

# LAUNCH OUT LETTERS (LOL)

Te Hao Nui– Launch Out Formation Programme  
Archdiocese of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

Archdiocese of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

Welcome to the October issue !

**Vicky Raw** reflects on the gospel of the young man who wanted not just to give more but actually to have more than the good life he already lives. Vicky shares that every one of us goes through this period where we have to make a radical choice if one is to enter God's Kingdom. **Margaret Bearsley** presents the first of a two-part review of Joseph Ratzinger's thesis on the end-of-times, *Eschatology*. Ratzinger presents the Kingdom of God as an the encounter with Christ. It is essentially an encounter with death-- an encounter with those who die to self through their beatitude response to a given situation - to love their enemy; to be kind to the ungrateful; to make peace. God's Kingdom is given, shared as a moment in the here and now, and most importantly, as an encounter. It also should be an encounter as Church, through the sacraments and our way of being in the world. We can glean insights from the book review of **Joe Green** on Brian Lucas' book on collaborative ministry which sheds light on our ongoing journey as Church.

**Simone Olsen**, the ADW Coordinator for Marriage Ministries, puts the ideal of God's Kingdom into the practical perspective of married life. Simone underpins sharing love by making time for each other. She brings to mind today's addiction to fill our time, all the time; running away from solitude and silence lest we feel alone and unsafe. In the world of work, productivity is often connected to busyness (or the semblance thereof). Our educational system enables this obsession by urging us to devour every piece of literature and to develop as many skills as possible to reach our fullest potential. However, more recent writings suggest that deep learning, creativity, and the ability to solve complex problems happen in the 'lull.' This 'lull' is what masters in the spiritual life refer to as 'spirituality', as the space where God's Kingdom becomes encounter, and where encounter becomes us. **Bridget Taumoepeau** aptly dedicates her column on the need to nourish our spiritual life.

The Kingdom of God is aspirational and a living reality within and through us, in the lives we live and the Church we build. Like the young man in the gospel, we yearn for more, but what is more important to realise is that Jesus wants to give us much much more, God's Kingdom no less. The question is, how much are we willing to give up to receive it?

*Maya Bernardo  
Launch Out Formator and Manager*

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*When he had finished eating, he said to Simon,  
"Launch out into the deep water and let down your  
nets for a catch".*

*Luke 5: 4*

For comments and suggestions email:  
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Visit the Te Hao Nui-Launch Out webpage: [https://  
www.wn.catholic.org.nz/about/church-mission/launch-out-formation  
-programme/](https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/about/church-mission/launch-out-formation-programme/)

# Where is God's Kingdom?

Mark 10: 17-30, 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Vicky Raw  
Launch Out Candidate  
Te Whetu O Te Moana, Marlborough



Image Copied from Unsplash <https://unsplash.com/photos/woman-in-white-and-black-hijab-lying-on-floor-CGnPbY1qeM>

Recently I went to an exhibition on homelessness in London, called Homelessness: Reframed. I didn't know anything about it. The large one-room exhibition had 3 distinct parts. The first was a series of framed words on cardboard such as: 'I am just hungry, This is awkward 4 me too, I need help'. Seeing this wall of silent cries for help was confronting – so many times I have walked on by even when I have seen these words scrawled on cardboard in front of people. The second part were various exhibits by people who had been homeless, depicting their interpretations of what it meant to be

homeless. The third part was a series of doors that had been painted by children and local artists who had experienced life on the streets with the aim to inspire hope through their collaborative works. This exhibition, in the heart of one of London's most affluent areas, brought home the starkness between the haves and have-nots of the goods of this world, where far too many are living rough and are being ignored.

A few days later I was hurrying through the street, in the same vicinity, on my way home when suddenly I heard the words "The Big Issue?" being spoken to me. I snapped out of my thoughts, got out my purse and gave the guy some money saying, "Please take this. I don't need a copy of the magazine." "Thanks, luv, but take a copy anyway." When I saw the price I realised that what I had given him was nowhere near the cost of the magazine. I couldn't walk on without giving him the change that I had.

Today's reading from Wisdom and Mark teach us about the importance of praying and entreating God for wisdom versus the riches of this world so that our treasure will be in heaven and the kingdom of God. What is this kingdom? The Kingdom is what we pray for every time we pray 'may your kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven.'

But how do I make this happen??? And what does it mean to ask for wisdom?

Bishop Robert Barron describes wisdom as 'seeing life from the perspective of God. It means having an intimacy with God by which I now understand the world and live my life.' Solomon's desire was for this, more than all the riches that he possessed. Bishop Barron goes on to talk about desiring the goods of the body, of the mind and finally of the heart. The first is what money can buy. The second is what transcends the goods of the body as they bring you into a more 'refined world.' And finally the goods of the heart are those things that draw us to God. These are of highest value. This is what Solomon desired. And once it has been given "you will know what to do with the wealth (goods of the world e.g. power, wealth, talents) that has been given to you," says Bishop Barron.

Looking at the Gospel the young man obviously desired to have more than his mere riches (the goods of the earth). He knew that there was more to life than these but he didn't know what this was. He saw in Jesus someone who could give him an answer. Jesus tells him to obey the commandments, as these are ways to ensure that he (read 'we') is not trapped in sin that prevents him from obtaining wisdom. These are the goods of the mind. The commandments are the fundamental ways to eliminate the problems and sins that stand in the way of obtaining eternal life. The rich young man says that he had fulfilled all these commandments. Jesus could see that he was hungry for wisdom and goodness (the goods of the heart). So Jesus asks him to do one more thing – to give everything away that he possessed and give the money to the poor, which will give him 'treasure in heaven' and finally he says, "then come, follow me." This request was one step too far for the man.

Bishop Barron calls this a 'time for a radical choice' for this man. Jesus could see that he was trapped in his world of riches and he wanted to set him free by telling what he needed to do. But faced with this critical choice the man just couldn't go through with it and 'he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.' When given this opportunity to follow Jesus he is somehow drawn back into his old way of life where there is safety and comfort.

Jesus understands that it is a hard call to renounce the old ways and to give away riches if we want to move to the ultimate level of desiring to be in union with God, to 'get to the level of the heart which is total surrender to God,' as Bishop Barron says. This is what God's wisdom ultimately gives us.

I want to keep asking Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit and the will of the Father, and the intercession of the saints in heaven and on earth, for more than the physical goods of this world. I am not perfect. I am a sinner but I want eternal life. I want God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. I am seeking more; I want to be a missionary disciple that serves God's mission for a better, more just and equitable world; I am hungry for more and to do more; I want to keep hearing the voice of Jesus, even when he says "Go and sell everything and come follow me." I pray that by answering the call to journey as a Launch Out candidate that I am letting go of the old ways and following in the new ways, wherever they may be leading me. It is at times a challenging journey. But ultimately it is life giving.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- Food for Faith <https://foodforfaith.org.nz/>
- [Deacons in the Church](#)
- [Synodality in Oceania Webinar – 18 September 2024 \(youtube.com\)](#)
- Tui Motu-Archive– Free copies of Tui Motu issues from 1997-2023 <https://hail.to/tui-motu-interislands-magazine/publication/IkRFhG1>
- Previous Issues of the Nathaniel Report <https://nathaniel.org.nz/bioethical-issues>
- [Free e-learning - Child Safeguarding Week](#)
- [25 troubling trends driving younger members away from church](#)
- <https://www.catholic.org.nz/news/media-releases/church-leaders-renew-apology-in-royal-commission-response/>
- As the second (and final) session of the Synod on Synodality approaches, we check in with Wellington **Archbishop Paul Martin SM** on how he's been preparing for the Synod and what he hopes the Synod can accomplish. He also asks Kiwis to pray for him and his fellow Synod members. <https://fb.watch/uWVzSqpcOh/> (taken from ADW Facebook Page)





# Our Lives Matter to the History of Salvation

## A Commentary on Joseph Ratzinger's *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life*<sup>1</sup> (Part One)

Margaret Bearsley  
Launch Out Candidate  
Holy Trinity Parish

In the 1980s, the children's story *The Velveteen Rabbit*<sup>2</sup> was in popular use for faith formation, as I recall. The story is about a new stuffed toy becoming 'real' through being loved by its little boy owner. The dialogue between the rabbit and a very old toy in the nursery is quite stunning:

*"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"*

*"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."*

*"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.*

*"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."*

*"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"*

*"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."*

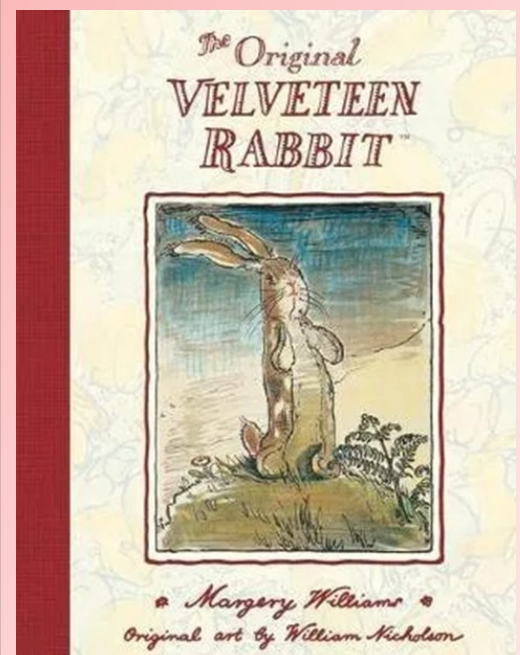


Image copied from <https://www.kobo.com/nz/en/audiobook/the-velveteen-rabbit-41>

My review of Joseph Ratzinger's *Eschatology* is in two parts, spread across two editions of Launch Out Letters. In this part, I comment on Part One of the book, which deals with the 'problem' of eschatology. Next time, I review Parts Two and Three of the book, which look at the component parts of eschatology. Together, this two-part review is on Ratzinger's thoughts on *Death and Eternal Life*.

For those who are new to the study of theology, and trying to get to grips with the jargon, "eschatology" comes from the Greek, *eschatos* meaning last or farthest, and *logos*, meaning word or speech. So, eschatology is the branch of theology concerned with the final events, both of individuals and of time itself.

For Christians, we are talking about death, judgement, heaven and hell. For Catholics, we add purgatory into that heady mix. And for all believers, these 'last things' are our hope for the really Real: eternal life and a heavenly home with God.

*Continue to page 5*

Given that the human race has a 100% mortality rate, and the sobering thought that no one 'gets out of here alive', there is great benefit in contemplating the last things, to face our fears, and to unpack them. And that is precisely what the great German theologian Cardinal Ratzinger, not yet Pope Benedict at the time of his writing, does in this book. Along the way, through reading this extraordinarily rich work, we find glimpses of why and how our hair is loved off and our joints become loose; glimpses of the pain and joy of becoming real, in a loving relationship with the eternal God who *is* Love.

This Second Edition contains a Forward written by Joseph Ratzinger in 2006, as Pope Benedict XVI, where he reflects that, at the time of writing the book in the late 1970s two profound upheavals were underway (both of which are alive and well today, I believe). The book attempts to deal with these two upheavals.

The first one is the theological re-conception of hope into an active virtue to change the world. Here, hope is political. It attempts to create a new humanity from which a better world will emerge. The kingdom of God becomes humanity's kingdom, the "better world" of tomorrow. God is no longer above but is now right here in front of us—our political goals for this world.

From this emerged a theological development that sought to set aside Tradition. Resorting to solely Biblical principles, it was thought that there was no scriptural notion of the immortality of the soul, but only the hope for resurrection. Immortality of the soul was dismissed as Platonism, and resurrection was then explained to take place in death.

These upheavals are what Ratzinger refers to as the 'problem' of eschatology. Part One of the book helps us to understand why they are a problem—they go to the very essence of Christianity.

Somehow the idea of humanity's efforts at creating a better world has an appeal. But one only need read the News each day to be brought back to reality. Many of us in the First World are much better off in material goods than almost any people were, anywhere, even 150 years ago. But many many people, even in the First World but especially in developing nations, live in abject poverty, in the terror of war between nations or factions, without even the basic necessities of life. And, many in the First World are, to borrow from Mother Teresa, suffering from a different kind of poverty, that of loneliness, hunger for love, and an unmet hunger for God.

The modern problem as identified by Ratzinger is the longing of humanity for progress. But unrestrained consumption shows up the tragic alienation between the created order and the human species—humanity is capable of destruction, but we lack the power to create freedom out of the ashes.

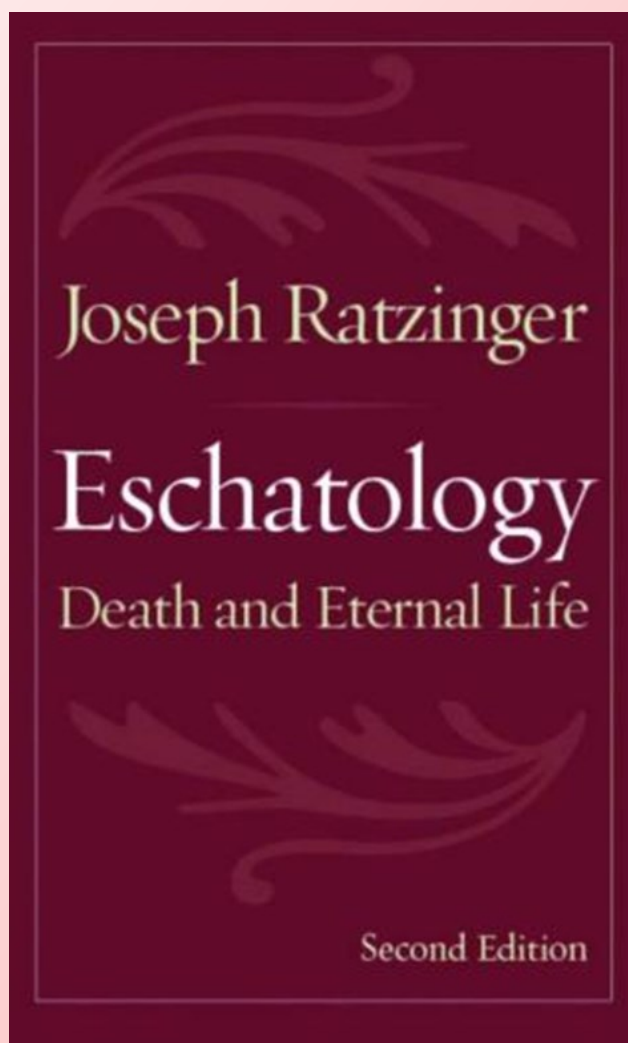


Image copied from <https://www.christiansupplies.co.nz/product/9780813215167/eschatology-death-and-eternal-life-joseph-ratzinger/>

In the face of the potential absurdity of humanity, then, Ratzinger invites us to encounter the figure of Jesus Christ in a new way. The Kingdom of God is found in those persons whom the finger of God has touched, and who have allowed themselves to be made God's sons and daughters. How? See the beatitudes in Luke 6: 35 and Matt 5:9, respectively: 'But love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.' And, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

This transformation, says Ratzinger, can only take place through death. For this reason, the Kingdom of God, salvation in its fulness, is necessarily connected with death, be it death to self or physical death, or ultimately, both. *Take up your cross...*



Ratzinger tells us that we, even with our ambiguous story of acceptance and rejection of divine grace, are each an acting subject in God's saving plan, and it is on this basis that we inhabit time. Think about that for a moment. I inhabit time as a participant in God's plan of salvation for all the world. I matter. My life matters; and not just to me, but to the history of salvation.

We cannot produce the Kingdom of God from our own resources. Sharing in the Kingdom of God is not something that *is* even produced, but rather it is given. And this, through sheer love.

Ratzinger identifies what Phil 2:5-11 sums up as the whole of biblical theology. Christ emptied himself and became obedient, even unto death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and tongue confess that He is Lord.

If we miss that point, thinking instead that the end-goal of reality is a better political world, or a better self, we miss completely what it means to be real.

It seems, then, that we share in the Kingdom of God in those moments of beatitude actions and dispositions, when we love an enemy (try doing that!), when we make peace.

Ratzinger closes Part One with this thought: Since in the crucified Christ love prevailed and death was conquered, human hope is truly eternal. The eternal is the really Real.

End of Part One.

*“Sharing in the Kingdom of God is not something that is even produced, but rather it is given...through sheer love”.*

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Ratzinger (Second Edition) Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC (1988). The First Edition was published in German in 1977.

<sup>2</sup>Margery Williams, 1921, first published in Harper's Bazaar.



# Making time, time after time

Simone Olsen  
Coordinator, ADW Marriage Ministry



You may have come across the saying “we all have the same 24 hours in a day” when talking about how busy we are in the way we live today.

This can be unhelpful when you think that the demands on those hours can be very different!

In marriage ministry we talk a lot about time – quality time, a lifetime, time to prepare, that time when you first got to know each other, the time you grew in commitment to each other, the time you have spent together, the time you’ve been married, milestones, time apart, time, time, time!

We also discuss challenges which can become a barrier for couples to make time for each other. Whether its demanding jobs, raising young families or, dare I say it, the time spent increasingly on our devices in the various ways that can draw our focus away from being present to those around us.

Now it would be easy to say – devices and technology are the problem - get rid of them!

But the reality is that technology is a big part of our lives. Technology is a tool, and like any tool it can either be used for the enrichment or to the detriment of us. For many of our couples coming through our marriage preparation courses this is a significant challenge to their relationship in lots of ways.

Of course, for this current cohort social media or dating platforms was the tool through which they met. They have successfully used this tool to “meet” online, start a relationship and then positively transition that online relationship into a real life, committed and meaningful relationship leading them to marriage. I certainly have great admiration for how they must have navigated this adjustment successfully!

Whether we are newly married, a long time married, single or living a religious vocation we all have the challenge of making the time to nurture the significant relationship or relationships in our lives. Time with our parents, our children, grandchildren, our religious/faith community, or ethnic community, friends, extended family...

My husband Shane and I have been married for 16 years, and we too struggle with the consuming nature of our phones. So when we present at the *Love is a Decision* marriage preparation course, we discuss this challenge not from a virtuous place of being great at this, but from a place of understanding and empathy for the constant challenge it is to ensure we have quality time together. Time long enough to go beyond a superficial conversation about the happenings of the day from work, to what’s happening in the family or with friends, but to talk more in depth about the things that are troubling us, the hopes we have, the joyous observations of being parents, how we can improve how we work together as a team to reach financial goals, etc.

The benefits of these sorts of deeper conversations, whether with a spouse or a parent, child or friend, are a deeper connection, closer relationship and an intimacy that comes from knowing and really seeing who they are.

Technology is our servant; we don't want it to be our master....

When we discuss this topic with couples, we try to offer them a springboard for their own creative thinking into how they can work on making time for each other, especially if they have young children, or in readiness for bringing children into their lives.

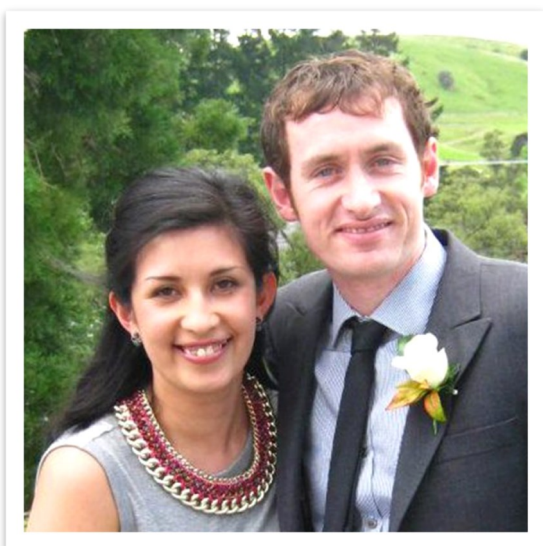
Some practical ideas – that we can all consider for improving the time we have for our significant relationships – including time for ourselves in just our own company!

- It takes intentional planning and prioritising to stick to it. At first, it might seem silly to make an appointment with a spouse or someone you live with but often we take for granted the time we have in their presence.
- Remove the distraction of phones, or the TV on in the background, or jobs or tasks around the house...
- Time without a deadline – time to ease into the flow of a conversation, and just be – without pressure, to be fully present allowing for the Spirit to work in the conversation.
- Add in an activity that doesn't detract from being able to have a meaningful conversation, going for a walk, a card game, a meal or maybe even a mindless task...

We know from our faith perspective that spending quality time in prayer for example takes intentionality and prioritising, and the removal of distractions. We would never dream of spending an hour in prayer, scrolling on our phone but expecting it to be a fruitful experience of connection and nurturing of our relationship with God. It's the same for any other significant, meaningful and lifelong relationship we have with anyone.

It's easy to feel discouraged when we think about our feelings of not being intentional with our time and nurturing the relationships important to us. However, as we head towards the end of the year and the busy build up to Christmas, let's remember that every day we are given a chance to do better... and I say that as encouragement to myself as much as I say it to others!

If you know someone about to get married, share with them this resource from the Marriage Ministry which guides them in preparing for their big day <https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-Booklet-Planning-your-wedding-day.pdf>



*Simone has a professional background in communications and began in this role at the end of 2023, she coordinates the ADW's marriage preparation courses. She and her husband Shane have been involved in marriage preparation ministries for around 10 years, they have a daughter, Olive, and are actively involved in the parish community of Te Awakairangi.*



## UPDATES

**Celebration Sunday**  
**Venerable Suzanne Aubert**  
**06 October 2024**



Mother Aubert like many of us is a migrant, who immersed herself into the life of the peoples of Aotearoa. Revisit her journey and be refreshed by her charism that lives to this day. Click [here](#) for the Venerable Suzanne Aubert website.

*“If you do not place your confidence in Providence, where will you place it? You can do nothing, say nothing, think nothing, but by the good pleasure of God! Jesus is our hope, our Saviour...Let us abandon ourselves to Him without reserve, and He will grant us such joy, such peace...”*

### Launch Out Graduates' Fellowship

Last 14 September some of the Launch Out Graduates gathered for fellowship and good kai at Sharon Penny's house at Carterton. We are hoping we could do this regularly and have more graduates join us.



From the left: **Sharon Penny** (former LPL of Wairarapa Parish now working as spiritual adviser for residential care facilities in the Wairarapa), **Christine Walkerdine** (Kneeling; currently in ADW), **Margaret Luping** (former hospital chaplain), **Mika Teofilo** (former LPL Samoan Chaplaincy), **Barbara Rowley** (Kneeling; current LPL of Te Awakairangi), **Ann Williams** (and fondly referred to as Tom Williams' representative), **Mary Ann Greaney** (Kneeling; former Director Parish Leadership Ministry, ADW), **Kevin Crighton** (lay minister residential care facility in Lower Hutt) and **Matthew White** (former LPL; current Deacon, ADW).

### EVENTS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE

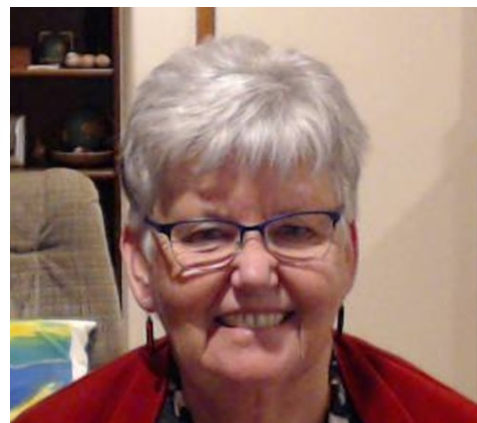
<https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/events/>

### Prayer Day with Mary Jackson Kay, rc

This will be our last gathering for 2024 before the Pastoral Presentation in November.

We are fortunate to have Mary Kay, one of the most beloved Catholic spiritual director in Aotearoa. Mary is a Cenacle sister based in Waikanae. Not only does she provide spiritual direction, she also a formator for aspiring spiritual directors in the [Te Wairua Mahi Programme](#)

Venue is at the Home of Compassion on 19 October.



**Book Review**  
**Collaborators in ministry –**  
**A guide for lay people and clergy**  
By Brian Lucas

Joe Green  
Lay Pastoral Leader, Ohariu Parish

In this time of synodality, and the potential this brings with it for much needed change within the pastoral leadership of the Church, the title of this book by Father Brian Lucas, a priest who has held senior leadership roles within the Catholic Church in Australia caught my eye. Initially it excited me.

As I got further into the book I developed a sense of disquiet. Lucas tends to restate the current situation with church leadership and governance, with no mention made of section 33 of *Lumen Gentium* (and its footnote drawing on a statement on collaboration between lay and ordained by Pope Pius XII), the Explanatory Letter to *Spiritus Domini*, and only fleeting mention of *Querida Amazonia* (quoting Phyllis Zagano on the female diaconate (p.123), and commenting on the role of Acolyte and Lector (p. 139 & 145)). While the Council and successive Popes have envisaged an enhanced collaboration between lay and ordained, Lucas firmly positions the apostolate of the laity within the world, with lay people contributing to ministry at the direction of a priest.

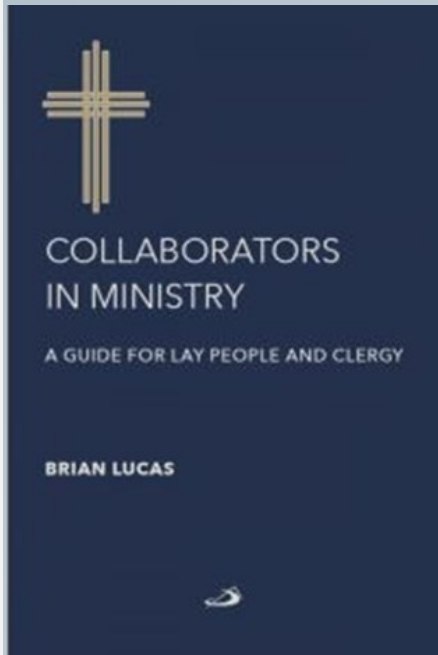


Image copied from <https://www.christiansupplies.co.nz/product/9781925494839/collaborators-in-ministry-a-guide-for-lay-people-and-clergy/>

This is perhaps best demonstrated in chapter 3 of Lucas's book. He begins by outlining the USCCB documents on priestly formation and a lay ecclesial leadership (p. 65 – 72), which is akin to the Archdiocese of Wellington approach coming out of the 1998 Archdiocesan Synod, then describes the Australian Church's approach *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace*, where the emphasis is on lay ministry rather than lay ecclesial leadership, through to the vision espoused by Pope Francis, which Lucas (p. 72) suggests is dependent on the development of a theology of Church that "embraces tradition and (the) proper role of the ordained that is lived out in practice in collaboration with lay people". Lucas (section 7.6) firmly places the role of lay people in ministry as subject to delegation by the pastor. So, for Lucas, collaboration between lay and ordained is a future event, despite 70 years of papal encouragement and the provisions of an Ecumenical Council.

Lucas devotes a chapter to 'Women in Ministry'. Christine Cheyne's seminal research on women in the Church in Aotearoa (*Made in God's Image*, 1989) has given us a very good understanding of the pivotal role that women have played, and continue to play in the life of the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand. Lucas titles one section 'Feminisation of the Church', which I found strange given that without women the Church would not be! Certainly, without one particular woman – Mary. Lucas goes on to outline the development of Lay Ecclesial Leadership, largely in the USA, whereby there are a considerable number of Lay Ecclesial Leaders, the bulk of them being women.

I have spent much time reflecting on *Collaborators in ministry – a guide for lay people and clergy*, wondering where the disquiet I felt came from. What might be the application of Lucas's work to the Archdiocese of Wellington.

It then struck me that this publication is written by an Australian priest who continues to hold senior leadership roles within the Australian Catholic Church, and, it is written in and for the Australian context. Published in 2022, this book follows from the National Plenary of the Australian Catholic Church. By way of example, this is a Church that, as at 2021 lacked even the most basic of synodal structures at the diocesan level. While diocese had made various attempts over a number of years to have a Diocesan Pastoral Council, as at 2021 (Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils: an Australian Historical Study*), of the fifteen dioceses, including the Archdiocese, only five had in place a Diocesan Pastoral Council. While lay "ministry" is a feature in Australia, Lay Ecclesial Leadership is, arguably, not.

So, would I recommend this publication? Yes, it is a worthwhile read, however only if one remains acutely aware that it is written within a context that is somewhat foreign to that of the Archdiocese of Wellington in that the Archdiocese: has been a synodal Archdiocese since the latter part of the 1800s; has had an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council since the early 1970s; an expectation from the Archbishop that parishes will have Parish Pastoral Councils dating from about the same time; a synodal decision for Lay Ecclesial Leadership made in 1998 and a programme to form those Lay Ecclesial Leaders; and, possibly more importantly, a terms of reference describing collaborative lay/ordained leadership in parishes promulgated in 2018.

So, yes, read Lucas, but keep a critical eye open!

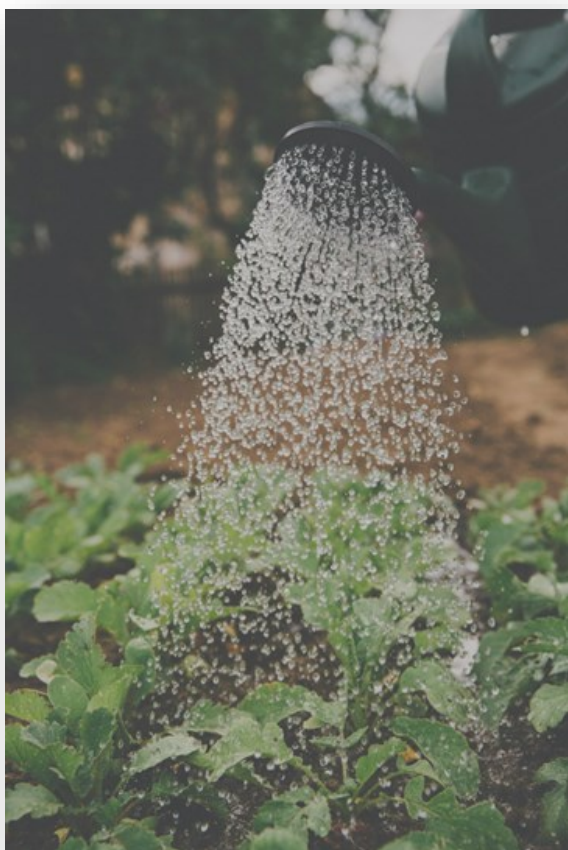


# How much do we nourish our spiritual life?

Bridget Taumoepeau  
Pastoral Mentor

For many years, while I was working as a psychiatrist, I was accustomed to using the Whare Tapa Wha health model, developed in 1984 by Sir Mason Durie, distinguished Māori psychiatrist and social scientist. This model is of the house (our health) supported by its four cornerstones - Te Taha Tinana (physical health); Te Taha Hinengaro (mental health); Te Taha Whanau (family and/or support systems); and Te Taha Wairua (spiritual health). While developed to support and guide the health of Māori, it applies to everyone.

In medical practice the one cornerstone that is often neglected, or about which people feel uncomfortable to talk, is the one on spiritual health. It is often confused with religious affiliation; it is seen as too personal; or the inquirer may feel it has the potential for conflict, if the therapist does not share the same view; and unfortunately, medical practice, particularly psychiatry, has been quite 'anti-religion' for some years.



*Copied from Unsplash <https://unsplash.com/photos/person-watering-plant-sFydXGrt5OA>*

Some years ago, I wrote an article for health practitioners, about Te Taha Wairua, so it is interesting to revisit this topic from the point of view of belonging to a Church and pursuing leadership and formation within that faith community. First of all, we need an understanding of what spirituality is – it can be considered as our world view; the beliefs or practices that sustain us; an awareness of a life force greater than, or outside of, ourselves; ways that we make sense of life; what gives meaning and purpose to our lives; spiritual or religious communities that we belong to; how we feel connected and so on. Such spirituality may or may not include a traditional religious belief system.

For us in the Launch Out community, our spirituality is clearly linked to our Catholic faith, and we have the gift of many examples of different spiritualities that we can follow. Probably the most familiar to us would be Ignatian Spirituality which is rich in models of how to connect to God, types of prayer, gratefulness etc.

On my recent visit to Tonga, I was asked by the Director of Youth Services to speak to the youth leaders about their spiritual life and ways to develop it. There is no better way to reflect on a topic, than when one is asked to talk about it to others! (I referred to this in my article on my time in Tonga.) As is often the case, I have pondered on this since then. My impression in Tonga was that it was not just the youth who might like to explore this aspect of their faith. Currently there is little opportunity for retreat activities; lay people are not receiving spiritual direction and the way the Church is run is not very self-reflective, probably because church attendance and vocations are both high.

My own experience is that I need to attend to the Whare Tapa Wha for my own health. We are most familiar with the effect physical ill health has on us. Hopefully we can learn how anxiety, depression and other mental health issues can affect us. Family upsets and disruptions can certainly bring sadness, and conversely great joy when good things happen in the family. But what about our spiritual lives? I am certainly aware that if I neglect the spiritual practices that I know nurture me, I do not feel so settled or at peace. Recently I attended a reunion of my medical school class. It was interesting to note that, despite their lives and careers having been devoted to helping others, they did not appear to have a spiritual component to their lifestyles. They were clearly somewhat intrigued with the obvious importance to me of my religious faith and spirituality. I had the impression that there was something missing in their lives.

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So, all these thoughts and reflections lead us to recognise the importance of spiritual health, how it needs to be nurtured and reviewed from time to time, just as we would attend to the physical and mental aspects of our health.

Everyone's spiritual practices are unique – there is such a range of ways to connect us to God – different forms of prayer, including praying with the Scriptures; times of silence; conversations with God. Thomas Reese SJ, a well-known writer, recently wrote on 'spiritual development'. He talks of how we must mature in our relationship with God. If we consider that we change our relationships with our family and friends as we get older, then it should be no surprise that our relationship with God should also change.

As children we are often afraid that we will be punished for doing wrong, so our prayer life is that of contrition – 'I am sorry', identifying with the prodigal son in the parable. Later, hopefully, we look at the practice of virtue – 'How can I be a better Christian?' And we start to look at God as more of a coach to help us improve, than a judge. So we are saying 'Help me'. Reading the Gospels may be very helpful in seeing someone we want to follow and imitate. Sometimes, however, this feels too demanding and we tend to think that God asks too much of us.

And then we move to a third stage of spiritual development – thinking more about God than about ourselves. We look less at the prodigal son, and more at his father, noticing the love he showers on his sons. And so we learn how awesome and wonderful God is. This may, indeed, be difficult to believe, but in this stage, we are filled with gratitude, thanksgiving, and adoration. All this leads us to fall in love with God – trying to be good, not out of fear, but because we know that as God first loved us, we too can be loving and good.

***'Nothing is more practical than  
finding God,  
than falling in Love  
in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.  
It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
what you do with your evenings,  
how you spend your weekends,  
what you read, whom you know,  
what breaks your heart,  
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
Fall in Love, stay in love,  
and it will decide everything.'***

Attributed to Pedro Arrupe SJ, but written by Joseph Whelan SJ.