

# THE MUSEUM

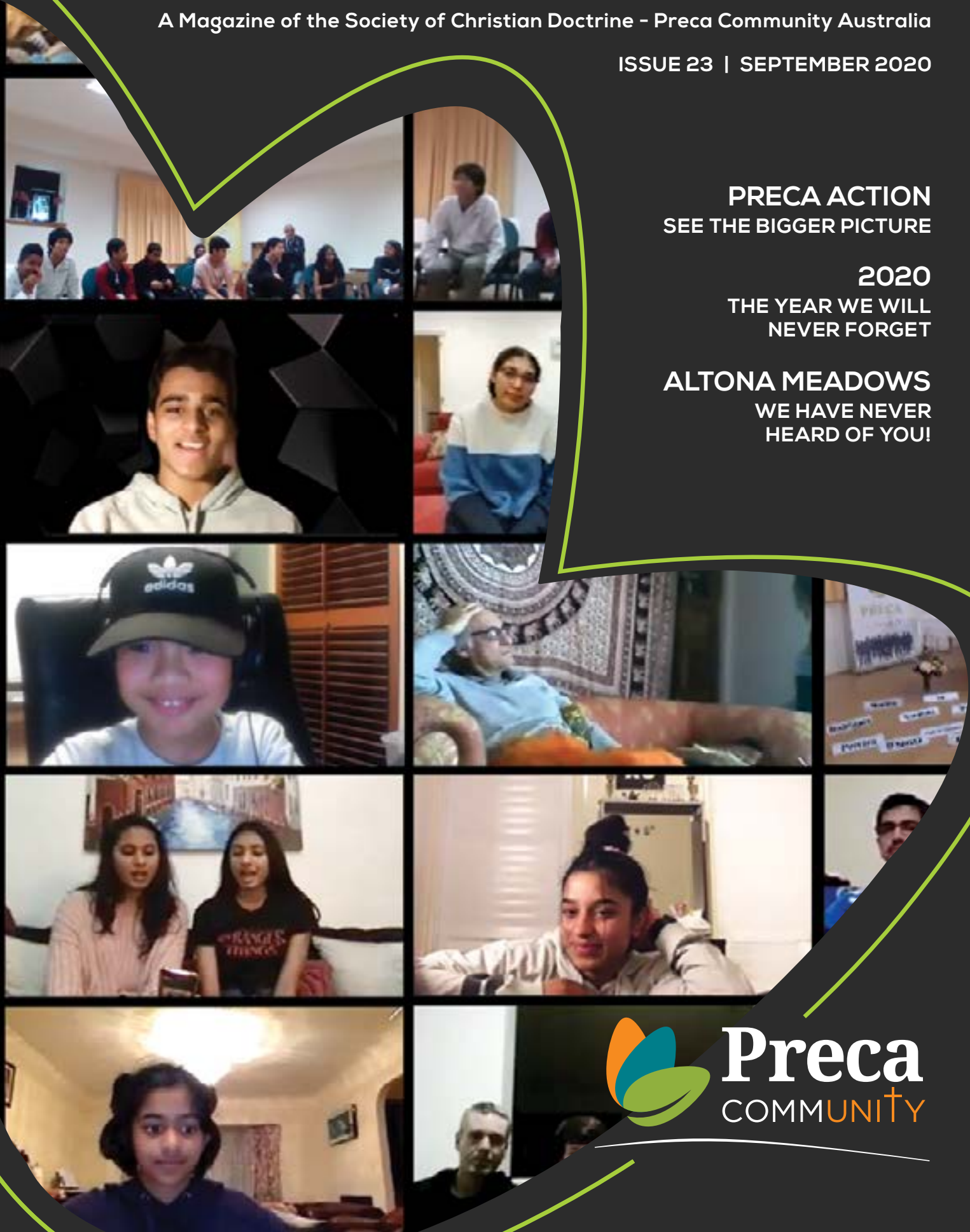
A Magazine of the Society of Christian Doctrine - Preca Community Australia

ISSUE 23 | SEPTEMBER 2020

**PRECA ACTION**  
SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

**2020**  
THE YEAR WE WILL  
NEVER FORGET

**ALTONA MEADOWS**  
WE HAVE NEVER  
HEARD OF YOU!



**Preca**  
COMMUNITY



## **SAFEGUARDING OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES**

The Society of Christian Doctrine - Preca Community values the dignity of every person. We are especially committed to ensuring the care, well-being, and protection of children, and vulnerable persons in our faith communities.

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**THE MUSEUM** is issued for friends and associates of the Society of Christian Doctrine in the Australia. M.U.S.E.U.M. represents the first letter of a Latin prayer, Magister Untinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus translating Divine teacher, may the whole world follow the Gospel.

*A Magazine of the Society of Christian Doctrine, founded by Saint George Preca.*

Front and back cover: Images showing that the Preca Community in Australia continues its ministry propelled by online formats during the lockdown.

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# PRESERVING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE SDC

↑ Fr Ian Ranson, PP of Parish of Laverton with parishioners attending the Canonisation of George Preca in Rome 03 June 2007. Br Anthony Gatt, far right, a member at Altona Meadows centre at the time was also present. We are reminded by the umbrellas that it rained all day!

Members and young people from Tasmania and Victoria occupy a carriage on the Melbourne - Sydney bound train for the Annual General Meeting in Sydney, 1962. ↓



Anthony (Toni) Caruana, RIP 01.07.20  
Toni was among the group of Members to be incorporated in Australia on 29 December 1957 held at Corpus Christi College, Werribee, Victoria at the first incorporation ceremony in Australia. He is pictured here in Gozo, Malta following his return to Gozo to live and minister. ↓



Photo credit - Frankie Pavia.

# PRECA ACTION - SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

## 1. Preca Winter Weekend

Over the weekend of 11-12 July 2020, the young people in Adelaide gathered for a retreat to nurture their journey in Christ. The theme of the retreat was finding our identity in Christ and being a witness to the Word of God and love within our communities. The first session on 'Contentment' conveyed the importance of being grateful for everything we are blessed with no matter how small it may seem and understanding that cultivating a life in faith is a process which begins by taking one small step at a time.

Through the sessions, reflections, prayers, songs and activities, we engaged in the discussions and shared our various views on our faith journey. The retreat not only helped us grow more deeply in our faith but also helped the Preca Community youth leaders understand and reflect on their own journeys in Christ. The weekend brought everyone closer, especially during a time where the world is challenged by the pandemic. With good weather and good food accompanying the weekend retreat, it was a very enjoyable experience that exemplified the joy in coming together as a community of faith in Christ.

Sarisha Lobo



Our retreat weekend was based around the theme 'Finding our identity through Christ'. The retreat was truly a time of questioning and reflecting who I really am and how the people around me affect my thoughts and actions. The older youth of the Preca Community took us through a journey of spirituality and self-reflection; they also opened up to us about their own personal experiences and journey that have traversed. I came into the retreat expecting to learn about things that I may already had the knowledge about, but instead it opened my mind to new experiences and learning about God's power and love.

During a session in the retreat, I remember having a discussion about how today's society is affecting us and not fully letting us be ourselves. Some people talked about how they are afraid to let others know about their belief in Christ. I related to this because I know how hard it is living in a society where not everyone shares the same view as you and, in some cases, you might even be in the minority. We must learn to deny the outside world when it forces us to change for the worse. This made me realise how grateful I am for the Preca Community and how I am able to be around people who are constantly supporting me and teaching me to know, love, and serve God.

Alexis Noronha



## 2. Darwin Group Begins

While attending the episcopal ordination of Bishop Charles Gauci in 2018, we were able to connect with friends in Darwin who have begun meetings with a focus on Preca spirituality. Early days yet but as they explore the spirituality of St George Preca; we wish them continuity. Presently Bishop Charles Gauci is guiding them.



## 3. Annual General Meeting 2020

The AGM for the Society of Christian Doctrine – Preca Community in Australia was held at Mt Schoenstatt Conference and Retreat Centre, Mulgoa NSW from 02 January through to 06 January 2020. Bishop Charles Gauci from Darwin accompanied us during the meeting providing support and spiritual input.

The Reflection Morning focused on The Seven Degrees of Humility and Our Call to Holiness.

Each centre provided a reflection on their activities for the year 2019: 'Celebrating the Preca Ministries'.

A games night 'Recalling SDC History' proved to be challenging for all but brought back many memories and highlights of the SDC in Australia.

Votive Mass of George Preca followed by dinner at a local restaurant where we celebrated our mission for the year 2019 concluded the AGM. Frs Laurie Cauchi and Carmelo Sciberras joined us on this occasion. We acknowledged Reno Gauci who celebrated 45 years of incorporation.



Bishop Charles Gauci takes us through the benefits of The Examen based on the style of St Ignatius of Loyola.



A games night 'Recalling SDC History'.



Musicians, Raymond, Noel, and Michael.



Mt Schoenstatt Shrine.

## 4. Reflections from St Albans Centre

Hi, my name is Jeremy I am 14 years old and I am in Year 9. I joined the Preca Community about 4 years ago through one of my friends and have been attending ever since. Every Friday since 2016 (with some exceptions) I have been learning about the Word of God and various other topics while also having fun and meeting new friends. At the start of the class we pray and then get straight into learning new things about the catholic faith. Following that we have some time to play outside and most of the time we get treated with some food. Every first Friday we are also invited to mass and have the ability to either proclaim the reading or altar serve. I've learnt many things here like the lives of different saints, catholic values, and many prayers. Nowadays because of COVID - 19 we use zoom to connect with each other instead of seeing each other face to face, even though it does take some important aspects away we still have a great time learning. It does get difficult when I have a lot of homework but usually I just try my hardest to finish it early so that I don't have to worry about it affecting anything else. I have a lot of fun at these meetings and consider it as my second home, everyone is friendly and it is a nice community to be a part of.

Jeremy Pope

Hi, my name is Jake, I am 11 years old. I live with a loving family of four. I am in grade 6 and I am from Australia but my background is Indian. My brother and I joined Preca in 2016. How did we join? One of my brother's friends' mum told my mum about the Preca brothers so my mum decided for us to join the Preca Community. My brother and I have lots of fun there, we are taught our catholic faith and the value of faith and prayer. The catholic faith always helped me to face daily life challenges, Every Friday I'm looking forward to having a journey of faith with the Preca Community. We always learn something new when we go to Preca. They share food which we enjoy. I would like to thank the Preca brothers for their loving and caring hearts and their dedication so that our catholic faith may grow. I would like to continue the journey of faith with the brothers and always take the goodness to others.

Jake Pope



Jake and Jeremy with their dad, Shaji.



## 5. St Joseph's Church in Hobart

Fr Justin Raj CP with parishioners after a morning weekday Mass at St Joseph's Church in Hobart following the virus restrictions being lifted in Hobart. St Joseph's in the care of the Passionist congregation has been a mainstay for Preca Members in Hobart since our beginning there in 1961. We currently minister there in sacrament formation.

Jeffin Jones, a student resident at Preca Centre, Hobart is pictured far left.

Catholics in Tasmania have been urged to live their Christian lives with renewed purpose and focus as they emerged from isolation.

Photo credit: Archdiocese of Hobart. [↑](#)

## 6. Training for Catechists at Preca Centre, Adelaide

Catechists are called to lead others to Jesus. This demands that catechists nourish an intimate relationship with Jesus. Fr Preca taught the principle that no one gives what one does not possess.

***“The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good ... for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”***

St George Preca



## 7. United in Mission

Members from Preca Centre St Albans share fellowship with the Redemptorists who administer the parish of Holy Eucharist, St Albans.



## 8. Gospel of John

Peter Judge, a Member of the Preca Community in Hobart delivers a message on Shalom North America TV on the reading from the Gospel of John on the Passion story.

## 9. Monthly Mass

Monthly Mass with student residents at Preca Centre, Hobart. Fr Brian Nichols, PP of Sandy Bay/Taroona parish presides at Mass. In January 2021 he will move to Melbourne to take up the position of Vice-Rector at Corpus Christi College Seminary.



## 10. Weekly Prayer

Weekly prayer held at Preca Centre, Hobart. In prayerful eucharistic adoration young people worship together.



# CONFINED AND CHANGED!

Confined and Changed! - these are the first two words that came to mind, when Peter asked me to write my personal experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

***“I therefore call on all humbly to seek God’s help, and then in reliance on him to do their duty unflinchingly.”***

***“As he stood, transfixed, on the plateau in front of the Auberge de Castile, he had a premonition that he would never be the same man again, nor Valletta the same city, nor Malta the same.”***

These two quotations are from a great book to read: The Kappillan of Malta by Nicholas Monsarrat. Passing fifteen weeks, from 13 March until the end of June, inside Dar il-Hanin Samaritan (DHS) was no joke....and after that, from 01 July, going out but with many restrictions!

Although a retiree, my days before the pandemic, thank God, were full: attending lectures for senior citizens, visiting my widowed sister who has a 24-year old wheelchair bound son, attending the Preca Centre where I had two classes and a subject during our meetings once a week, taking part in a radio programme every three weeks, and the preparation involved, making cribs, fixing up a studio-gallery I have been dreaming of for a long time....

But this all changed abruptly on 13 March. During that morning, I had a meeting with my workers working on my property which I had to cut short as the residents at DHS, had a meeting at 11.00 am and after that it was history, as the saying goes!

From that date onwards, we could not leave the premises no matter what, and no one was allowed to visit us for any reason. It was a very bitter pill to swallow.

The first few days were terrible because I felt helpless and lost. I had to come to terms with the situation. I knew that it was for our own good; catching the virus could have proved fatal for some of the residents. But then, I had to find other means I was accustomed to and that is to use my time “confined” in my own home!

As the first week came to an end, I decided to do things for which I had little time to do before. I could not let myself sit on the fence. Basically, this is what I did:

- 1) Cribs for all the windows of the DHS corridors, which I did with the help of Carmel Borg, an 83 year old resident. In fact we did about 40 of them, apart from some cribs, big and small, for friends and for the centre, ready for Christmas;
- 2) Reading books and articles;
- 3) Praying The Watch, as much as possible, in the proper times, or while walking in our beautiful garden and enjoying some quality quiet time;
- 4) Viewing mass and the rosary online;
- 5) Video conferencing with the other Members of my SDC centre everyday for a meeting and or for a chat;
- 6) Weekly video chat with some of the young people attending the centre;

- 7) Making contact with as many friends as possible via e-mails, Facebook, and the occasional phone call which is so easy nowadays or video chat;
- 8) I used the video chat with my widowed sister twice a day as my nephew, being mentally handicapped cannot understand why I no longer visit him in his own home;
- 9) Whenever I phoned, he was always trying to make me understand, poor chap, that I was to visit him face to face and not via the computer! This was the hardest thing as I used to provide personal care for him every day and give her time to speak with me after passing much of the day on her own;
- 10) I “wrote” a lot of icons, almost 30, some of them ordered the previous year. Thank God I had a lot of wood to use for my icons. I had to do them in my room as I have no space to work in at DHS;
- 11) Planting and taking care of a lot of cuttings for future use in my own garden at the studio gallery;
- 12) Contact with my workers who continued with the work discussed beforehand.

You may say: “Quite a long list! How did you manage?” I have only one answer to this question: “With God’s help, everything is possible”! Actually, no time to get bored or feeling helpless.

From time to time, I do feel the urge to be angry, angry with God, with those around me, with the situation, I am in.

This was especially deeply felt when my sister brought her son and all I could do was stand in the doorway while they remained in their



Icon depicting Breaking of Bread.

car and communicate across the front terrace. I was always emotional after such encounters. At least he did not protest or attempt to come near me. There were times of frustration of not being able to continue with the quiet time of the past. Sometimes persons getting on everybody’s nerves, as is expected in a community, made matters worse. Then there are those who clearly showed their frustration by inertia. Our vocation, may not be the same again, as quoted above from The Kappillan of Malta.

At other the times, I feel at peace, accepting the unpleasant situation that is affecting not only me but the whole world.

I do pray a lot for all involved, especially my loved ones and those involved in healthcare. Yes, I did try to feel normal, but not in a protracted way. I trusted that in due time, God will make everything good again, hoping for brighter days and returning to normal.

Hope is the last thing that dies in man and this hope pushes man into new boundaries, changes, and new beginnings...

Vincent Mangani  
Preca Community



Our Lady on stone is Our Lady of Mellieha, Malta. Quote taken from Psalm 22.5 ‘To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame’.



The crucifix inspired by the Vigil Pope Francis held in empty St Peter’s square: my painting written on Good Friday.

# RETURNED TO GOD 2020

We hold them in prayer.

31.01.20 ANGELO BUHAGIAR

24.02.20 LEONARD MICALLEF

02.03.20 GEORGE MONTEBELLO

04.03.20 CARMEN FARRUGIA

March 2020 CHARLES TABONE

09.03.20 JOHN BATHERSBY

10.05.20 LELI CHIRCOP

06.06.20 NOEL CONNOLLY

16.06.20 RHONDA GADD

29.06.20 MARTIN BORG

01.07.20 ANTHONY CARUANA

18.08.20 SUZANNE SHERMAN

22.08.20 EMEKE ONWUKWE

27.08.20 RUSSELL McNAUGHTON

Disclaimer - While we make every endeavour to include those who have died and have been connected with the SDC, we apologise if we have missed someone.



Carmen Farrugia 12.10.32 – 04.03.20 as a young Member in 1950; incorporated into the SDC in 1949. Faithful servant ministering in Adelaide.



Carmen Farrugia far right with fellow Members, Miriam Belli and Maria Grech RIP.

## ALTONA MEADOWS - WE HAVE NEVER HEARD OF YOU!

In Australia, the Society of Christian Doctrine was established in 1956. The work in the area of catechesis operates from our own centres or from parish based resources. Our centres, known as Preca Centre are like an oratory where young people and adults are welcome to share their faith in an engaging environment.

The SDC has a modus operandi of relying on recommendations for our work rather than our offering or advertising our services; since this is the will of our Founder, St George Preca. There was always a thought that overt advertising and self-promotion could exaggerate what service is on offer. However over the years, we have found

that our work which is quietly achieved has been appreciated by many a parish community.

When we introduce ourselves, we are often faced with the question – “Who are you? or - We have never heard of you!” This does not faze us as our Founder always insisted on us working quietly away for the sake of the Kingdom. When the SDC celebrated its golden jubilee in 1957, one of the less extreme examples of this humility was when he proclaimed St Paul as the real Founder of the Society by virtue of the words: “... hand on to reliable people so that they in turn will be able to teach others.” 2 Tim. 2:2.

This happened to us when we ventured further afield from the inner western suburbs of Melbourne to the greener pastures of Altona Meadows; which sits off the Geelong freeway. Fr Claude Borg MSSP and Charles and Evelyn Hili, who were relatives of St George Preca wished for a centre in this area. Our mission began under the parish priest of the Laverton parish, Fr Gerald Fitzgerald, with Members in 1986 from the Ardeer centre travelling weekly to the parish. The Laverton parish was expanding and the need for services including reliable catechists was emerging. Altona Meadows is a suburb within the Laverton parish confines.

Fr Fitzgerald was replaced by Fr Vincent Burke, and at this stage in 1993 we were keen to establish a centre with full immersion into the parish. We met with Fr Burke and he asked us why we wanted to open a centre in Laverton? Who are you, what are you etc? The rest is history.

A Mass of Dedication to bless and initiate the work of the SDC in the newly established centre in Talbot Street, Altona Meadows was held on 12 May 1993 by Bishop Peter Connors, Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne.

During this Mass, Bishop Connors stressed the need for us to become involved in adult education and the importance of reaching out to the unchurched in our midst. This we have taken on board in many diverging ways, including conducting the RCIA process.

Today this parish which has been renamed from the Parish of Laverton to that of Holy Trinity; is one of the largest in the Melbourne archdiocese; with five catholic primary schools and two secondary colleges. There are also vibrant welfare and support groups within the parish. The current parish priest Fr John Healy supports us in our work. The naming of one of the meeting rooms in the parish centre after St George Preca is testament of this ongoing support.

The parish being where faith is shared and support given as expressed in this quote:

*“The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather, ‘the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit’, ‘a familial and welcoming home’, the ‘community of the faithful’. Plainly and simply, the parish is founded on a theological reality, because it is a Eucharistic community. This means that the parish is a community properly suited for*

*celebrating the Eucharist, the living source for its up-building and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church.”*

John Paul II, Christifideles Laici, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 1988, n. 26.



Queen of Peace church, Altona Meadows.



Children prayerfully display the Stations of the Cross during Holy Week.



Confirmation class line up for a photo at Preca Centre, Altona Meadows in 2002. These young people would be near to thirty years of age now. Joy indeed knowing that we have been instrumental in initiating them into the life of the Church.



S. Maria ai Monti in Rome  
burial church of St Benedict Joseph Labré.

# FOLLY FOR CHRIST

The tradition of the Holy Fool, the person who is odd, at the edge of society, is strong in Russian Orthodoxy. Though the term is not used much in western Christianity, Benedict Joseph Labré, patron saint of the homeless, might well be considered a holy fool. St George Preca was acutely aware of this theme often quoting Labré and chose him as a model for one of the promises that Preca Members make each day; that is to 'embrace contempt' in our love for Christ. To 'embrace contempt' means to accept ridicule in following Christ.

The Founder used to often quote this saying attributed to St Benedict Joseph Labré:

***“Now consider how Christ dealt with himself and you will be convinced that he truly treated himself with a heart of bronze. On appearing on earth he threw underfoot with utter contempt the riches, esteems, and bodily***

***pleasures - things which the world seeks so much - and embraced the Cross. With a bronze heart he bore so many offences, insults, and contempt through mockery, ridicule, and blows.”***

George Preca interpreted Benedict well and understood that Christ's contempt of the worldly values and of the false self-constructed by it, was simply a way of opening himself to the love of neighbour and the greater glory of God. The heart of bronze was the same heart of flesh beating with compassion for the poor and the same fire burning with desire for God. George Preca did not separate these three hearts, "... a heart of fire for God, a heart of flesh for others, and a heart of bronze for ourselves."

St Benedict Joseph Labré

1748 - 1783

Feast day: 16 April

Benedict Joseph became a kind of homeless pilgrim, a 'fool for Christ', visiting and praying at the shrines of Europe. He died during Holy Week of 1783, at the age of 35, on a street in the neighbourhood of S. Maria ai Monti in Rome, where he attended Mass each morning. Benedict is also buried in this church. S. Maria ai Monti is not far from the Colosseum, where Benedict often slept among its ruins.

He was first educated by an uncle who was a priest. During an epidemic his uncle died as he was attending the victims.

Though Benedict Joseph tried to join the Trappists and the Carthusians, he was rejected by several monasteries. Finally he was accepted at a Trappist monastery, but he left after several months, convinced that his vocation was to be a wandering poor pilgrim.

Though the Franciscans have claimed him, and some list him as a secular Franciscan; he was probably only a member of the Franciscan third order.

He travelled as a pilgrim on foot, all over Europe. Finally he settled in Rome, living in the Colosseum, visiting churches, especially where the Eucharist was exposed during the Forty Hours



S. Maria ai Monti in Rome.

devotion. He did not beg but took what was given to him, often sharing his meagre rations with other poor.

Following his death the word immediately went throughout Rome, "The saint has died."

He is a saint who calls us to solidarity with the poor, to be willing to love and accompany even the most repugnant. His legacy is a reminder to become free of concern for acceptance and being recognised and free of our fear of being ignored or despised.

Spiritual writer Jim Forest has written:

"Holy fools pose the question: Are we keeping heaven at a distance by clinging to the good regard of others, prudence, and what those around us regard as 'sanity'? The holy fools shout out with their mad words and deeds that to seek God is not necessarily the same thing as to seek sanity.... Does fear of being regarded by others as insane confine me in a cage of 'responsible' behaviour that limits my freedom and cripples my ability to love? ...

"Holy fools challenge an understanding of Christianity that gives the intellectually gifted people a head start not only in economic efforts but spiritual life. But the Gospel and sacramental life aren't just for smart people. At the Last Judgment we will not be asked how clever we were but how merciful."

**The world pokes fun at believers, and regards as fools and gullible those who follow the Gospel - even though the world's own darkness is unfathomable!**

St George Preca - A Letter on Meekness.



Burial place of St Benedict Joseph Labré.

# THE PRIVILEGE OF MINISTRY

## Cody Harwood is an Associate of the Preca Community based in Hobart.

The Associates of the Society of Christian Doctrine are women and men, single or married. This network of committed Christians come from all walks of life. They are people who value the particular contribution of the Society of Christian Doctrine based on the spirit of St George Preca, our Founder to the Church and want to be associated with these.

The aim for the Associate is: "To unite with the Preca Family in its life of prayer and its task of proclaiming the gospel, and to grow in the realisation of one's own role in that ministry."

My background: I grew up in a large family of 12 in the northern suburbs of Hobart at Bridgewater.

I was raised a Catholic attended Catholic schools completing Year 12 at Guilford Young College in 2010. I participated in Church life for many years, attending Mass regularly since the age of six. I have always had a passion for developing an understanding of what Christianity is about and how to apply this in my own life.

I have attended the activities of the Preca Community since that time.

Cody Harwood shares with us his practical pastoral placement at Calvary Hospital health care network in Hobart. –Tasmania.

I am currently studying theology at "Alphacrucis" an interfaith College in Hobart.

During my pastoral placement I was mainly based at the Lenah Valley campus and also at St John's Hospital as required.

During my time at Calvary Hospital I was doing ministerial and administrative tasks directed towards caring for patients and the Calvary community.

These tasks include taking sacramental communion to the sick, assisting with the set-up for weekly Mass at the Lenah Valley campus and interacting with patients, staff, and volunteers. My role also included an involvement in Calvary Hospital community events, liturgies, memorials,

and the Mary Potter celebrations. Mary Potter is the founder of the Little Company of Mary, the congregation of sisters who founded Calvary hospital in Hobart in 1899. The first campus was at the St John's site.

During this placement my goal was to develop my understanding and experience, so I can better equip myself with the knowledge and skills that will enable me to work in this field to some capacity. I would like to be able to live out my beliefs and understanding of Christianity to better serve other people and meet their needs wherever they are in life.

Taking sacramental communion to the sick is something for which I have a passion for. It is also a way of connecting with others. It connects the patient who is receiving the Eucharist to their wider parish community. This also enables them to experience the peace, love, and healing power of Christ that is present in the Eucharist, which is the source of nourishment for our faith.

Many other Christians continue Jesus Christ's table fellowship with the sacred sharing of bread. Many staff would know this long tradition is of special importance for the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary going back to their foundation by Venerable Mary Potter. It is their tradition we continue at Calvary and it holds a significant importance in bringing the love of Christ in the Eucharist, to the bedside.

A strong aspect of my understanding of what it means to live in a 'Christ-like' way is to have the capacity to love, accept, and understand people, no matter who they are or where they are at in life and a favourite quote of mine is from St Francis of Assisi; "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."

### A Privileged Encounter

On a recent Wednesday morning I had a moving encounter with a patient. I knocked on his door to offer communion as he had requested a visit but soon found out he was disheartened with his lack of recovery.

I began by introducing myself, where I was from and why I was there. I asked the gentleman if he would like to receive communion. He was visibly upset and he said to me, "I don't think God would be interested in me at the moment." After hearing that, I paused for a short while and I responded by saying, "God is interested in us at any time and is available to all, no matter where they are at or what they think they may have done." Following that comment, I asked him again, "Would you like to receive communion?" He responded with an emotional "yes". I then continued to proceed with the communion ritual and I offered him the Eucharist.

I was also able to pray for with him around his current situation, especially for a speedy recovery, and for God's continued care.

It was a privilege to hear about his life situation and I left the room with the sense that this patient had experienced the love, forgiveness, acceptance and grace of God that comes from the ritual of sharing the bread of life that we call the eucharist. It made me very aware how patients are able to take their current worries and life situations to God through their participation in communion. - Cody



Cody with Archbishop Emeritus Adrian Doyle at Mary Potter celebrations.



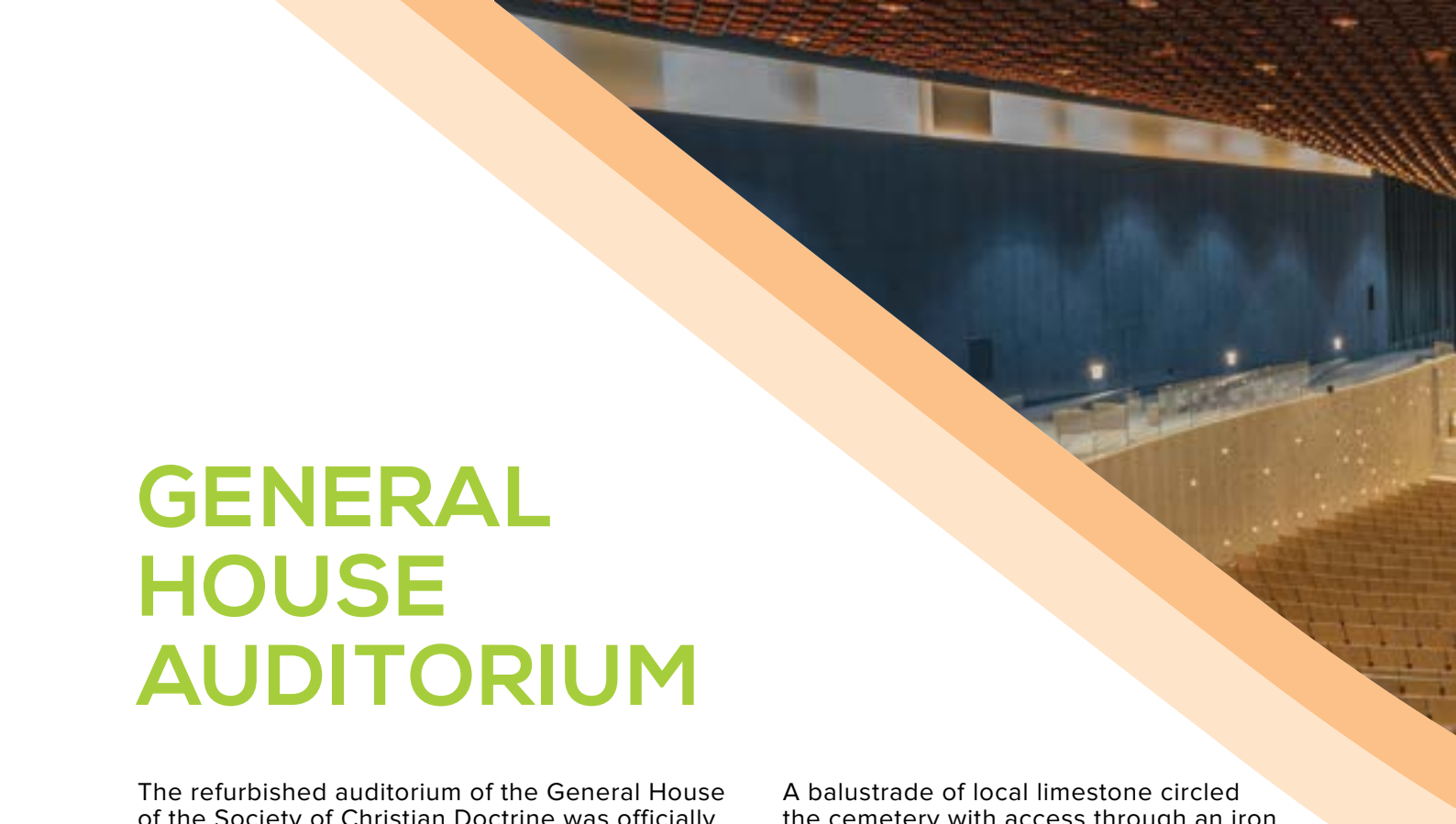
Cody at St John's with fellow Volunteer Ray Pearce and Pastoral Care's Maris Kingston.

## Mary, Help of Christians has been the official patron of Australia since 1844.

### Entrusting Australia to Our Lady Help of Christians.

O Immaculate Mary Help of Christians, Queen of heaven and earth, and tender mother of humanity at this time when the pandemic threatens all your children, we entrust to you our nation Australia, and all who live in this country. We commit to your intercession all the members of our community, beginning with the weakest ones from the unborn, sick, disabled, and the elderly. We commit to you our families, our young, our old, all of those who are vulnerable and those who are quarantined or anxious. We entrust to your Immaculate Heart, those who have lost

their livelihoods, our pastors, and other essential service workers, and our leaders at this time. We implore your intercession, especially for the protection of doctors and nurses, and those that minister to the contagious sick in this crisis. Reign over us, Mother of God, and teach us how to make the heart of Jesus reign and triumph in us and around us as it has reigned and triumphed in you. Amen.



# GENERAL HOUSE AUDITORIUM

The refurbished auditorium of the General House of the Society of Christian Doctrine was officially inaugurated on 07 December 2019. Many of our readers are familiar with the auditorium. It is situated in Blata l-Bajda which is approximately 2.25km from the capital, Valletta.

The ceremony included readings from Scripture and readings and prayers penned by the Founder; St George Preca.

The Cappella Musicale Caeciliana enhanced the evening with motets and chants. Architect Katya Abela Cassar from Atelier Maison, the company responsible for the renovation project, spoke about the underlying concept of the design whilst the Superior General, Natalino Camilleri shared a reflection on the Auditorium being the home of SDC Members.

Fr Kevin Schembri, the Ecclesiastical Assistant, led the blessing rite.

Directly behind the auditorium, the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal contains the sacred remains of St George Preca. This forms part of the General House of the Society of Christian Doctrine. The chapel was refurbished in 2001 to house the remains of St George Preca (1880-1962) who was canonised in Rome on 03 June 2007. His feast day is 09 May.

The history of the site of the auditorium goes back more than 200 years.

At the beginning of the 19th century a cemetery was built on this Blata l-Bajda corner spot which is now the site of the General House. This is situated where the road from Porte des Bombes divides into two.

The purpose of this cemetery was for the burial of the victims of the plague.

A balustrade of local limestone circled the cemetery with access through an iron gate on St Joseph's Road. In the middle stood a column raised on three steps which had a limestone cross on top of it.

When the Blata l-Bajda underpass was constructed in the early 1950s, part of the cemetery was dismantled and all the remains were exhumed, and reburied at the main cemetery known as Addolorata.

The plot was given in perpetual lease to the Society of Christian Doctrine which is colloquially known in Malta as the M.U.S.E.U.M. Work on the foundations of a chapel and complex began in August 1954.

On 02 October 1954, the corner stone of the complex was laid and blessed by Archbishop Michael Gonzi in the presence of many including George Preca.

When the headquarters was ready, work on the chapel itself started with the foundation stone laid on the 23 February 1958.

The round chapel is separated from the auditorium at the back by glass partitions, making for more congregational space if needed.

A bronze statue of Christ the Redeemer was raised on top of the dome on 06 July 1963 with the assistance of the British Navy engineers and in 1964 the completed chapel was opened and blessed by Archbishop Gonzi on 13 May.

The newly refurbished auditorium is an architectural gem forming an integral part of the refurbishment of the headquarters of the Society of Christian Doctrine. New pedestrian structures have provided easier access and prominence to this architectural wonder.



Aerial view showing construction of recent flyover at the Blata l-Bajda site.



The mammoth task ahead.



Early photo of the General House.



Photo credit Franklin Balzan.



Mattia Preti painting.  
Can you spot the dog?

## THE DOG ON THE CEILING

It was a dog on the ceiling of St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta that used to distract me during liturgy. Instead of following the celebration, my whole attention was focused on one ceiling painting where a dog was stepping into the banquet hall of King Herod. That energetic dog has endured time and is still there in the masterpiece of Mattia Preti. One can still see it on the left side of the vault of the cathedral, in the first arcade above the marble statue of St John baptising Christ.

It was tradition for some to attend the cathedral celebrations on certain Sundays. The younger ones, myself included, did not share at all the enthusiasm of the adults that accompanied us for the celebrations.

But, anyway, we went along, walking from the village of Floriana, heading towards the cathedral to those not-so-compelling events. One may understand how sluggish our stride was. Such events were not so interesting to boys full of energy who, like other boys, preferred to run and play about.

Liturgy then was not appealing to us at all. It was lengthy, Mass was in Latin, singing was done by a men's choir, though orderly and precise, made up of seminarians accompanied by the majestic organ. Mass would always begin by a cortege of monsignors, moving slowly towards the altar.

The lengthy homily, from a pulpit high up over our heads, did not contribute much to my eagerness or to that of my colleagues. The occasion seemed to be never-ending.

That is the main reason why the dog on the ceiling drew my attention so much and grabbed my imagination. Today, whenever I go to the cathedral, I have a cursory look at the dog, still standing on the same step, facing the king's table. But now I approach things out differently.

Loving memories come immediately to mind, bringing with them many thankful emotions towards those who made those experiences possible. I sincerely pray for those who have passed away. It was they who imbued in me a sense of the sacred and of what is truly beautiful. That painting on the ceiling no longer draws my attention away from what is going on in the cathedral. I still cherish the memory of those persons as if they are still standing next to me. I've grown up with them and my life was shaped by their loyalty, their enthusiasm, and their love towards what is sacred and beautiful.

The ceremonies, to which they looked forward to with so much expectation, were a clear indication of their appreciation of the sacred. For now I realise that those celebrations were not only sacred; they took place in an atmosphere of culture. They were beautiful, classical events.

The cathedral embraces within it the culture of a Church which, first of all, has always celebrated beauty in its liturgy and proclaimed it in a way that still continues from generation to generation, celebrated also in sculpture and in painting – expressing so nobly the life and mission of St John. It is no wonder, then, that people who enter the cathedral for the first time and look around them move their heads up towards the grandiose ceiling and express their astonishment so clearly in front of such rare beauty.

We did also have time to go around the church, with a brief explanation on the marvellous Belgian tapestries which, in those days, used to be beautifully hung across the main arcades on special occasions. I also remember as a child being taken aside to a chapel on the right wing of the cathedral, precisely the Spanish Auberge, where there is a monument depicting two Turks with hands tied behind their backs. We were invited to note the finesse of the white marble statues, such as the blue veins evident in the arms of these effigies.

The memories the dog in the cathedral time and again brings to my mind evoke in me some reflections.

The cathedral attracts people from all over the world who are so impressed by what they behold. But, unfortunately, for many of us, sacred art may not be one of our interests and we may perhaps be living a life of cultural mediocrity. There may be Maltese citizens who have never set foot in the cathedral. They would only know about their parish church and about the things around it. We should talk to such people and reveal the beauty of sacred art and encourage them to visit such places as St John's Co-Cathedral whenever they happen to be in the city.

There is no need for one to have had higher education to be able to appreciate the heritage we have received in sacred art. A disposition to value the architectural and artistic heritage that belongs to our island may be a first step in the right direction. One has to be convinced that sacred art is an important element in Christianity.

As in earlier times it has a didactic scope, even today it is still a means of inspiration and an invitation to reflection on what we believe in. Sacred art can be an opportunity to open up a dialogue between the work of art and the person. It may still inspire spiritual benefit to the beholder.

One may add another recommendation, that one be acquainted with men and women of culture;

discussion with such people would strengthen one's taste for learning.

Sacred art has a long history and moved with the times. The style in sacred art, as in all art, reflects both the status of its social context as well as particular traits belonging uniquely to the artist or sculptor. Certain art may be quite understandable while modern art may put greater emphasis on the message. It is good to cultivate within us a culture that distinguishes between different styles of art: This makes us appreciate better what artists try to tell us through their works.

The dog on the ceiling of the cathedral still opens to me a window to sacred art. It also invites me to acknowledge so much good that I have received from others, especially during my childhood. The old temptation may be persistently there but it is my pleasure not to resist to this temptation and to give a hurried glance at the dog, even if, at the moment, this may be a brief alienation from what is more important.

Joseph Galea  
Preca Community



St John's Co-Cathedral, Malta. The main cathedral of the Archdiocese of Malta is The Metropolitan Cathedral of Saint Paul, commonly known as St Paul's Cathedral or the Mdina Cathedral. The cathedral is the seat of the Archdiocese of Malta, and since the 19th century this function has been shared with St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta.



Mattia Preti painting.



# 2020 - THE YEAR WE WILL NEVER FORGET

The events of this year and, in particular, the drought, extreme bushfires, floods and the COVID-19 Pandemic, reminds us of Mary MacKillop and 'her perseverance in the face of adversity' which has reflected in her embracing of the title of the Cross - St Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

In her writings, Mary speaks often of when we are faced with illness, persecution, condemnation, grief, loss, and hardship, we need courage. In these extraordinary and difficult times, we reflect on her words; 'Have courage, no matter what your crosses are'. Mary MacKillop 1890

We provide the prayer that St George Preca promoted during the scourge of World War II in Malta between 1940 and 1943 when the island was bombed extensively. Today the SDC suggests this prayer to ask God to protect us from the pandemic that we are in.

Pray and share.

## *"The Victim"*

God the Father, Lord of heaven and earth, from your Sanctuary look at your beloved son Jesus Christ, whom you has given us as the only advocate and only victim for our sins. Take heed of the bloodshed of this our Brother, holy and eternal, pleading before you for forgiveness, peace, and salvation. It is only through him that you shower your divine mercy on humanity and receive glory. We offer you, therefore, his divine wounds so that you may forgive us our sins and subdue all the enemies of your name that they may experience, to their own confusion, the strength of the lion of the tribe of Judah in whom alone we hope to be delivered from sin, from sickness, and sorrow, and from eternal perdition. Amen.

**While 2020 has not gone to plan, that doesn't mean we can't look forward to a bright future in the years ahead!**

'Breaking of Bread' icon  
written by Vincent Mangani.



