

LAUNCH OUT LETTERS (LOL)

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

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Welcome to the April 2025 issue of LOL.

We continue on the season of Lent leading to Easter Sunday in the month of April. **Margaret Luping** starts with the gospel reflection for Palm Sunday. Margaret is a Launch Out Graduate and the first lay hospital chaplain for the Archdiocese of Wellington. Her reflection is a poignant reminder of the ongoing struggles of the people in the Holy Land, particularly the Palestinian people.

Nick Polaschek, a Catholic and Co-Chair of the Wellington Abrahamic Council, calls for introspection about the language and some of our religious practices, mostly around Lent, which may affect interfaith relationships and perpetuate misunderstanding, especially in light of rising antisemitism.

Both articles centre on the peoples of the Holy Land, the place and context of Jesus' human life. Margaret and Nick's articles in presenting the current challenges of the people in Jesus' homeland, confront deep questions of our times and urge us to go beyond the rituals and symbols and see Lent as an invitation to reflect on the world's yearning for justice in all forms and shapes. And to see in Jesus' sacrifice the deeper invitation for us to take part in healing the world.

Recently the world dreaded the possibility of losing Pope Francis. He continues to advocate for the poor and oppressed, even in his vulnerable state. He provides a powerful example of living the Lenten call to selflessness and compassion. **Bridget Taumoepeau's** reflection on Pope Francis highlights the blessings of his leadership, underscoring the ongoing importance of hope, justice, and solidarity in the face of adversity.

As we reflect on our own Lenten journey, we are called to look into our own lives--our suffering and the possible suffering we intentionally or inadvertently cause to others and to creation. We open ourselves to the gift of Jesus' forgiveness and healing by allowing ourselves, especially as we pray the Way of the Cross, to be soaked in the love of Jesus that does not hold back and gives all for our sake.

Maya Bernardo, Migrant Ministry & Formation Coordinator



*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

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For comments and suggestions email:

m.bernardo@wn.catholic.org.nz

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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/)

Jesus and the Holy Land

Palm Sunday Luke 22:14—23:56



I have been to the Holy Land about six times including once for a pilgrimage. I have been to Gaza, and I visited many of the refugee camps. One of my daughters established **Lawyers Without Borders** in Israel and Palestine.

The memory of a Palm Sunday procession in 2003 inspired my reflection. It may be a very long time ago, but the memory of its details remains vivid. We were processing along a street heading for a church. We passed by a cemetery on a hill where soldiers were pointing rifles at us. I overheard one of the pilgrims in front of me, say “Now they are guarding the dead!”. As we went round a corner, we noticed that we were heading towards soldiers on horseback. Suddenly my daughter started jumping on the pavement. It was the first time she had been in a procession where the soldiers on horseback had not charged at them. I

thought the situation for Palestinians both Christian and Muslim was extremely difficult then. It is considerably worse now. For me, Palm Sunday is a time for reflection on suffering. The suffering of Jesus and the people in the Holy Land and throughout the world. The suffering especially of the innocent.

On the first Palm Sunday Jesus comes in peace and humility. He enters Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowd following Jesus waved palm branches as signs of peace. It was a time for much celebration. However, not long after the triumph of the original Palm Sunday the situation changes drastically. Plotting against Jesus intensifies. There is deception, desolation, trials, tribulations and finally crucifixion.

Isaiah and Psalm 21 speak of so much suffering. Certainly, Jesus suffered from the time when he knew He was about to be betrayed. He trusted God to be with him during his suffering. At the Last Supper, the mission of his disciples is made clear. Jesus blesses the cup and passes it to his disciples to share in his drink; signifying that the disciples share the same cup of suffering. The symbolism of the bread and wine has also been described as the sharing of the mission of Jesus. Jesus is the servant who gives his life for others. The bread must be broken and the wine cup to be passed around to be shared, so is his body to be broken in death so that the life-giving spirit might be given for the entire humanity. This underpins Jesus’ salvific-giving—of sacrificing his life for the sake of others (Johnson, 2006).

We are all called to the mission of Jesus. Some of the early followers of Jesus said they were followers of ‘*The Way*.’ This *Way* must surely mean that we are all called to reflect and live as Jesus’ lives. What would Jesus want us to do today? We would all have our unique responses to that question. Jesus spoke so much of love, forgiveness, care, support for one another, service, compassion, and mercy. We are asked to treat others as we want to be treated ourselves. We are asked to put God at the centre of our being. We are asked to look after God’s creation.

As we move towards Easter it is hard to make sense of what is happening in the Holy Land today. It is not just a question of religion but more one of what it means to be human.

Palestinians whether Christians or Muslims are suffering hugely. Basic needs such as food, water, medicines and provisions for shelter have been kept from reaching the Palestinians. Hospitals and schools have been demolished. Journalists have been killed. In recent news, with the end of the hostage-situation, Palestinians were so happy with the expectation of an end to the current suffering. We all saw pictures of the celebrations and then we also witness their slow troop back to former homes, where a landscape of devastation awaits them.

Peace is so fragile. Many countries have come out openly in support of the right of all to live in peace and security. It would not be fair either to simply blame the Jewish population. There are Jews who are also speaking out against the atrocities to Palestinians. I met Rabbi Jeremy of Rabbis for Human Rights and Jeff Halper who used to work to restore demolished homes of Palestinians. It is hopeful to know that there are many peace and justice makers in the Holy Land.



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As Pope Francis' call to Synodality as a way of listening, the world needs to listen more, especially to those most affected. Arab countries have come out with suggestions on how to resolve some of the issues in the Holy Land. It is a hopeful sign. Sadly, any suggestions from them have been rejected by Israel and the United States. There are many countries which are predominantly Christian who have criticised the war but not on the basis of Christianity but politics. I believe, we need to have more Christian voices speaking out and more so, more Christian listening.

We are now moving towards Easter. There is a significant uncertainty in the world on many levels. It is an appropriate time to reflect on the life, passion and death of Jesus, especially in this Lenten period. As we journey through Lent, let us remember the Holy Land, where Jesus' continues to walk the *Way of the Cross*.

In our reflection, we can listen to the suffering Jesus. What would Jesus say to us? Perhaps he would look at what is happening in his homeland and weep.

Reference: Luke Timothy Johnson, "*Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*." Minnesota, Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press (2006)

Margaret Luping – 'Adventurous' is a word that best describes Margaret. She finished a B.A degree from Victoria University (VUW) where she met Tan Sri Datuk Dr Herman Luping (decd), a distinguished Malaysian gentleman who was taking up his postgraduate studies at VUW. They married when she was 21 and moved to Sabah, Malaysia where they raised their three daughters. In Sabah, Margaret worked as a secondary school teacher, and an editor of a newspaper and of a book on Mount Kinabalu (the highest mountain in Southeast Asia). Her family moved back to New Zealand in the 1980s and around that time her interest in Church was stirred and she started her involvement in parish work. So much was her fascination for the Church, she completed two Diplomas—one in Pastoral Ministry and another in Religious Studies. She joined Launch Out when it started in 2002. In 2007 she was appointed the first lay hospital chaplain in the Archdiocese. Now with five grandchildren, Margaret remains keen on social justice and geopolitics. She is an avid traveller, visited 40 countries with repeated trips in some of them, including Palestine. She has made many friends from various religions and cultures. As she grows older, she continues to strive to be inclusive and to be a better listener. Her focus in many ways is what it means to be a good human being, and for her, Jesus is the perfect example.



Link to Margaret's commissioning:

https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/adw_welcom/first-lay-hospital-chaplain-appointed/

ONLINE RESOURCES

- [Food for Faith https://foodforfaith.org.nz/](https://foodforfaith.org.nz/). **Rutger Keijser** will have his maiden podcast for the 5th Sunday of Lent, 06 April.
- A good source for reflections. Thanks to Vicky Raw for recommending. **Hallow** https://hallow.com/prayers/1074182?is_shared=true
- **Practices of Discipleship** by Terrence W. Tile, a Boston College video https://youtu.be/MkQ3S_BRLdI?si=-A9GpN4XpeHqYPkb
- Free **Tui Motu** articles. Their website has good articles <https://tuimotu.org/>.
- Free audio book of Pope Francis' encyclical letter "**Fratelli tutti**" <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/podcast/fratelli-tutti.html>





The New Testament is not anti-Semitic, but it has often been interpreted in an anti-Semitic way in our Christian tradition. Tragically this has contributed to 2000 years of persecution of Jews by Christians, culminating in the Holocaust. Most striking to us are the anti-Jewish diatribes of the early Church father St John Chrysostom, *Against the Jews*, that were regularly cited by the Nazis. However, an anti-Semitic undercurrent continues, in writing and preaching about the New Testament, in much current Catholic teaching, based in negative or patronizing assumptions about Jewish people, culture and religion. Often in these Christian talks the Jewishness of participants in the scriptural stories or reflections is presented or assumed as limiting or distorting their understanding and their behavior.

We need to consciously correct such misunderstandings in and through our reflection and teaching today, as anti-Semitism is a real and ongoing problem. We must always read and interpret the scriptures in ways that express its fundamental message, that God loves all of humanity, from all cultures and religions, and intends our salvation and fulfillment as human beings, while belonging to our different cultures within humanity.

Unlike our forebears who ignored this, we are now clear that the man Jesus was a Jew, and his first followers were all Jews, including Peter whom we recognize as the first pope. Jesus is now known as being a diligent Jew, regularly attending the synagogue and pilgrimaging to Jerusalem for the major annual Jewish feasts. He refutes criticism from the religious leaders for healing on the sabbath by reference to the Jewish tradition itself.

Jesus' teaching was always framed in terms of the Jewish tradition, which was his own cultural identity. He thought and talked as a Jew. Most obviously, when asked about the most important commandment, he does not offer his own thoughts but, like any Jewish teacher, rather summarizes the heart of the Mosaic Law by quoting from the Torah, the divine Word to the Jewish people (Mk 12:28-34). His regular critique of abuses of the religious leadership of his day is made in the same terms as the earlier prophets in the Hebrew scriptures of his tradition. *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice* Mt 9:13. In general the writers of the New Testament presents the Christian faith not as repudiating Judaism but as completing it. *I have not come to abolish the Law and Prophets but to fulfill them* (Mt 5:17)

While Jesus certainly had debates with some of the religious leadership of his day (a characteristic Jewish activity - in complete contrast to the obedience of Catholic lay people) and challenged authoritatively some of the ritual and ethical rules, he did not challenge the Torah, the divine Word to Jews, but remained faithful as a Jew. Indeed, in accord with his Jewish tradition his message was a call for total commitment to the divine Word through care for others, especially those most in need.

However, all of the New Testament texts were written within a polemical context in which the Christian faith was establishing its identity independent of its parent religion of Judaism. This is the appropriate framework in which to locate and interpret the most obvious negative general statements about Jews in the New Testament, such as the killing of the son of the vineyard owner (Mk 12:1-12), the crowd saying *His blood be upon us and our children* (Mt 25:27) and *you are from your father the devil* (Jn 8:44). In order to clearly affirm their Christian faith, within cultural contexts where it was still contested, with the Christian community still a challenged and often oppressed minority, in these particular texts the Christian faith is graphically contrasted with Judaism. We need to make this ancient and contested context clear if these particular texts are being publicly recited and carefully reinterpret the meaning they can have in our contemporary context.



Within the Christian context Judaism is still often critiqued as a legalistic and ritualistic religion, citing Jesus' criticisms of the Jewish religious leadership in the scriptures. Jewish people would say that this view misunderstands the relationship between their religious interpretation or actions and their faith commitment. Their various practices are not an alternative to faith in God, but an expression of their faith commitment. Of course, the Jewish religion is not perfect, but neither is ours, as the New Testament itself clearly manifests, in Jesus' own disciples' faithless behavior in the gospels (including Peter our first pope himself). We see this in Paul's critique as expressed in his letters, of Christian behaviors, including their rituals and practices, within his communities. Further, though less prominent than in the past, ritualism and legalism continue to be a feature of much Catholic practice.

Our Christian faith can only be made sense of in terms of Judaism from which it came. The language, symbols and ideas used to interpret the life and person of Jesus were naturally initially derived from the Jewish culture that he came from, and only subsequently modified with language, symbols and ideas drawn from the wider Greco-Roman culture that encompassed it. Divine involvement, in and through the history of the Jewish people, culminates, for the Christian, in the life of the Son of God come among the Jewish people, for the ultimate benefit of all of humanity.

When next we are in a group sharing about the Hebrew or Christian scriptures, let us imagine that we have several Jewish people present with our group, and think how they will hear and respond to what we are presenting, or assuming, during our time together. And let us remember, Jesus himself was a Jew.

Background reading:

- Allison, D. (1998). *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian prophet*. Fortress
 Allison, D. (2009). *The historical Christ and the theological Jesus*. Eerdmans
 Haight, R(1999). *Jesus: symbol of God*. Orbis Books
 Sacks, J. (2002). *The dignity of difference (1rst ed)*. Bloomsbury Continuum
 Sanders E. (1985). *Jesus and Judaism*. SCM



Over the last month Pope Francis has been very much in our minds. His serious illness, which as I write seems to be improving, forced us to think about what it would be like if he did not survive. During this time, we also celebrated 12 years of his pontificate.

Such circumstances tend to put us in a pensive mood, reflecting on the life of the one we are afraid we might lose. 12 years is a long time to have such a dynamic leader, a changemaker, a different type of pope than that to whom we are accustomed. The screening of the film *Conclave* at this time may also have turned our thoughts to the whole issue of the process of choosing the leader of the Catholic Church.

Thousands of articles and books have been written about Francis, and no doubt several PhD theses, with, I suspect, many more to come. All of us will have different impressions and memories of this man who unexpectedly came into our lives in 2013, and who has been ever present since.

So, what will be his legacy? Perhaps there are two ways to look at that – the legacy for us personally and for the Church as a whole. Often, however, there is much overlap in those two aspects. Francis is the first pope to be ordained after The Second Vatican Council (VCI). However, despite this, or maybe because of it, the Council has been very influential in his life. I imagine that during his seminary years there was much discussion about the impact that the Council would have on priesthood and the Church in the world, just as St John XXIII intended.

One very striking legacy that Francis will leave is his constant insistence on the importance of the Council, and the fact that it has not yet been fully incorporated into our understanding of Church. We should consider two of the most important documents of VCI, namely *Lumen Gentium* (LG) and *Gaudium et Spes* (GS). Edward Hahnenberg, in *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, describes LG as 'the crowning glory of the Council' where 'the church's sense of itself, its nature and purpose' are very clearly laid out. He goes on to say that GS 'treats the Church's mission in the world.' Hahnenberg considers these two documents as 'the two pillars of the Second Vatican Council.'

It would appear that Francis shares this view. In his writings he has developed the overarching principles of these documents, rather than commenting on other VCI chapters, which deal with more specific issues, such as bishops, priests, religious life etc, although, to be fair, he has progressed the topics of liturgy and the laity, that were specifically addressed in VCI.

If we look at his encyclicals and exhortations, he addresses the relationship of the Church and the world. *Laudato' Si* implores us to take our responsibility seriously to care for our common home, given to us by God. *Evangelium Gaudium*, *The Joy of the Gospel*, is subtitled *The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, and *Fratelli Tutti*, is a letter on *Fraternity and Social Friendship*. These writings touch on the relationship of us, as Catholics, to each other and to the world – emphasising dialogue and encounter. There are many other writings which could also be considered.

Perhaps the most impressive influence of Francis' pontificate is his Synod on Synodality, which is aimed at changing the whole way we conduct ourselves in the Church and in our relationship with the world, and extends from the many documents that he has written. Again, there are links to VCI, as it was the Council that reintroduced the synod of bishops.

Initially these synods were exclusive gatherings of bishops, held in very formal settings and addressing major issues in short periods of time - a complete contrast to the Synod on Synodality, which took place over three years and we have just been told, will continue to be considered over the next three years. There was extensive consultation with the Church from the parish level up, with our thoughts and aspirations being taken to Rome for the actual Synod. As well as bishops and priests, laity, including women, were invited to participate fully, with full voting rights. We were introduced to the process of 'spiritual conversation', which was not only used during the Synod sessions, but has been recommended for us all to use, as a way of discernment and decision making.

The principles of the Synod were identified as *Communion, Participation and Mission*. Subsequently, there has been much discussion about what Synodality really means. We have become familiar with the principles of listening; walking together; being inclusive; accompanying each other; as well as recognising the importance of all the baptised - the People of God – in the life of the Church. Francis recognised at the beginning of his pontificate that he had been elected to be a reformer, and the Synod on Synodality is the pinnacle of his many activities for that aim.

Turning to the effect of this pope on our personal lives, there will be many reactions. Some have found the changes difficult. The idea of the laity moving from a somewhat passive role, to being encouraged to be changemakers ourselves, is a major challenge. But there would be no doubt that this pope has been more present in our lives than his predecessors. His ability to engage people; his accessible writings; his emphasis on the Gospel values of mercy and love; his insistence on the preferential option to care of the poor and migrants; his generosity in terms of time and attention to the suffering of so many, have touched us all.

As we are facing the end of his pontificate, perhaps this is a good time to reflect on what is described as '12 years of incredible gift'. How has Francis inspired us to incorporate our faith into our everyday lives; what have we learned and how will we, every one of us, continue to respond to the challenges that he has set us? Perhaps Lent is a particularly good time for us to turn our minds to these discernments.

