

Montmorency

For the recently deceased:

Tony Belfiore

For those whose anniversaries are at this time:

Jan Collins, Sheila Lee, Madge McDonell, Aileen Moylan

For those in need of healing, remembering especially:

Arturo Bacani, Rita Bevanda, Kim Brisbane, Debbie Edgley (nee Vanderwert), Alana Foulds Bob Fraser, Melanie Lam, Lita Lee, Frances McDonald, Cindy Morrissey, Andrew Pighin, Agatha Spina, Melina Tenaglia

Eltham

For those in need of healing, remembering especially:

Violetta, Jade McAlear, Fiona Rogers, Rosemary Scully, Ian Sturman, James Sutton, Sarah Thompson

To include an anniversary please contact Parish Office

9435 4742 or eltham@cam.org.au.



Congratulations to all who celebrated their sacraments during January:

Saturday 18 February

St Francis Xavier, 12:00pm

Miles Verne Beattie

Solomon Jay Goulding

Baptism

Baptism

Sunday 19 February

Our Lady Help of Christians, 12:00pm

Lily Isla Eve Sheldon

Baptism

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Thank you to all involved in our Parish's Prayer Shawl Ministry for their hard work and their generosity in giving the items to charity. The photos here show a small amount of what will shortly be donated to GIVIT, as there are currently over 60 shawls, scarves, beanies and lap rugs.

Thank you for your continued knitting, crocheting, prayers and chit chat, all of which contributes to making this happen.

Blessings, Elisabeth (0414 673 607)



Prayers of the Faithful for 19 February 2023 - Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Leader: Lord, we gather together in prayer, trusting in your love.

For compassion and forgiveness: may we always leave our hearts open to listen. May we be prepared to see the other side, to meet halfway, to forgive and move on. May Jesus' message influence our leaders to listen and learn from each other, to be informed, to act with compassion and an awareness of both national and global responsibility.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for our country Australia as we endeavor to move towards understanding, reconciliation and a fairer representation of our long Indigenous past. May the Lord guide our leaders and our communities to listen together with respect and dignity, to think creatively, with a genuine desire to move forward together towards a new, shared future story.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for our friends, homes and family, for the beauty of our country and our freedom. Let us remember all those who have lost or who are struggling to find home and security, living in poverty, separated from family, anxious about the future. Our hearts and prayers are especially with the people of Türkiye and Syria.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. May we be compassionate, involved and informed, with eyes open to the needs of our neighbour, in our homes, community and wider society.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

'The spirit of God dwells in you'. May we find the space to allow the spirit of God to work within us, bringing wisdom, acceptance and peace. We pray for those who are suffering with physical or mental illness. May the spirit of the Lord dwell gently within, bringing healing and peace.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who have died, and whose anniversaries occur around this time, including *Jan Collins, Sheila Lee, Madge McDonell & Aileen Moylan*. May they rest in the peace and love of the Lord.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Dear friends, may our lives reflect Jesus' message of kindness and compassion. We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen

THE PARADOX OF JEAN VANIER

Jean Vanier was founder of and inspiration for the remarkable L'Arche worldwide network of therapeutic communities for people with learning disabilities. He was also a serial abuser of women. When this came to light two years ago, the shock to the communities he founded was immense. Now, with the publication of an exhaustive external investigation into what happened, commissioned by the governing body of L'Arche, the contradictions are almost unfathomable. Vanier seemed to have no perception of himself as a sinner: he was doing God's work. His key idea was to take people with learning disabilities out of the grimly depressing institutions to which they had been confined by a heartless society. They were treated as human beings with the need for caring relationships, and all the human gifts they had to offer appreciated. In its context, L'Arche was revolutionary.

The communities that grew from the initial L'Arche community, founded in Trosly-Breuil, northern France, in 1964, brought people together as equals, respecting the rights and human dignity of all members whatever their abilities. Now there are 150 communities in 38 countries. Though the leadership of L'Arche has to learn lessons from this story, it is imperative that it should continue to flourish.

Over the years Vanier's vision attracted many volunteers of all types and conditions. He sought out idealistic young women among them, and began a sexual affair with a selected few, with intense religious and quasi-mystical overtones. The details, set out in the new report, are very disturbing.

But also paradoxical. There is no evidence that he ever sexually abused any of the disabled members of the communities of L'Arche to which he had access. In a curious tribute to Catholic moral teaching, he refrained from full sexual intercourse with his victims, many of whom appeared to consent. They were adult women, often highly intelligent and well-educated. But the power he had over them was profoundly abusive, exploiting their perhaps naive Catholic piety to make them think that by submitting to him they were being obedient to God's will. What he was doing was psychologically and spiritually damaging, often hampering their capacity to have healthy adult relationships.

So in his insight into the needs and gifts of those with mental disabilities he was compassion personified; in his treatment of these women, he lacked empathy to the point of sadism. It is hard to comprehend. But the phenomenon of religious movements growing up around charismatic men who cultivate impunity is not unique to L'Arche. What is perhaps unique is the good L'Arche has done to those with special needs for whom it has been life-affirming and liberating.

Why were Vanier's sexual manipulations not spotted, and stopped? It is true the women involved were slow to come forward: he had bound them to secrecy, and they knew that revelations of abuse would inevitably be damaging to L'Arche's reputation. As always, what does the damage is not just the abuse itself but the fear surrounding it, the well-meaning turning of blind eyes, the refusal to be suspicious.

Jean Vanier / President of the French Conference of Religious speaks out

L'Arche report underlines 'the great silence'

BESS TWISTON DAVIES

Sr Véronique Margron, the president of the French Conference of Religious, is demanding the Church take responsibility for the record of sexual, spiritual and psychological abuses committed by Jean Vanier and his spiritual mentor, Fr Thomas Philippe.

A 900-page report detailing abuse claims against the French-Canadian founder of L'Arche found that at least 25 women had "experienced sexual contact" with Vanier as "part of a continuum of confusion, control and abuse" between 1950 and 2019.

Fr Philippe, a Dominican, is described by the report as a "deviant mystic" who influenced the "sectarian" group led by Vanier within L'Arche, the communities he founded where people with disabilities live alongside adults without them.

Sr Margron said the report's findings prompted questions about the Catholic Church's "entire ecclesial, theological and pastoral culture, since



Sr Véronique Margron: the Church must take responsibility

it has been the breeding ground for abuse, manipulation, aggression, lies and even death".

She spoke after the publication of the report on 30 January. It said Vanier had belonged to a "sectarian group" in the L'Arche Trosly community that held "distorted pseudo-mystical beliefs" and had "a culture of deliberate secrecy".

L'Arche International commissioned the independent report after the first claims of Vanier's abuse emerged in 2020. Six researchers from the fields of history, sociology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis and theology, conducted 119 interviews for the report. Access to church archives revealed that Fr Philippe had been subjected to a trial by the Holy Office in 1953 on charges of "false mysticism". He died in 1993. Vanier died in 2019.

Margron said the inquiry had demonstrated how secrecy, and "the great silence" by the Vatican, had enabled the "gnostic delusions" of Vanier and Philippe as well as their impunity and abuse.

None of the abuse claims involves women with learning disabilities or took place in L'Arche communities in this country. The leaders of L'Arche International, Stephan Posner and Stacy Cates-Carney, acknowledged their "institutional responsibility" for failing to spot, report and forestall the abuses.