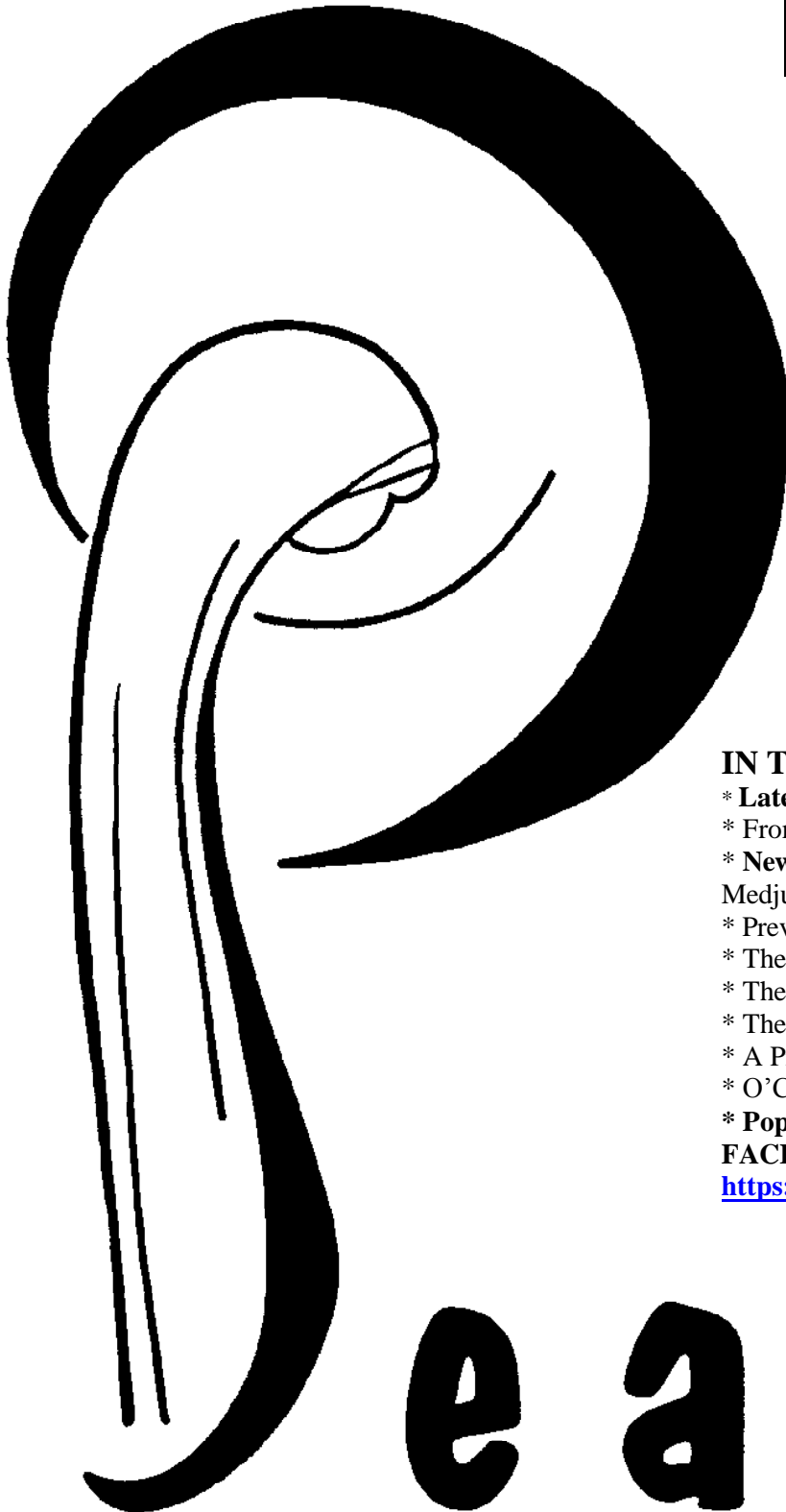


MEDJUGORJE NEWS

New Zealand

FREE

Issue no* - 87 March 2018



Preview of
the 2018
Auckland
Eucharistic
Convention

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As its name implies, the aim of this newsletter is essentially **the spreading of the messages received by the visionaries** in Medjugorje, according to the wishes of Our Lady

The Medjugorje Story

On the evening of 24 June 1981, in the parish of St James in Medjugorje, six young people claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin Mary on Podbrdo Hill. The next day four of the six alleged another meeting with Our Lady, and said they spoke with her. On this occasion, the four teenagers (three girls and a boy) were joined by another young boy and a teenage girl. These six became the definitive visionaries in Medjugorje; they are Ivanka Ivankovic, Mirjana Dragicevic, Vicka Ivankovic, Ivan Dragicevic, Marija Pavlovic and Jakov Colo.

Since 1981, these six young people have been the centre of world attention, and medical and scientific studies. Their principal claim is that practically every day to the present time, our Blessed Lady has been appearing to one or more of them, and that from her they have received thousands of messages for the parish of Medjugorje and the world. All six still claim apparitions, though only three of them now on a daily basis, and each of the six says that he or she has received, or is in the process of receiving, ten secrets. The first of the secrets is to be revealed to the world through Mirjana Dragicevic, and the third is said to be concerned with a permanent sign that will authenticate the apparitions and be a help to conversion, and will be evident to all at Medjugorje. The visionaries say that Our Lady identifies herself to them as the Queen of Peace.

As a result of these claims, more than forty million people have visited Medjugorje from all over the world and there have been many assertions regarding remarkable signs and wonders, cures and spiritual healing. There is no doubt at all that those millions of people have found a pilgrimage to Medjugorje one of the most spiritually significant experiences of their lives.

News from Medjugorje can be found at the official website:

<http://www.medjugorje.hr/>

We acknowledge and accept that the authority regarding the authenticity of apparitions, locutions and related messages as well as all private revelations from **Our Lord, Our Lady or any Saint rests with the Holy See of Rome whose final judgement we will respect and obey.**

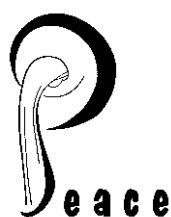
We also affirm our total allegiance to our One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, our Priests and Bishops and our Holy Father, Pope Francis .

THE MEDJUGORJE MESSAGE

The Blessed Virgin Mary proposes a six-point programme:

1. **Faith** - Belief in God and in the supernatural. It is your true vision. Therefore live by it.
2. **Commitment to God** - Let Him direct your life. Begin by turning away from sin in true conversion and repentance.
3. **Prayer** - Regular Mass, monthly confession, daily rosary and dedication to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
4. **Fasting** - Bread and water on Fridays (and Wednesdays) if you can. If not, at least cut back or practise some other form of self denial.
5. **Peace** - In your own heart, in your family and neighbourhood and workplace, in all your human relations and reaching out to the war-stricken world.
6. **The Holy Bible** - We should read part of the Holy Scripture every day.

The Messages of Mary are addressed not only to Catholics but to the whole human race, regardless of beliefs or religion.



Our Lady's Messages



25 November, 2017

"Dear children!

In this time of grace, I call you to prayer. Pray and seek peace, little children. He who came here on earth to give you His peace, regardless of who you are and what you are – He, my Son, your Brother – through me is calling you to conversion, because without God you do not have a future or eternal life. Therefore, believe and pray and live in grace and the expectation of your personal meeting with Him.

Thank you for having responded to my call."

25 December, 2017

"Dear children!

Today I am bringing to you my Son Jesus for Him to give you His peace and blessing. I am calling all of you, little children, to live and witness the graces and the gifts which you have received. Do not be afraid. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to be joyful witnesses and people of peace and hope.

Thank you for having responded to my call."

Annual Apparition to Jakov Colo on December 25th, 2017

"Dear children,

Today, on this day of grace, I am calling you to ask the Lord for the gift of faith. My children, decide for God and begin to live and to believe in that what God is calling you to. To believe, my children, means to surrender your lives into God's hands - the hands of the Lord who created you and who loves you immeasurably. Do not be believers only in words but live and witness your faith through works and through your personal example. Speak with God as with your Father. Open and surrender your hearts to Him and you will see how your hearts are changing and how your life will marvel at God's works in your life. My children, there is no life without God and that is why, as your mother, I intercede before, and pray to, my Son to renew your hearts and to fill your life with immeasurable love.

Thank you for having responded to my call."

25 January, 2018

"Dear children!

May this time be for you a time of prayer, so that the Holy Spirit, through prayer, may descend upon you and give you conversion. Open your hearts and read the Sacred Scripture, that through the testimonies you also may be closer to God. Above everything, little children, seek God and the things of God and leave earthly ones to the earth, because Satan is attracting you to the dust and sin. You are called to holiness and created for Heaven; therefore, seek Heaven and the things of Heaven.

Thank you for having responded to my call."



From the Editor:

Dear Friends of Medjugorje News,

New photo, New Year, New(old team). Have decided to introduce you to the "team" at Medjugorje News NZ (Dargaville). It comprises of myself, Bernadette and Miriam. Yes that is the team, so if you feel that your mail is not being answered quickly enough, I am sorry, we are a small team, all working extremely hard for Our Lady, both with the magazine and the 101 other jobs we do at home, work or for the Church community. Don't get me wrong, we love it, life is never dull working for The Lord or Our Lady. Both Bernadette and Miriam have written articles in the magazine this issue, both extremely unimpressed when I suggested the idea but how the Holy Spirit works.



At the beginning of the New Year I was blessed to be at the birth of my granddaughter Ellie Marie Hawkins,

born 14 January, 2018. On looking at my prayer book, I was amazed to see that the births of both my grandchildren, correspond with dates I had started praying a certain pray. The first was for "Our Lady of Guadalupe, Intercessor of the Unborn", that began on 14 February, 2011, my grandson Hunter was born on 14 February, 2014. The other pray was "The Consecration to the Holy Angels", this began on the 14 January, 2008, ten years to the day, our granddaughter was born. Now what an amazing "Gift" The Lord has given me. Whenever I despair, I just need to look at all the wonderful blessings he has given me along the way, and I realise that He is always beside me in everything I do. What a wonderful GOD.



Yes we have made it to another issue, and the June issue is also looking good with the donations that have come in for the magazine. We send out around 4000 copies each issue, and the cost to produce each issue, with postage and printing is around \$6500. With the cost of postage continuing to go up, it has been suggested that we use email more or people can download off our website. That is good and we encourage our

readers to take this opportunity up. However, there is the majority that don't have access to a computer or the internet, so mailing is the only form of reading. Thank you to all who have made donations, your generosity is much appreciated. Thanks be to God that the magazine is able to continue.

Our condolences to the family of Denis McCarthy of Hamilton, who died late last year. Denis used to deliver 350 magazines to the various churches in the Hamilton area, he will be sorely missed. If anyone, or more people are interested in taking up delivering to the Hamilton diocese, please give us a call or email us.

See you all at the Eucharistic Convention, hopefully, all of the team will be there to meet and greet.

We can now be found on facebook thanks to Bob and Judith Gill, our webmaster.
<https://www.facebook.com/medjugorjenz>

May the Lords face shine on you and give you peace, and may the Lord bless you and keep you.

Sarah Moran

Visiting those in prison – by writing

Would you like to become involved in a very special work of mercy by writing to long-term prisoners in a foreign country?

Divine Mercy Publications have set up a team of letter writers to correspond with the inmates of a maximum security jail in Zambia, central Africa. Most of these are Catholics/Christians to whom we send reading and prayer literature as well as clothes and toiletries.

The requests for pen pals are growing; the prison we write to has over 400 inmates, most of whom are in desperate need of consolation and encouragement. They are served by an Irish Catholic priest, whom they see 2-3 times per month.

We wish to continue this important work of mercy and need helpers to 'adopt' a prisoner and write on a regular basis, usually once every 1-2 months. Can you help?

There will be absolutely no cost to you, Divine Mercy Publications/Trust will cover all expenses including sending funds via the prison Chaplain approximately twice per year to help the inmates purchase food, toiletries, medicines, clothes and in some case pay a portion of their children's school fees to prevent them becoming 'street kids'.

All you need give is your time and mercy to these needy souls.

If you would like to know more please contact us. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Divine Mercy Publications Trust Christchurch. PO Box 20266, Bishopdale, Christchurch 8543 –
Ph/Fax 03 3592087

Excerpts from

Children of Medjugorje

From Sister Emmanuel - <http://www.childrenofmedjugorje.com/>

On November 2, 2017, Mirjana received her monthly apparition at the Blue Cross in the presence of a large crowd. After the apparition, she conveyed the message Our Lady gave us:

"Dear children! As I am looking at you gathered around me, your mother, I see many pure souls, many of my children who are seeking love and consolation, but no one is offering it to them. I also see those who are doing evil, because they do not have good examples; they have not come to know my Son. The good which is silent and is spread through pure souls is the strength which sustains this world. There is much sin, but there is also love. My Son is sending me to you - the mother who is the same for everyone - that I may teach you to love, to comprehend that you are brothers. He desires to help you.

Apostles of my love, a living desire of faith and love is sufficient, and my Son will accept it. But you must be worthy, you must have good will and open hearts. My Son enters into open hearts. I, as a mother, desire that you may all the better come to know my Son - God born of God - to come to know the greatness of His love which you need so much. He accepted your sins upon Himself and obtained redemption for you, and in return He asked that you love each other. My Son is love.

He loves all people without difference, all people of all countries and of all nations. If you, my children, would live the love of my Son, His kingdom would already be on earth. Therefore, apostles of my love, pray, pray that my Son and His love may be all the closer to you; that you may be an example of love and may help all those who have not come to know my Son. Never forget that my Son, one and triune, loves you. Love your shepherds and pray for them. Thank you. "

Helping our deceased?

This testimony by Saint Mechthild of Hackeborn (1241-1299) inspires us to pray in a powerful way for those who have left us for a time:

When she had finished reciting her Sunday prayer for the souls in purgatory, she had a vision of a large number of souls who, in an immense bliss, gave thanks to God for their release.

Mechthild rejoiced, and then learned of the death of a certain person. She hastened to recite five Our Fathers in honour of the five wounds of Christ on the Cross. One day, anxious to know what relief this soul had received as a result of her prayer, the Lord answered her: "The soul received five favours: on its right, the angels spread their protection over it; on its left, they gave it consolation; in front, they gave it hope; behind, confidence and above, heavenly joy." Then the Lord added: "Anyone who, in a spirit of compassion and charity, intercedes for a deceased person also participates in all the good that the soul did for the Church. The day the intercessor leaves this world, he will find all these favours prepared for his own relief and for the salvation of his soul."

Why deprive them, and deprive ourselves of such treasures? (See Scandalous Mercy, chapter 38 on Purgatory).

Thieves in our midst!

Every day, new means of communication are made available and placed on the market for us to buy. They are touted everywhere: television, radio, mobile phones, twitter, WhatsApp, Internet, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, etc. If these "modes" are supposed to help us communicate, then why has fellowship and relationships between people deteriorated? Why are families increasingly torn apart? Who are these thieves who come to subtly steal away our time of listening to one another, to participate in the joy of fellowship and unity of hearts?

A trap for our relationships with others. Families should be "a place of understanding and kindness," Mary told us on Oct. 2nd. But through television and all these different devices, too many families have allowed thieves to sneak into their midst. Thieves who steal their time, family conversations, and paying attention to one another. Of course, these technologies are not all bad! They are often very useful and the only means of communication between house-holds miles/kilometres apart. But their frantic, systematic and indiscriminate use has turned them into real domestic tyrants that control us. These new forms of communication, among other things, steal our ability to have a deep inner life, to listen to God and to our neighbour; they steal our ability to adore the Living God, which makes the grandeur of man. They suspend us in a state of distressing superficiality that we are getting used to, and it is a disaster. It is almost like a drug addiction. When we worship God, we become what we truly are in the eyes of the Creator, while these impostors deprive us little by little of our beautiful identity.

Many families are suffering from a critical lack of communion. Where love is not expressed, every person tries to survive his imprisonment by seeking compensation through all-out communication. Oh if only we knew how much God wants to talk to us! After all, His first commandment begins with "**Shema Israel**", (Listen Israel)!

A pitfall in our relationship with God

The Lord said to St. Faustina: "In a chatty soul, I find no rest. The incessant turmoil exhausts me, and in this

tumult, the soul cannot hear my voice." God indeed speaks to every soul, but only a small number of them hear the murmur of His voice. Today, many people are afraid of silence; afraid of having to face themselves. Noise enables us to forget our inner emptiness by pretending to fill it. What an illusion! Poor heart, it cannot find true joy! Poor heart that does not know that only God can fill it, and which forgets its capacity to be filled!

How can we keep a pure heart?

When we are criticized or we hear unkind words, we are hit by them like the shore is hit by a wave. It can hit a rock and bounce back with even greater violence: this is what happens when we respond, justify ourselves or further spread these words around. But the wave can also run aground on the sand, lose its strength and end up disappearing: that is when we oppose criticism, slander and hatred with silence, as Jesus did during His Passion. Thus, violence runs aground in our silence, and simply disappears.

"Never enter into a [combative] discussion," said the Mother of God! For instance, if someone curses God in your presence, pretend not to hear it. Do not respond, do not argue back. But in your heart, bless the Lord with all your heart, say as many praises as you can. Your blessing will cancel out the effect of the blasphemy, and God will be glorified.

The three filters: the philosopher Socrates gave us some very good advice. When we hear something bad being said, and we want to repeat it to others, let's first put it to the test of the "three filters":

- a.) Is it absolutely true?
- b.) Is it a good thing to say?
- c.) Is it useful to say it?

If it is neither true, nor good, nor useful... then let's forget it!

Advent is nearing, this is the time when the Mother of God was silent as she carried Baby Jesus in the quiet of her heart. She did not cry out from the rooftops: "Guess what! I have the best news ever for you!"

"Silence is a sword in spiritual struggle," says St. Faustina.

"A talkative soul will never attain sanctity. The sword of silence will cut off everything that would like to cling to the soul. We are sensitive to words, and quickly want to answer back, without having any regard as to whether it is God's will that we should speak."

"A silent soul is strong. If it perseveres in silence, no adversities will harm it. The silent soul is capable of attaining the closest union with God. It lives almost always under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In a silent soul, God works without hindrance," (Diary §477).

"The Holy Spirit does not speak to the dissipated and talkative soul, but speaks by silent inspiration to the soul that knows how to keep silent. If silence were strictly observed, there would be no murmurs, no bitterness, no slander and gossip. Love of neighbour would not be tarnished. In a word, many flaws would cease to exist. A mouth that keeps silent is pure gold and is a testament to inner holiness," (Diary §145).

Elsewhere, Jesus also said to her: "Try to live in silent reflection in order to hear my voice, which is a murmur; only souls remaining in silent recollection can hear it," (Diary §1779).

On December 2, 2017, Mirjana received her monthly apparition in the dining room of her guest house, in the presence of a small number of people. After the apparition, she conveyed the message Our Lady gave us:

"Dear children, I turn to you as your mother, the mother of the just, the mother of those who love and suffer, the mother of those who are holy. My children, you too can be holy - this depends on you. Those who are holy are those who immeasurably love the Heavenly Father, those who love Him above all. Therefore, my children, always strive to be better. If you strive to be good you can be holy even though you may not think so of yourselves. If you think that you are good, you are not humble, and arrogance distances you from holiness. In this peace less world full of threats, your hands, apostles of my love, should be extended in prayer and mercy.

"And to me, my children, give the gift of the rosary, the roses which I love so much. My roses are your prayers pronounced with the heart and not only recited with the lips. My roses are your acts of prayer, faith and love. When my Son was little, he said to me that my children would be numerous and that they would bring me many roses. I did not comprehend Him. Now I know that you are those children who are bringing me roses when, above all, you love my Son, when you pray with the heart, when you help the poorest. Those are my roses. That is the faith which makes everything in life be done through love, not knowing arrogance, and always ready to forgive; never judging, always striving to understand one's brother.

"Therefore, apostles of my love, pray for those who do not know how to love, for those who do not love you, for those who have done evil to you, for those who have not come to know the love of my Son. My children, I ask this of you because, remember, to pray means to love and to forgive. Thank you."

Odette Caught In the Ice on Podbrdo

A few days ago, the parish of Medjugorje was shaken by a terrible event: a French pilgrim was reported missing. Odette, an 84 year-old single woman, had come with a group from Nice to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Odette was working as a nanny for a large family whose mother had died. She is a simple person, full of common sense who has a deep faith in God's love.

That Tuesday morning, on December 5th, the cold with its freezing temperatures fell upon the village. Odette climbed up the hill of Podbrdo and walked away from the normal path in order to explore the blessed place a little more. However, because of her poor eye sight she got lost. Instead of panicking she prudently decided to stay where she was in order to avoid anything worse happening. She thought that, on one side there was a pit, and on the other very high rocks. But the day went by and no one came to her rescue.

The cold became more bitter. To prevent herself from freezing, she moved around on the spot, constantly praying, and did not get discouraged. She was convinced that the Blessed Mother would send someone who would eventually find her. She told herself, 'Jesus was found in the Temple!' When the dark of the night finally fell on the hill, the temperature dropped to 23 degrees Fahrenheit.

Odette did not want to lie down. She fought her tiredness and cold with all the little strength she had. She prayed and sang and thought of Jesus in His Passion. 'He too was thirsty on the cross, I can bear that too!' She thought. Then she lost her balance and fell on a stone. She was hurt and thought, 'Jesus was flogged, I can endure that too!' She could no longer move her legs, yet her confidence was still not shaken! To make a long story short, it wasn't until the following evening that Odette was found again. She was immediately taken to the hospital in Citluk, where she was warmed up gradually and fully checked out. There was nothing wrong with her, not even a cold!! She was able to come back to Medjugorje where she resumed her pilgrimage with her group from Nice on her own two feet!

On Tuesday, we were told about her disappearance and everyone started praying. When the village heard the news, a wonderful chain of support and supplication was formed. I think that our guardian angels had never been solicited as much as they were during those hours of suspense! We were asking them to warm her up, to give her drink and food in their own ways and keep her in good spirits. Because of the continuing sub-zero temperatures, some people thought she had already died from the cold and were asking the Lord to take her soul into Heaven. The angels heard our prayers! By nature she should have felt the cold more than others since she was not dressed for such an ordeal, yet she told us that she did not suffer from the cold!

After 36 hours, it was one of the 50 first-aid volunteers in Medjugorje, Joseph, a waiter at Viktor restaurant, who found her on Wednesday night at around 11pm. Odette cannot stop thanking him and all those who ardently prayed for her! As for me, listening to Odette, I saw an extraordinary witness to the power of faith. She had a childlike faith that allowed her to hold fast without even being afraid! "One must be confident," she said to me with disarming simplicity! "Our Lady would not abandon me!" Praise God, France still has true believers!

The extraordinary physical and moral protection Odette enjoyed reminds me of the experience of the great Russian writer, Alexander Ogorodnikov. He too, had to live through the "ordeal of freezing". How could he survive his imprisonment in Moscow when in 1986 he was thrown naked into a cell where the walls were covered with ice? The answer is simple and he himself gave witness to it: thousands of people were praying for him, and many had sent him their guardian angels. His torturers wanted him to freeze right there and thus rid the country of this embarrassing Christian. But God had another plan for Alexander: while trapped in the walls of ice, he could feel a mysterious heat and he knew that it came from the prayer of his supporters. He was finally freed and returned to his activities as a witness of Christ.

I could not say how many angels were sent to Odette. God only knows, but we saw their efficiency firsthand! Who among us does not have some people dear to us who are in great physical or moral difficulty? Send them your guardian angel! That angel will be an excellent missionary if you talk to him with faith and affection. Why not do the good that is in our power to do? Why live below our spiritual means and not use these very powerful friends?

A Virgin with Child

The Blessed Mother appeared to Juan Diego in 1531 in Mexico, and we call her Our Lady of Guadalupe. She is one of the few representations of Mary as pregnant. The black maternity belt around Mary's waist, and the jasmine flower over her womb were signs of motherhood to the Aztecs at the time. In addition, the nine golden flowers on her tunic symbolize life and truth. When viewed upside down, the flowers take the shape of hearts with arteries coming out, representing life that originates from God, clearly identifying for the Aztecs, this child to be born as the centre of the universe. When she appeared, Our Lady wished that she be acknowledged as the "Mother of the True God".

The fabric that bears the image, the Tilma, stays at a constant temperature which is that of a woman ready to

give birth. This image is not imprinted on the fabric, rather it floats mysteriously above the fabric, as does the Shroud of Turin. Seeing this woman, who until then was completely unknown by the locals, displaying signs that belonged to their people, thousands of Aztecs asked to be baptized. 'She's one of us,' they thought. For us too, she is one of us! So, why not offer her a nice gesture of affection and gratitude in these special days of Advent? Let's join her in the divine dialogue she already had with her Child who was yet invisible but fully present within her. In these days when we are awaiting the birth of the Son of God together with Mary and Joseph, I suggest that we all pray from the bottom of our heart this simple prayer until the Day of Joy, the celebration of Christmas:

"O Dear Baby Jesus, nestled in the womb of your Immaculate Mother, I have come to see you. I need to talk to you. To tell you first of all how much I marvel at the fact that God himself took our flesh, which is so fragile and vulnerable. You made a mystifying leap from the splendour of Heaven where you lived with the Father in order to unite with our wretched race and take all kinds of risks with us... this thought makes me fling myself into adoration! How could I not love you? How could we not cherish you infinitely in this stage where you are a zygote, an embryo, an unborn child, before even showing your face in that miserable stable of Bethlehem! Yes, I love you because you did so out of pure love for me, for my family, for all humanity. You came into our muck and sludge to save us, to lift us up and enable us to share with you the delights of an eternal life in your presence. Only you Jesus could have imagined something so crazy! But you're not finished surprising us, I'm beginning to know you! Jesus, you know that I am coming to you with an agenda... I have a request, please don't be surprised! At the present time, many millions of tiny beings like you are hidden in their mother's womb. They are your treasures, Jesus! Their angels in heaven ceaselessly behold the face of your Father who is in heaven. There is nothing more innocent than these unborn babies on this Earth. Let me tell you about them. They have all received the gift of life, but have not all received the gift of love. Some float joyfully as they feel the love of their mother, but others wonder what on earth they are doing there, because they feel rejected.

Jesus, you are both Life and Love! Please visit every one of these little ones, those who rejoice to know that they are loved, and also those who are suffering from rejection. You're so tiny that your approach will not frighten them, on the contrary! Come see them wherever they are, in these fragile tabernacles of human life where they slowly grow. You are the same size as they are, be their divine twin! Thanks to the extremely sensitive antennae that their innocence gives them, they all listen to the soul of their mother, and also to their Creator. This is the moment, Jesus! Tell them how infinitely precious they are to you! Don't you recognize your own image in them? Tell them that you can't wait to see them grow up and reach in its fullness what they ought to be in your loving plan for them!

And if, unfortunately, they are ripped out from their humble hiding place, whether naturally or with violence, O tender Jesus, listen to their cry of anguish and spread your immense love in them! Heal their wounds! Please, be it done unto them according to your Word, Jesus, "Father, where I am, may they also be with me!" May the flow of your divine love also flood the heart of those who have chosen to lose them! Please, enable them to throw themselves into your merciful arms!

O my little Jesus hidden in Mary, how can I thank you enough for having visited me from the moment I was conceived in my mother's womb, when she and dad consecrated me to your Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary! Please let all parents take to heart to do the same and keep away from them the wolves who want to steal and devour the children of men!

O tiny Jesus hidden in Mary, listen to my poor prayer for your own kind! And on Christmas night, please be born in my heart! It is yearning for your coming and longing to see your face! My heart awaits to hear your voice in the night, like a watchman waiting for the dawn! Maranatha!"

On January 2, 2018, Mirjana received her monthly apparition at the Blue Cross, in the presence of all those who came to entrust the New Year to the Heart of Mary. After the apparition, she conveyed the message that Mary addresses to all of us:

"Dear children, when love is beginning to disappear on earth, when the way of salvation is not being found, I, the mother, am coming to help you to come to know true faith - living and profound - so as to help you to truly love. As a mother, I am longing for your mutual love, goodness, and purity. My desire is that you be just and that you love each other. My children, be joyful in your soul, be pure, be children. My Son used to say that he loves to be among pure hearts, because pure hearts are always young and joyful. My Son said to you to forgive and to love each other. I know that this is not always easy.

Suffering makes you grow in spirit. For you to spiritually grow all the more, you must sincerely and truly forgive and love. Many of my children on earth do not know my Son, they do not love Him; but you who do love my Son, you who carry Him in your heart, pray, pray and in praying feel my Son beside you. May your soul breathe in His spirit.

I am among you and am speaking about little and great things. I will not grow tired speaking to you about my

Son - the true love. Therefore, my children, open your hearts to me. Permit me to lead you as a mother. Be apostles of the love of my Son and of me. As a mother I implore you not to forget those whom my Son has called to lead you. Carry them in your heart and pray for them. Thank you."

A Beautiful Christmas Present!

At a Christmas gathering with my Community, I drew from a basket the name of a saint, my companion for the year 2018, as I hope you all do too. Well, to my great surprise, I found that this companion was actually a "legion"! What did the paper say? I read: "The Guardian Angels". Not just my own Guardian Angel (who is very used to protecting me), but all the Guardian Angels! I do not know what to expect in this coming year, but if such a crowd of heavenly friends chose me, then they have their reasons.

Do you know that a single Guardian Angel, even the smallest of all, is more powerful than all the demons of hell put together? This is understandable, because a Guardian Angel has God with him, and the demons do not. The task that I am gifted with is a delight for me: "To make the Guardian Angels known". So let's start right here!

As a child, my parents taught me to speak with my Angel and confide in him to be guided and protected. As a little girl, I gave him a name, Raphael, just to make my relationship with him easier. This name was not a revelation, I chose it thinking that he would be happy to bear the name of an Archangel! I thank my parents for having been able to tell me about angels, because I have developed a great and simple friendship with him, without any big mystical experiences. The "little way" of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, without any extraordinary manifestations, is the safest path for me...

One event struck me considerably when I lived in Nazareth. Sylvie, one of the sisters in my Community, came from Protestantism and was still struggling to pray to the saints and angels. Whenever I shared my stories with my Guardian Angel during meals, how he had protected me or how he had helped me in a difficult times, this sister would murmur to herself that this was all hooey. But because these events were real, she decided in secret to test it all herself, just to get to the bottom of this business. One morning, she prayed this prayer: "Raphael, if we really have to pray to the angels and take them on as friends, give me a sign. I am going to tell you something that you will have to pass on to Sr. Emmanuel. If I see that she picks up the message, you will have won, and I will pray to the angels." The morning went by, and for lunch, I went home and told the sisters right away: "Guess what the Lord gave me to understand today!" And I quoted the message that Sylvie had given to my Guardian Angel, verbatim. At the time, she didn't tell me anything as she first had to recover from the shock. But eventually, she became one of the greatest "fans" of the Guardian Angels!

Is Your Angel Unemployed?

We are living way below our means. Yes, I said well below! We are suffering from loneliness, misunderstandings, powerlessness in communicating with our loved ones, we are unclear as to which direction to take... and we don't turn to the celestial friends that God posted at our side! And yet, the more we ask of them, the more they help us. They are given the responsibility of placing us on, or bringing us back to, the path of God, leading us to choose God's will instead of seeking to please people. Every Guardian Angel knows God's special plan for his protégé. Angels are so infinitely precious to us when we live with them in the invisible realm!

Many parents complain about not being listened to by their children, because they prefer to listen to friends of their own age and conform to their way of life. But are these parents forgetting that their child too has an Angel eager to keep him or her emotionally and physically? When there is no more dialogue or when it becomes too difficult, angels help us out divinely. They suggest to the conscience of their protégé the things that please God. And their way of suggesting is so humble and subtle that their charge believes that these are his own thoughts, and therefore acts according to what was suggested to him. Of course this is not automatic, but with a confident prayer to the Angels, we obtain surprising results. Padre Pio was a great friend of angels, to such a degree that his angels would answer his overabundant mail for him! How could he write so many letters when he spent all his time in the confessional?!

From the beginning of the apparitions, the Blessed Mother asked every member of the prayer group to make friends with his Guardian Angel and write him a letter. She would collect these letters during the apparition on the next day. They didn't really know how to do this, but they wrote the letter and placed it at the feet of the Mother of God the next day. As a result, they developed a good relationship with the Angels! This was very enriching for them, especially under the Communist oppression where any protection was a Godsend. Remember that, in case of possible new oppressions today!

That was close!

Martha is a young girl who is very connected to Medjugorje. Here is what she told us: "I live in Normandy and I had just turned 22. I successfully passed my exam as a French teacher and above all I had experienced a strong conversion to the Catholic faith. In short, I was living a happy and very promising year! One evening, after I had spent a wonderful weekend with friends, I was getting ready to go home. I had 3 hours driving ahead of me, and it was already after midnight! My friends strongly advised me not to leave until the next morning. But for me, that

was out of the question because I was working the next day.

So I set off, and after a quarter of an hour, I started feeling sleepy. To get home faster, I started speeding at 93 mph (150 km/hr) for about an hour on the highway when I fell asleep at the wheel. Then something truly extraordinary happened. In the space of a few split seconds, I had a vision of a very bright Angel, and in my heart I knew that it was my Guardian Angel.

He was very big, as if to tell me that he was protecting me and his light was so intense that it woke me up suddenly! I was racing straight for a security railing at 93mph! I had just enough time to swerve to avoid it and get back on the road! That was close... a split second! God is good.

Because of my carelessness, my life could have ended there, at the age of 22, all bloody on the side of the road! But God took pity on me and allowed my Guardian Angel to save me. As Psalm 91 says: "For he hath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways." I give thanks to God for having protected me and for giving me a Guardian Angel who watches over me. Don't forget that you too have a Guardian Angel who watches over you and your loved ones!"

Here is a simple prayer you could say to your Angel:

"Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen"

Sister Emmanuel +

If you want to bring happiness to the whole world, go home and love your family."



The highest "virtue" in our modern milieu is happiness. Unfortunately, the world tells us that happiness can be purchased, traded, and even used and abused. **As Catholics, we know that we can expect to be "reasonably happy in this life but supremely happy in the next,"** which means that **God may permit trials to fall upon our marriage and family.** Rather than trying to change the entire world, Mother Teresa suggested that we spend more time loving our spouses and children, which will transmit joy in our wider communities.

Get Ready for Something Special at Eucharistic Convention XXV!

Each Eucharistic Convention tends to have one speaker who grabs our hearts. Don't be surprised if a special young Maori woman does that in 2018, for obvious reasons, despite all of this year's amazing speakers, including one who's literally out of this world!



When Aisha Te Kani was born, her relatives told her parents: "She is a curse for everything you have ever done wrong. You should put her in a home and forget she exists."

You see, Aisha was born with her heart on the OUTSIDE of her body and with two club feet. No one else in New Zealand had this rare heart condition. Doctors said there was nothing they could do, that she would surely die.

But Aisha survived countless weeks and months in hospital. She made it through school. She survived depression and thoughts of suicide. And she grew into an amazing Christian woman.

Having faced serious challenges herself, she has a real determination to use her life story and experiences to help others discover a sense of hope and purpose that will provoke strength and endurance.

Aisha currently works part time for a charitable trust 'Live For More' and has given amazingly inspirational talks to groups that include FLI and TEDx in Tauranga.

Michael Hopkins' talk is certain to be out of this world.

The NASA astronaut has not only walked in space, he has received Holy Communion while out in the cosmos!

The American astronaut blasted off from Kazakhstan in 2013 on his way to a six-month stay aboard the International Space Station (ISS).

Even though Mike had only been a Catholic for about one year, NASA and his archdiocese allowed him to take a small pyx filled with consecrated hosts into space, and he was given permission to self-administer Holy Communion. What a blessing!

In addition to weekly communion, he treated himself to communion on the morning of his two spacewalks - - "It was really helpful for me to know that Jesus was with me when I went out the hatch into the vacuum of space."

Mike grew up as a "non-practicing Methodist". He married Julie, a Catholic, and decided to come into the Church so he could better participate in his family's religious life. "Mike, that's not a reason to be Catholic," said his priest, Father Skip, who then arranged for Mike to take RCIA classes when he wasn't preparing for his space flight in Russia. He entered the Church before he entered orbit.

The Missouri native has logged 166 days in space. Married with two sons, he says being an astronaut has significantly helped his faith.

"When I receive Communion ... it puts things in perspective for me. When you're in orbit, and you're getting ready to go out on a spacewalk, from an emotional standpoint, you can be very nervous. You can be afraid, if you will. So it helped strengthen my faith, because when I was able to receive the Host and realize that if my faith is strong, I have nothing to be afraid of ... that helped."

Mike's talk is certain to be a highlight, but he's not the only high-flier scheduled for Convention XXV.



Fr Tony Ricard, a favourite son of New Orleans, has "come home" as he promised after Convention 2014, to once again preach and perform alongside members of his beloved Mother of Divine Mercy Choir.

If you didn't 'experience' Father in 2014, drop everything and make sure you come this year – this is a Priest *Like You Ain't Never Seen Before* (unless you have been to New Orleans)! Father Tony is a native son of the Jazz Capital of the World and a natural performer.

He sings! He struts! And, lawsy, lawsy, lawsy can he preach up a storm!

When New Orleans was virtually destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in

2005 -- when almost everyone who could leave, did leave -- Fr Tony stayed, spreading the Gospel and ministering to his suffering people. "He ignites your faith! He keeps it alive! He keeps you believing," says the California filmmaker who produced a doco on the powerhouse priest.

Fr Tony and the Mother of Divine Mercy Community quickly developed a deep bond when they worked together at the 2014 Convention.

In fact, the MDM choir was supposed to just "sing him on", but Father made them a key part of his presentation, and he supported their young people as they told emotional stories of abuse, forgiveness and growth as Catholics. As they say, there was not a dry eye in the house. It was something never to be forgotten and NOT to be missed this year!



RabelztheMC is a Brooklyn-born Catholic rapper who is taking Divine Mercy to the streets in America and to NZ!

I pray the novena, I pray the novena, I been kinda slipping but I won't start tripping Cuz I pray with St Faustina. "My goal, my mission is to expose Jesus' Divine Mercy to hip-hop culture, to youth, and to the world before it's too late," says the rapper, whose given name is Melvin Windley.

The father of five miraculously escaped the violent, sex-driven rap business due to St Faustina's Diary, which his wife shared with him during a particularly difficult time. Entry 42 terrified him.

"That's when Our Lord tells St Faustina He's going to leave the convent because of its lack of holiness. But the great Saint convinces him to stay. I read that, and I thought, 'He's serious. He means business. He will leave if we don't accept His mercy.' Suddenly, I was afraid He could leave me. I never wanted to do anything that would make Him leave me."

It's been said that his album *#Diary*, released in early 2015, may be the most powerful and creative alliance between the Divine Mercy movement and urban culture. He will work with Fr Tony and the Mother of Divine Mercy refuge to bring the message of Mercy to this year's Convention AND to the tough streets of NZ in extended outreach. (<https://soundcloud.com/rabelzthemc>).

Mother Assumpta, OP and Sister Joseph Andrew, OP are two of the four foundresses of the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, in Michigan USA.

This dynamic community was founded in 1997 and has now grown to over 135 Sisters, with an average age of just 31 years old! It currently has Sisters teaching and serving as administrators in elementary and secondary schools in Michigan and seven other US states. They also are serving at the Pontifical North American College Seminary Library in Rome.

In 2010, the Order became "famous" in America almost overnight when, after much prayerful discernment, they gave full access to The Oprah Winfrey Show. Oprah, a television legend in America, did a long, positive story about the Order and had many of the Nuns 'live' on her program, which was seen by a TV audience in the millions.

Mother Assumpta is the Prioress General of the Order. She holds a STL in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas in Rome, and has taught at the elementary, secondary and junior college levels. She is a former President of the Forum of Major Superiors and has served on the boards of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars and the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Sister Joseph Andrew is the Community's vocations director. She gives talks that employ Sacred Scripture, anthropology and psychology, guiding audiences to a greater understanding of the Divine Image in both male and female, and the authority God has entrusted to each.

Sister has published in various Catholic journals and magazines and led retreats for high school and university students, parishes, religious priests and seminarians in the USA, Canada and Austria. She has frequently appeared on television and radio. For more information, please go to www.sistersofmary.org.



Aurora Zacarias grew up in a very poor family in Mexico City. Tragedy struck when her mother became sick and their family didn't have the funds to help her. Aurora's father became depressed and addicted to alcohol. He abandoned the children.

Most times, Mexican children like her end up begging on the streets, struggling to survive, often forced into gangs. Fortunately Aurora and her siblings were welcomed into Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH), which is Spanish for "Our Little Brothers and Sisters".

Loren O'Sullivan, Director of NPH New Zealand, spoke at last year's Convention, which she also Emceed. This year, NPH has partnered with the Convention to bring Aurora all the way from Mexico to tell her inspirational story.

Aurora looks forward to sharing her life story, giving everyone an insight into how our most vulnerable children survive adversity through faith in God, and a helping hand from generous people like NPH's founder, Father Wasson.

The dynamic speaker will speak at the Convention on Saturday and Sunday (7th and 8th April), and she will be the guest speaker at the fundraising dinner on Saturday night (separate tickets required).

Gerry and Margaret Smy have been part of the Eucharistic Convention team right from its inception, and they were at the forefront of many other Catholic lay activities long before this Convention was even heard of.

Long before the Internet, Convention newsletters were compiled and mailed out from John Porteous' office by a band of willing helpers that always included Gerry and Margaret.

Says John: "This Convention owes them, and the other generous individuals who dedicated themselves to this necessary task, a huge debt of gratitude. It is our privilege to have Margaret and Gerry address our 25th anniversary Convention. They are a beautiful couple who are aligned to the call of Pope Francis and who carry out tremendous works of mercy to the elderly, sick and housebound.

"Beth and I have first-hand experience of the dedication they apply to their volunteer role. Gerry and Margaret take the Blessed Eucharist to Beth's mum, Dawn, and to others at The Orchards Retirement Village in Glenfield. Their heavenly reward will be great, indeed."

VENUE -- This year's Eucharistic Convention is set for 6-8 April, once again at the Netball North Harbour Centre, 44 Northcote Road, Takapuna. It will feature daily Mass (including the opening Mass said by Bishop Patrick Dunn), brilliant international speakers and musicians – something for everyone!

Adds John: "God always arranges exactly what we need each year, including an added blessing or two along the way. It's incredible. In January, we had confirmed a brilliant line-up of speakers. And then, out of the blue, NASA gave us the thumbs-up for Michael Hopkins -- after eight months of discussions and being declined once. The Lord knows this is a special event – our 25th Convention – and he has arranged something very special indeed. Come, and bring along your friends and family, especially if they have been away from the Church. You will not regret it!"

(Bill Moore does public relations for the Eucharistic Convention)

EUCCHARISTIC CONVENTION 2018 - REGISTRATION

LAST NAME: _____ FIRST NAME: _____

STREET: _____ SUBURB: _____

CITY/TOWN: _____ POST CODE: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

POSTAL (if different) _____

NUMBER OF SATURDAY TICKETS: _____ \$ total: _____

Adult = \$40 Senior = \$30

NUMBER OF SUNDAY TICKETS: _____ \$ total: _____

Adult = \$40 Senior = \$30

NUMBER OF CHILDREN'S TICKETS: _____ No Charge

Make cheques payable to EUCCHARISTIC CONVENTION) TOTAL \$ enclosed: _____

Please ENCLOSE STAMPED, SELF ADDRESSED ENVELOPE for return mail

Mail your registration to
EUCCHARISTIC CONVENTION, P O BOX 4523, SHORTLAND ST, AUCKLAND 1140

The Gift of Mercy



Greetings and Our Lady's love and peace to you all

I am Bernadette Isaacs and am married to Athol Isaacs. We have been married for 32 years and God has blessed us with four beautiful daughters. To date we have 1 grandson and 3 granddaughters.

I was brought up in a catholic home. Both my mother and Father catholic and both their parents catholic.

My father and two grandmothers were exceptionally dedicated to the Rosary and I witnessed this as I was growing up. My father's priority was his Rosary right up to the day of his death. His example and dedication to prayer has saved this once lost soul.

I attended both primary and secondary catholic schools. However when leaving school I thought I needed to have the world's fun and adventures so put my faith and God away, out of sight out of mind.

When Athol and I wanted to get married my father insisted that we get married in the church, which we did. I did not understand or see the blessings and grace or God's mercy that this would bring.

Meeting with our Priest and having the instructions for marriage set that flame which had diminished alight again. This was only the beginning.

When my first daughter was born I had a very strong desire for her to be baptised. I knew I wanted my children to have what I had grown up with. All four daughters were baptised within 3months of birth.

God then brought 2 beautiful ladies into my life, one older and one younger than myself. They prayed with me and for me and shared their faith experiences with me. This was the beginning of a new journey for me and through God's mercy, love and forgiveness my journey with Jesus continues.

As each daughter ended their time at primary school I was given the opportunity to take each on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. I know Our Lady called me there. The peace I was given there stays with me and my daughters today and the graces are many. Our Holy Mother holds my family firmly together through all our difficulties and continues to guide us all.

Fourteen years ago I began to work in the Parish Office. God continues to bring the most wonderful people into my life, especially the Priests, who continually witness to me God's love and His Mercy. As I get older and have a need for a quieter life, I am able to look back and see God's merciful love in my experiences of life, which I am so grateful for. Thank God for my father's faithfulness to prayer and our Lady's listening ear to his prayer. "His Mercy and Love endures forever."

Bernadette Isaacs- Co Editor of Medjugorje News NZ

Tailor-Made Medjugorje Pilgrimages

I have 15 years experience in booking travel packages to Medjugorje Ex New Zealand.

I can assist with all aspects of travel to Medjugorje including flights, accommodation, transfers, local guide, stopover destinations and pre/post travel within Europe if desired.

Accommodation in Medjugorje is a Family-run Pansion, comfortable and central to St James Church.

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I aim to ensure that your Pilgrimage is a wonderful lifetime experience!

For more information please contact Karen Ph 09 9400064 , mob 021 1887781 or email

Karen.embleton@mondotravel.co.nz

“Unlike the worldview that children are a burden, Blessed Mother Teresa always knew that children are the “greatest gift.” It’s tempting to get caught up in our daily work, keeping up our home, chauffeuring kids to games and meets, or engaging in our various forms of escapism. In turn, we tend to forget that our children are true miracles and we must cherish every moment we are given with them.”

The Gift of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a gift from God, not something we can earn by our level of trust, although to be forgiven we have to cooperate with God's grace in being contrite and confessing our sins (CCC 1450-58).

God forgives us when we REPENT of our wrongdoing. And He expects us to follow his example and right the wrongs we have with others through mutual repentance and forgiveness. But what of those that aren't sorry for their offenses? Who go on inflicting pain and heartache in our lives but have no intention of reconciling? Jesus does not expect us to automatically forgive these such people, and anyway, how can we forgive someone who is not sorry, it's impossible. He does however command us to LOVE one another as He has loved.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:44 "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," What does it mean to love our enemies, that is, someone who wrongfully hurts us, who isn't sorry and continues their wrongdoing? Do we forgive them regardless? No. We can't change their behaviour, we can't forgive someone if they aren't sorry, but we ARE called to LOVE them. To love them means to WILL GOOD on their lives, regardless of how they act. To pray that they find peace and resolution amidst their troubles. To pray they do reconcile with their brothers and sisters, and with God. We may not like their behaviour but we are called to love them by letting Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit move through us in the form of patience, kindness and healing regardless of how we are treated. It is then by the grace of God moving through us, that they may recognise God's unconditional love and be humbled and move toward conversion.

I found myself in a situation that required me to love unconditionally even though I felt the person was hurting me in a very cowardly way especially them knowing the powerlessness I had over the situation. Their twisted perspective was based on a whole lot of untruths, but was used as the fuel for their bitterness and resentment towards me and an excuse to behave the way they did. How was I going to forgive someone who continuously wanted to throw me under the bus no matter what I did? How resentful it made me feel and it was only stealing my peace. No reconciliation was ever intended by this person. They seemed to want to persist in their false beliefs and walk in darkness. In these situations God is not asking us to invite calamity into our lives, especially if they are abusive or unwilling to walk in truth, but to remain humble and sincerely will good for their lives, invite healing for them through prayer, and see it as an opportunity for me to grow in humility. It is precisely amongst these very challenging situations we sometimes find ourselves in, quite often by default, that we can find our true calling and fulfilment as children of God, to live as Jesus commanded us. I may not have liked my situation, and I may have been completely powerless to change it on an earthly level, but I learnt to let go and let God so that He could take control where I had none. To concentrate on those God had blessed me with having a right relationship with, where repentance and forgiveness was key to forming the loving, stable and deep relationships God wants us to have. These relationships are the ones blessed with the gift of forgiveness and are to be nurtured, treasured and grateful for.

If we hold on to grudges, resentments and hurts, we only wound ourselves by rejecting God's grace in our lives. Even if there seems little hope of mutual reconciliation with some whom cross our paths, if we reject God's call to love, we may eventually have nothing to bring to the table and we risk that God will one day say "I never knew you".

Miriam Guthrie, Co Editor Medjugorje News New Zealand

The love of our Lord



My name is Miriam and I was born into a loving Catholic family of two devoted parents and three adventurous brothers. I was baptised and raised in the tradition of the catholic faith, attended Mass every Sunday and all the extras like benediction and stations of the cross etc. You could say I was soaked in the faith thanks to my parent's strong belief in our Lord.

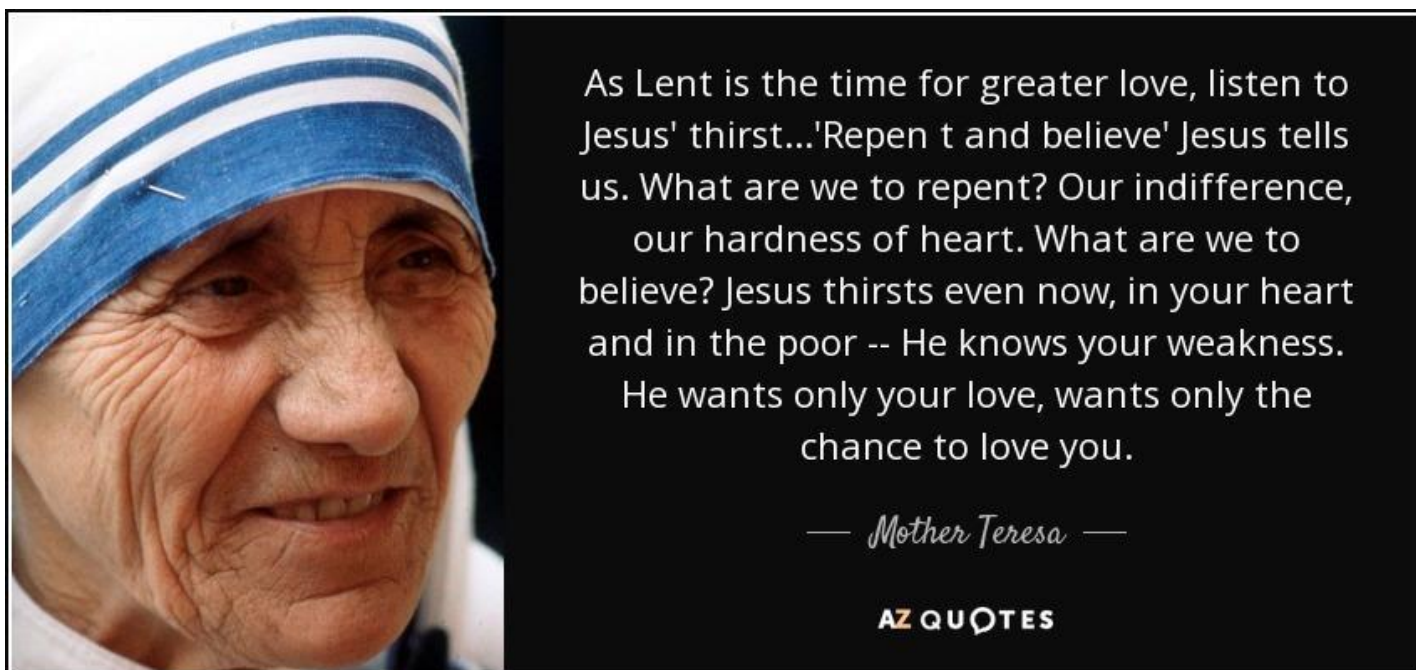
Always very head strong, independent and adventurous, when I finished school, and later gained a qualification in Graphic Design, I worked hard to save up and leave NZ for distant shores, travelling through Indonesia, Europe and the UK. While working in London for a year as a Graphic Designer I met my late husband whom the Lord blessed us with three vivacious and talented sons. Back in NZ tragedy struck our little family of five when he suddenly passed away at the young age of 42 while I was attending Sunday Mass. Our youngest was 18months old and I spent the first year in a complete fog of heightened responsibility and survival.

Two years of grieving, and now I was ready to attend the Beginners Experience weekend in Auckland, ready to move forward and find out what the Lord had planned for the rest of mine and my small family's life.

The Lord answered my prayers for a new husband and I am now seven years married to a wonderfully patient and creative man who lives with tetraplegia and is my constant inspiration and best friend. I am about half way training as a professionally qualified support worker so that I can give him the best care I can and to help me understand his condition better. Finding a balance between care giving, raising my children and developing my own talents, I have recently finished a diploma in professional photography. By my marriage to Stephen, (whose first marriage was nullified) I am now a step-mum to his three children, one completely independent and two teenagers still at home and living full time with their mother.

Even though our children have brought us much joy, to be honest there have been many difficulties and challenges blending our extended family. My Lord and my blessed mother are my constant source of strength and comfort as I help my children navigate their lives, all teenagers now. As I write this, my first born child (whom lives with aspergers syndrome) now, at 18, is leaving home for tertiary study in a town many miles from home. I am currently still recovering 8 months now from a serious operation, having faced some very serious health issues over the years.

But my God is my constant source of comfort and hope during these trials, and my blessed Mother is my advocate. Amidst much adversity in my life, I am equally blessed with so much and for that may God be praised!



Lenten practices of giving up pleasures are good reminders that the purpose of life is not pleasure. The purpose of life is to attain to perfect life, all truth and undying ecstatic love - which is the definition of God. In pursuing that goal we find happiness. Pleasure is not the purpose of anything; pleasure is a by-product resulting from doing something that is good. One of the best ways to get happiness and pleasure out of life is to ask ourselves, 'How can I please God?' and, 'Why am I not better?' It is the pleasure-seeker who is bored, for all pleasures diminish with repetition. [Fulton J. Sheen](#)

In New Zealand and Australia

Over 200 Catholics are offering Catholics “B & B” for \$35.00 one person, or \$30.00 per person for 2 or more persons per night, includes continental breakfast. This is a wonderful way for Catholics to meet and enjoy the company of other Catholics. If you wish to become a host or if you wish to purchase a book with all the details of hosts, the cost is \$15., includes postage, contact or order from Marie Anderson, 2 Brent Place, Christchurch, 8053, Phone 03 3595 541, email, marie.ian@xtra.co.nz.

A Protestant Interrupted

By Lorelei Savaryn, *The Coming Home Network Int.*

I was baptized Catholic as an infant. My family, however, did not practice the Catholic Faith. Instead, I came to know Jesus through the Nazarene Church, which formed my early faith. I helped lead worship and sang for God from the time I was thirteen.

Yet those Nazarenes were conservative and fundamentalist. Secular music, certain aspects of science, and anything other than a literal interpretation of the Bible were considered dangerous. My parents also separated and divorced during my early teen years, prompting me to cling more tightly to faith in Jesus. But it also left me less connected to my church home.

A high school friend attended a youth group at an Assembly of God church, and I visited an event there with volleyball and other games one night in 2002. I was surprised at how many people, both youths and adults, were attending. Continuing with the youth group, I began to attend Sunday services there.

This congregation was much larger than the Nazarenes, with full bands for both youth group and Sunday service. People spoke in tongues. Fortunately, no one pushed me into speaking in tongues, and my faith continued as before. I even joined the youth group worship team.

College and Questions

When I moved on to college, I entered a difficult period in my Christian walk.

Where before things were black and white, all of a sudden I was in a world where most people had different conceptions of truth, many doubting that it even existed. What was taught in class often didn't fit into my previous conservative Evangelical worldview.

The liberal stance of this ELCA Lutheran college was my first exposure to the diversity of Protestant Christianity. I encountered doctrinal differences I didn't know existed. Finding a Christian community I was comfortable with was difficult, so I tried to maintain my faith through personal study, seldom joining in community worship. It was a lonely time.

That particular college was a poor fit, so I returned to my hometown, took a break from school, worked multiple part-time jobs, and along the way met a young man, JP, who later became my husband. Meanwhile, I was losing my moorings in Christianity. I still had faith, but my practice of it gave way to “more important things” in life.

JP and Catholicism Enter the Picture

I really liked JP, except for one thing: he was Catholic. Thankfully, my mom didn't seem to think JP's Catholicism was anything to worry about. Besides, he was much too handsome to pass up. His “incorrect denominational choice” could be fixed later. I was sure that once the errors of Catholicism were explained to him, it would all work out.

To be fair, my understanding of the errors of Catholicism was mostly based on misconceptions. As I was growing up, I had absorbed a number of anti-Catholic attitudes and arguments, all one-sided, of course. The Protestant-Catholic debate remained our most frequent point of contention throughout our dating, engagement, and early marriage.

I attended part of an RCIA (instruction) class during our engagement but, following my predisposition, dropped out.

We did have a Catholic wedding — ceremony only, no Communion — on May 26, 2007 at Old St. Joe's Church at St. Norbert College. It was a good compromise, since by then I had no home church, and our relationship had developed around the St. Norbert campus.

We had no inkling how difficult it would be for us to remain divided in our faith. Our first two years together, we wrangled over church issues, often going to two Sunday services, first to Catholic Mass, then to a non-denominational church.

How Can We Do It?

I prayed a lot for unity in that time. We knew that we wanted children, but how were those children going to understand that we both worshiped the same God if we went to separate churches each Sunday?

I began researching other denominations, trying to find some middle ground. When I came upon the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, I thought it might work. I shared the Lutheran theology with JP and drew him a tree of the

early Church, suggesting that maybe truth had followed the Lutherans at the time of the Reformation. LCMS seemed to have a lot of the “good” stuff of Catholicism but none of the things I took issue with. We tried a nearby congregation and there encountered some lovely people. Maybe my prayers for unity had been answered.

We were finally able to attend one church together. We also sang and played together on the contemporary worship team at the Lutheran church.

Some of JP’s family took the news of his becoming Protestant kind of hard. His uncles talked to him at a family gathering and overwhelmed us with their concern that he was now living in heresy. Honestly, JP had no idea what he was leaving.

In 2012, after relocating twice, we found ourselves, with one child, in a town in southeastern Wisconsin where there were no young, vibrant LCMS churches. We found it easiest to find a different Protestant church to attend together. We settled on the First Christian Church, where we encountered some amazing and servant-hearted people, with whom we are still friends. But at the same time, I entered into the darkest period of my faith life.

JP and I had been backsliding in our faith. We weren’t reading the Bible; we weren’t praying much. Church had become something we did on Sundays. I was still leading worship, but I wasn’t sure I believed what I was singing. I wondered if this whole Christianity thing was a fairy tale. We were going to church but living as practical agnostics.

We moved yet again, this time to buy our first home in Racine, Wisconsin. Here we had our second child. Traveling distance to our former congregation became an issue, so we switched to a different church, closer to our new home. This one was Baptist. Since leading worship was part of who I was at the time, I inquired about being on the worship team. I auditioned, and everything looked good. We just needed to go through the membership class.

Things Start To Change

The Statement of Faith at this church was only two pages long. It was relatively easy to assent to, and the membership class was very basic. However, there was one point brought up, in which the teacher drew the classic “two cliffs illustration,” where the chasm between them separated God and man. Ultimately, the cross of Jesus fills that gap. (Interestingly, I later found out that this illustration had Catholic origins!) My husband then asked what happens for those who enter a relationship with God but later choose to reject Him. The teacher replied that, once you cross over, you can’t go back. If you have authentically believed, it is irreversible.

This didn’t sit well with us. “Once saved, always saved” just didn’t make sense with our life experience. Both JP and I had genuinely known Jesus from an early age, yet here we were, in our young adulthood, not living our faith. I knew the Bible well and I was familiar with the verse about faith without works (James 2:17). This teacher at our membership class was suggesting that, if we walked away, our original belief in Christ was illusory. JP and I were dissatisfied with the shallowness. How could we base our lives on such a faith?

We later discovered that this Baptist congregation had strong Calvinist leanings. Thoroughgoing Calvinists have a particular belief about predestination, election, and security of salvation, and they tend to be heavily anti-Catholic. These points would come back later to impact the events surrounding my conversion and JP’s return to the Catholic Church.

Faced with these facts, we decided to get serious about our faith. Did we actually believe Christianity was the truth? If it wasn’t, we wanted to stop pretending. But if it was, we needed to take our faith life much more seriously.

We could not sustain this practical agnosticism, this “Christian in Name Only, Church as a social club” lifestyle any longer. We had two children who would be depending on us to anchor them in some worldview that they could count on.

JP and I dug into theology, each in our own way. Timothy Keller’s *The Reason for God* was very helpful to me, as was C.S. Lewis to both of us. And at the end of our searching, we came to believe in Christ more fully as adults, passionate about doing whatever it took to follow Him.

The Storm

The events that followed helped to create the scenario that led me, as a surprise even to myself, to look into the claims and beliefs of the Catholic Church and, ultimately, to become Catholic.

Now that we knew we were Christians, we sought to live in service to others. Reducing our selfishness would allow us to help our fellow man, Christian or not. We weren’t being super holy in this or thinking we needed to earn our salvation through our own power. We just wanted to be genuinely obedient to the commands of Jesus to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

The small group that we had joined at our church responded with discouragement when we shared the changes in our lives. We thought we were discerning what Jesus would have us do, but they insisted that we couldn’t do everything, that the purpose of the local church was to take care of each other and that feeding the hungry pagans wasn’t a bad thing to do, but it was not required.

It seemed so clear to JP and me that Jesus was calling His followers to care for the most vulnerable in the

world, regardless of their faith. Yes, we as Christian brothers and sisters should take care of each other in times of need, but that does not mean that we are given permission to neglect others. The dissonance was growing between the reality we understood deep in our core and what we were being taught at this church.

Also, as I spent more time on the worship team, I was becoming discouraged with what I felt to be a heavy emphasis on the production value of the worship set each week. We had a stage with fancy equipment, and sometimes worship services were recorded and put on YouTube. People would talk about how you “rocked” a song if you did well. I’m not against making worship beautiful and removing worldly distractions. But the culture of the team and the emphasis placed on secular values made me wonder: Shouldn’t there be a certain reverence to what we were doing, singing, and playing music each week?

These thoughts began to redefine the whole concept of the church services we attended. It felt more and more like we were in a “church” where reverence was neglected and “niceness” was paramount.

Looking back, I know many in the congregation itself at the time would have described its whole culture as unhealthy. There had been difficult transitions, factions, and splits over the years that had left deep scars. I now view it as an example of what happens when you have no central authority that you assent to. If you don’t like something, you leave, or start a new church or, if you’re in a position of authority, you change things to your liking. Now that I am Catholic, I can see how, under such a system, each person becomes his own pope.

In all of this frustration, and in trying to find somewhere to land that would allow me to embrace the depths of my faith, I again started researching different denominations. I asked our small group what the early Church would have looked like because maybe the problem was the Americanized version of Christianity. No one had an answer, and no one thought it was a worthwhile question!

Turning Homeward

One night, I sat on the couch and acknowledged that, amazingly, I was at a place where I felt I needed to take another look at the Catholic Church. I had been to enough Masses and talked enough with JP’s Catholic relatives to know that they had a stronger connection with the early Church than I did. I simply wanted truth, no matter where it came from.

So I determined to re-examine all that I had previously disagreed with and give Catholicism a fair chance for the first time in my life.

JP and I were on a date, one snowy December evening in 2015, when I asked him if he would be interested in attending Mass that Sunday.

He was thrilled! Unknown to me, JP had been reading some Catholic theologians during his commute to work on the train each day. He told me he had been feeling drawn back to the Catholic Church and had been praying for unity in our marriage.

Taking on the Issues

Thus began the final, intense part of my conversion story. Every single bulwark that I previously had built up against Catholicism came crashing down. I tackled things systematically, one issue at a time, leaving my biggest concern for last.

My background was strictly Bible alone, but as I studied and learned, I came to the conclusion that we Protestants were setting ourselves up as the authority for interpretation of Scripture. If the Holy Spirit were really guiding everyone in correct individual interpretation, we would not have thousands of denominations and even more factions within those denominations!

I knew truth is not ambiguous. God has a specific meaning for all He has inspired to be written in Scripture. He has to be loving enough not to leave us with just a book, with no trustworthy means to know what He meant. It didn’t make sense that individual interpretation was the intended system.

Another big issue for me was purgatory. I thought it was a strange belief and imagined that Catholics believed souls just waited around for a while before God deemed them “good enough” for heaven. Besides, how could purgatory be supported by Scripture?

Protestants can easily understand that God sanctifies, or makes holy, those who follow Him in Christ. I also understood that we are sinless when we come into heaven, by virtue of Christ’s redeeming sacrifice and resurrection. But the intricacy of how that process works was vague to me as a Protestant. At the Baptist church we were attending, the belief was that Jesus’ death and resurrection cover over our sins like a sheet. God looks at us and sees a clean sheet. But underneath, we are still totally depraved. The Catholic view, in contrast, is that Jesus’ death and resurrection make it possible for us to actually become clean and holy in God’s eyes, no sheet required. This led me to think about the fact that, at the moment of our death, we are not all equally sanctified. Some people need more purification than others.

1 Corinthians 3:15 speaks of people who will be saved, but as though “through fire.” It’s difficult to let go of sin. Whenever we turn away from sin and choose God’s way, we experience a certain amount of pain. Ultimately, I came to understand purgatory as the process by which God allows our sanctification to be completed, so that we can enter heaven.

Praying to saints was another difficulty for me. I was taught that we should pray only to God. This is one of

those instances when Catholics and Protestants use the same words but attach different meanings to them. When Catholics speak of praying to saints, it means we are asking for their intercession, or for them to pray for us on our behalf. Revelation 8:4 talks about the prayers of the saints in heaven. Since they are in heaven, they have no need to pray for themselves. Catholics conclude that they are spending their efforts in prayer for those of us on earth. Through the Communion of Saints that crosses the spiritual and physical worlds, we can ask for their prayers just as I could ask my husband to pray for me.

Priests and Papacy

I also learned more about the words Jesus spoke in establishing a priesthood at the Last Supper and establishing the role of Pope to guide His Church once He ascended. The Pope was always something that had confused me. I didn't understand how "on this rock I will build my church" made Peter a Pope (Matthew 16:18). But finding ourselves on a road trip at the beginning of my conversion journey, JP and I listened to an audio recording of Scott Hahn discussing the legitimacy of the papacy. The way he described Christ's words in the original language made a very strong argument that the "rock" Jesus is referring to is Peter.

Another thing I didn't understand was how the papacy was an inheritable office. Just one verse later, in Matthew 16:19, Jesus tells Peter that He will give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. For all my years of reading that passage, I had no idea of its meaning. Now, I discovered that the "keys" symbol refers to a passage in the Old Testament, where the person who held the keys was second in command to the King (Isaiah 22). The keyholder had royal authority; he acted on the King's behalf while the King was away. The Old Testament also makes it clear that the "Office of the Keys" is an inheritable office. I then learned about the unbroken lineage of the Popes from Peter, which made sense, given that Jesus intended the Pope to be an inheritable position and that the Pope was meant to act on Christ's behalf until He comes again.

In all of this, I was learning about the early Church. The early Church writings overwhelmingly support the office of the Pope.

At this point, I had no choice but to conclude that the early Church was entirely Catholic!

And just like that, issue after issue, I kept assenting to the Catholic position. But now I had to approach my biggest concern: the Catholic views on Mary. As a Protestant, we just didn't think about Mary that often. Statues of Mary were okay to take out during the Christmas season within the context of a Nativity scene, but that was pretty much it.

A Different View of Mary

One thing that helped change my understanding of Mary came through a better understanding of Judaism. Jesus was Jewish, and what He did and said would have had significance for the Jewish people of His time. But 2,000 years later, our evolved culture has lost much of that understanding.

I had never been exposed to the concept of the Queen Mother and its significance in Judaism — until I started exploring the Catholic Church. In Judaism, the mother of the King was highly honored. King Solomon's mother in 1 Kings is seated at Solomon's right hand, and he even bows to her! Jesus is known as the King of the Jews. Understanding the idea of Mary as the Queen Mother made a lot more sense to me when I looked at it through a Jewish lens. She would therefore be honored greatly (compare Luke 1:48b). Revelation 12:12 also speaks of Mary. There, she is described as being in heaven and wearing a crown — further supporting the idea that she is highly honored. Again, the Queen Mother had the ear of the King, and the King would take her requests and input seriously. That's why Catholics are so keen to ask for Mary's intercession. When the Queen Mother speaks, the King listens respectfully.

To be completely honest, by this time, I had found the Catholic Church's position on *every single issue* to be more thorough and logically consistent within Scripture and within the whole system of belief, and I ended up feeling that I had no need to look into the issue of Mary with much scrutiny. I basically acknowledged that if I hadn't stumped the Catholic Church on anything thus far, Mary probably wasn't going to be any different. If the Church said Mary was ever-virgin, I was ready to believe it.

Discovering the Eucharist

We began attending RCIA classes shortly after attending that Mass of family unity together. The classes helped me to work through my issues and answer my remaining questions.

During this period, I began to feel drawn toward the Eucharist. The Catholic understanding of the Eucharist wasn't that difficult for me to accept. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod believes that Christ is truly present in holy communion, even though they do not believe His presence remains in the elements. Their belief comes much closer to the Catholic belief in the Real Presence than many other Protestant denominations. Having spent some time as a Lutheran, I had already reached the conclusion that, if God wanted to put His Presence in the elements, He was more than able to do so. This, then, helped me embrace a full Catholic understanding of the Eucharist.

Our RCIA class was held on the same night of the week that our parish holds Eucharistic Adoration. I would walk past the sanctuary and look through into the Adoration Chapel. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, I realized that something important was going on in there, and I knew that I wanted to participate. It was definitely a supernatural desire, something I cannot account for on my own. After caring nothing about transubstantiation,

here I was longing for Jesus in the Eucharist. This yearning has continued and grown since my conversion.

Sharing the News

The time came for us to let those in our Protestant church know what we were doing. We hadn't spoken much about it because initially we weren't sure where we were going to end up. But we also were concerned with how people might respond. We didn't want other people's arguments and pressure to impact our honest study. I knew the arguments; I was the arguments. Nothing any Protestant could say was going to surprise me. I wanted to be able to focus, without interference, on seeking the truth.

Sadly, the transition from our Protestant church to the Catholic Church was painful. We lost some friends, and other friendships became strained. We were not allowed to say goodbye to those in our Christian life group; we were told "it would be best" for us not to return. We went from being connected and well-liked to being a dangerous concern. As beautiful as entering the Catholic Church was, it came at a cost. I remember talking to a Baptist pastor in our home, who had come to express his concern that if we were losing this much, and if it was *this hard* to become Catholic, and I was doing it anyway, this spoke strongly of my conviction. He confided in us that they had never before had anyone leave their church to become Catholic, that they would have much less problem with someone leaving for another Protestant church. Finally, in the view of those who held tightly to Calvinistic views, if we were becoming Catholic, then we were never genuinely Christian in the first place.

Confirmation

And still we pressed on. I was set to be confirmed at the Cathedral of St. Paul, in Minnesota, on Easter Vigil, 2016. I received permission to be confirmed there so all of JP's relatives who had shared their Catholic faith with me over the years, who had prayed for my conversion, could celebrate with me as I became fully united to the Church Jesus Himself established 2,000 years ago. You can't get more connected to the early Church than that! Standing in that beautiful cathedral, during the amazing Easter Vigil service, having just been anointed with oil by the archbishop and facing the congregation, tears in my eyes, I just knew that I was finally home.

One Year Later

March 26, 2017 marked my one-year anniversary in the Catholic Church. Our lives have truly changed for the better over the past year. JP and I learned about the Theology of the Body, which is an extensive work by St. John Paul II, addressing the meaning and purpose of our human bodies. It is a holistic and completely Christian view of sexuality, an icon of our purpose as image-bearers of God. The Theology of the Body taught my husband and me about living our lives as a gift to each other and to those we encounter, and our marriage has become much stronger. Thanks to the teachings of the Church and the Theology of the Body, we reopened ourselves to new life, and I gave birth to our daughter, Mary Charlotte, the day after Christmas 2016.

We now have all these beautiful tools to help us live out our faith: Confession, the Eucharist, Adoration, the Rosary, weekly and daily Mass, and more. We have such a solid set of truths to teach our children and live out in our own lives. We are encouraged to think and dig deep, but discovering ultimate truth is not something that rests only on our shoulders. We have the confidence of correct biblical interpretation and teaching in the Catechism, Tradition, and the Magisterium.

In the short time we have been Catholic, the Church has given us so much that we feel blessed to give back and also to share with others. We have started sharing our own faith story and journey on our blog, [This Catholic Family](#), and we hope to be able to assist in teaching RCIA. I have had the honor of cantoring at several Masses. We want to augment the young adult ministry by starting a small group in our home. Ministering in various ways, knowing that we are part of a Church that values social justice, and serving the most vulnerable and marginalized in society — this is our passion. My mom and stepdad are on their own conversion journey. They plan to be confirmed at Easter Vigil, 2018.

And finally, thanks be to God for the Catholic Church and for His Spirit gently yet persistently, leading me home!

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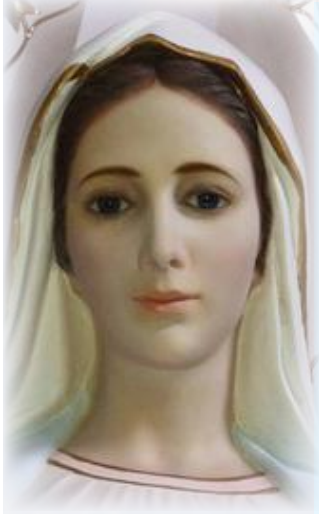
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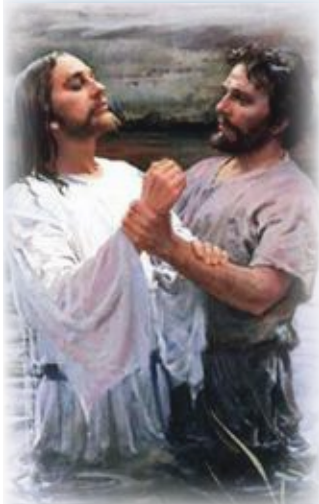


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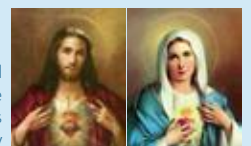
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Pope Francis' Easter Message

In his 2017 Easter message, Pope Francis says, “The Church throughout the world echoes the angel’s message to the women: *‘Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised... Come, see the place where he lay’*”(Mt 28:5-6).

Filled with Easter joy, let us take up this message once again and be people of hope wherever we live and minister.

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