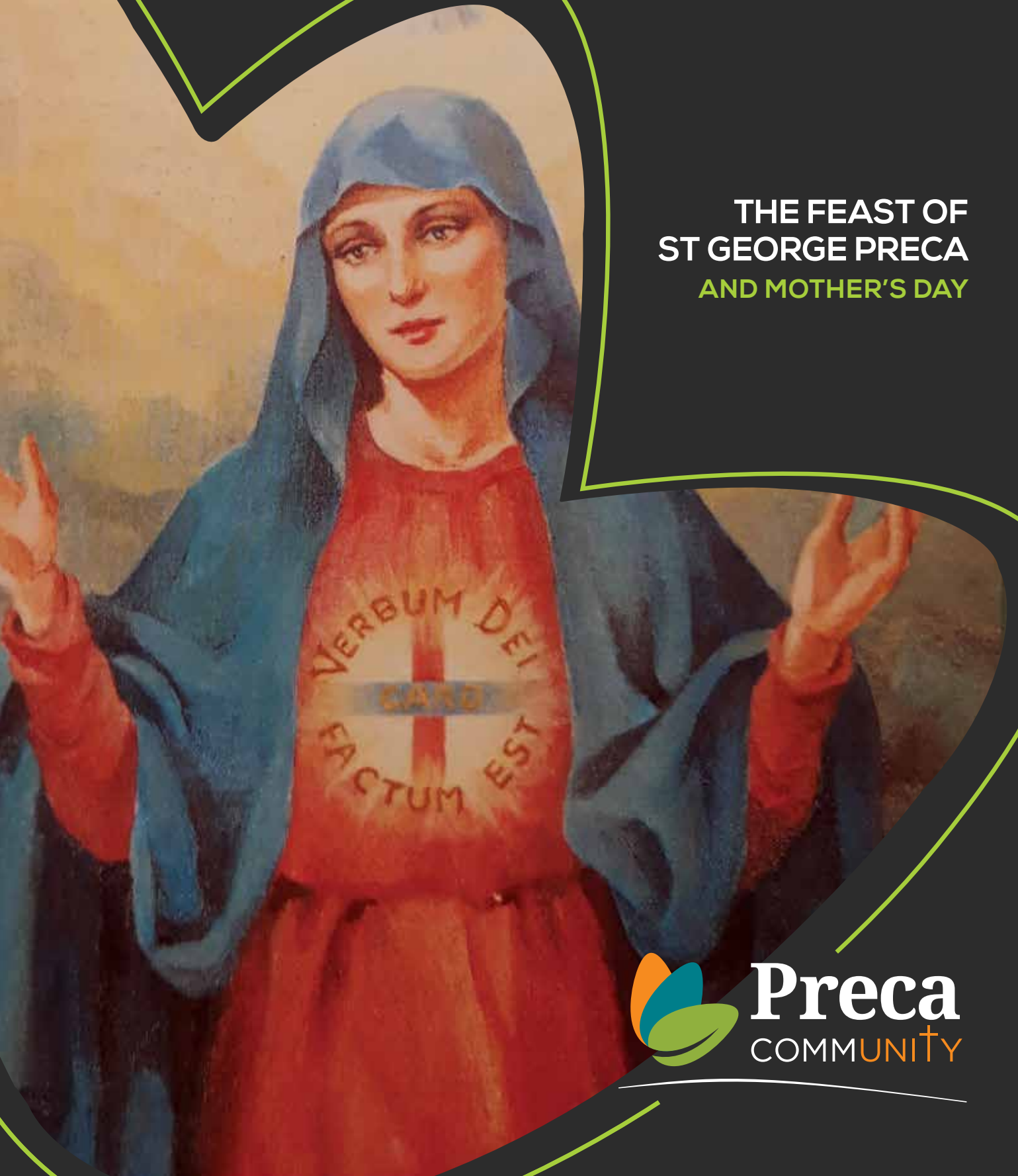


THE MUSEUM

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

ISSUE 25 | SEPTEMBER 2022

THE FEAST OF
ST GEORGE PRECA
AND MOTHER'S DAY



Preca
COMMUNITY



**PRECA COMMUNITY IS A SAFE ENVIRONMENT
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Preca Community values the dignity
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well-being, and protection of children,
and vulnerable persons in our
faith communities.

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

Front cover: 'Our Lady of the Verbum Dei' by Rafel Bonnici Cali (1907 – 2002). See article Page 3.

Back cover: On the 60th anniversary of the death of George Preca, we recall his passion for implanting the faith in his hearers.

No 25 | September 2022

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THE MUSEUM is issued for friends and associates of the Society of Christian Doctrine in 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.



'Our Lady of the Verbum Dei' by **Rafel Bonnici Cali** (1907 – 2002) which was commissioned by St George Preca himself, showing his dedication to motherhood.

THE FEAST OF ST GEORGE PRECA AND MOTHER'S DAY

“The gaze of the Mother, and the gaze of every mother. A world that looks to the future without a mother’s gaze is short-sighted. It may well increase its profits, but it will no longer see others as children. It will make money, but not for everyone. We may all dwell in the same house, but not as sisters and brothers.”

The human family is built upon mothers. A world in which maternal tenderness is dismissed as mere sentiment may be rich materially, but poor where the future is concerned. Mother of God, teach us to see life as you do. Turn your gaze upon us, upon our misery, our poverty. Turn to us your eyes of mercy.”

Pope Francis’ Reflection on Mothers
01 January, 2019

We celebrate the feast of St George Preca on 09 May each year. This is around the same time as Mother's Day which in Australia we acknowledge on the first Sunday in May. Although most probably; designed for commercial reasons, we can pause for reflection when Mother's Day comes around.

Although George Preca did not specifically write about mothers, we can be assured through his filial devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, that he honoured mothers, and held them in high esteem.

As he walked through the streets, **children would gather around him, and mothers would beg him to bless their babies and bless their rosary beads.**

Closer to home, a dear friend of the SDC, Bishop Joseph Grech of the Diocese of Sandhurst, who is now deceased, recalls a moment when his mum was walking in a street in Balzan, Malta. She came across George Preca, and asked him to bless the child that she was carrying. This was a moment of grace for Joseph, and his mum; one that he often recalled.

This also gains traction when reflecting on the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, which we believe their genesis was inspired by George Preca in the 1950s, and taken up and authored by John Paul II later on. The second Luminous mystery The wedding feast of Cana; he quotes Mary, 'Do whatever he tells you'.

George Preca's devotion to Our Lady of the Verbum Dei is well known.

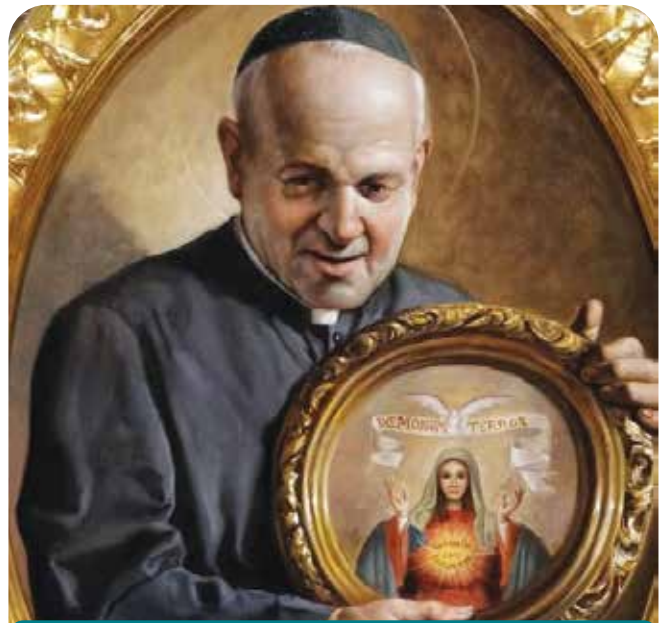
In fact, each Preca centre will usually have this image displayed.

Our Lady, Help of Christians

During 24 May each year, we acknowledge Our Lady, Help of Christians.

'This is your mother.' Under the title of Help of Christians, Mary was chosen as Patroness of Australasia by the First Provincial Synod, convened by Archbishop Bede Polding, in Sydney in 1844.

The fledgling colonies were in need of Mary's help at that time. We are helped through Mary's intercession, and through the example of her life found in the Gospels.



Painting by **Manuel Farrugia** found in the Qrendi Parish Church, Malta, with a version of 'Our Lady of the Verbum Dei'.

PRESERVING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE SDC

Superior General Visits in 1971

Towards the end of 1971, and the beginning of 1972, **fifty years ago**, the second Superior General, Francis Saliba, and the General Secretary, Joseph Schembri visited Australia. Notice the necktie on Francis as he sets out for an Incorporation Mass at San Carlo church in Hobart.

The “tie” in the 1970s was considered to be an appropriate mode of dress, for formal occasions in this country showing respect, and a dignified way to dress. George Preca frowned upon the tie considering it to be unnecessary, and perhaps a show-piece. However, when the SDC came to Australia, they were aware that wearing the tie was a required mode of dress. In fact, in the Australian Parliament to this day, it is required, and is up to the Speaker of the House to act upon it if not worn.

The Members sought to be dispensed of this custom. The dispensation was allowed by George himself on the condition that the tie worn would be black. This soon changed as black ties in the early 1950s as is today, were associated with funerals. A tie of one colour was introduced. Early Members in Australia would be familiar with this strategy.



Francis Saliba in Hobart, 1971.



Joseph Schembri in Hobart, 1971.



Laying foundations at Preca Centre, Ardeer 1960s.



Archbishop Sir Guilford Young, & Fr Joseph Abela in Hobart in early 1960s.

Joseph Mary Abela, (23.11.1931-15.3.1991)

Joseph Abela was born in Zabbar, Malta in 1931 and emigrated to Australia in 1952, **seventy years ago**. He was our Delegate for almost 17 years. He was a contemporary of George Preca.

He was ordained priest at St Patrick’s Cathedral in Melbourne 24.07.60. 24 out of 32 Members attended this ordination.

Later he left the priesthood and proceeded to Louvain where he obtained his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Louvain University magnum cum laude (with great distinction).

While Delegate of the Superior General he worked tirelessly to see the SDC grow. One of his projects was the dairy farm at Dixon’s Creek, Victoria near Yarra Glen which was opened in 1966. The farm consisted of 169 acres and was staffed by Internal Members of the SDC. Eventually the vision was for the SDC to establish conference, formation, and retreat facilities. He also intended to have the Good Samaritan home for retired Australian Members at Dixon’s Creek.

From 1966 - 1975, until the venture closed, eight Members joined the community. Joseph was the prime mover behind the establishment of the SDC in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, and Victoria.

In 1962 - only less than ten years after establishment, there were seven houses in Adelaide, Hobart, Melbourne, and Sydney. There were 54 Members and over 35 Candidates. (Bulletin 28 October 1962).

Under Joseph’s leadership at the AGM held in 1962 at Boy’s Town Engadine, Sydney, conducted by the Salesians of Don Bosco; there were 120 participants, Members, Candidates, and a smattering of young men.

At this AGM it was determined that the abbreviation for the Society for use in Australia; should be SDC and the word MUSEUM¹ to be avoided. He was keen that the SDC should always be presented well and made connections with Church prelates for this to occur. We have always maintained this.

He insisted that at each AGM of the SDC held at the end of each year, we meet with the local Bishop. It soon became a regular occurrence programmed into the AGM.

Joseph died on the 15 March 1991. On his death a memorial card was presented to all Members in Australia.

¹ In the early years of the Society, the first Members agreed on ‘MUSEUM’ as the name for their Society. Fr Preca changed this name into the Latin prayer M.U.S.E.U.M., Magister Utinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus - “Divine teacher, may the whole world follow the Gospel!” The term, MUSEUM is widely used in Malta and travelled with those who immigrated to other countries. It has become an anomaly for us, especially in English speaking countries where the SDC is present.



DELEGATION VISIT

Philip Bezzina, Oliver Aquilina, Archbishop Peter Comensoli, Joseph Micallef, John Micallef, and Peter Judge.

During July 2022, Oliver Aquilina, Assistant Superior General, and Philip Bezzina, member of the General Executive Council visited all centres of the Preca Community in Australia.

Although a somewhat whistle-stop visit; they attended the Annual Reflection Weekend in Melbourne over the weekend of 15 - 17 July, and visited Archbishop Peter Comensoli of Melbourne.



Oliver, far right at the Family Weekend at Arura, South Australia, July 2022.



Philip, and Ethan at the Family Weekend at Arura, South Australia, July 2022.

While in Hobart . . .



The Delegation visit the team in Hobart.



Peter & Cody entertain our international guests, Hobart style.



Also a visit to the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge.



Fr Ben Brooks presides at Mass on 25 July 2022 at Preca Centre - Forteviot.

PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE



Cody Harwood, Preca Associate from Hobart is awarded with a degree in Theology. Present were his family, and Preca Members, Peter Judge, and Reno Farrugia.



Preca Community Member, Joseph Kielnerowski pictured with the The Mayor of Playford, Glenn Docherty. The Mayor is aware of the impact of Joe's Connected Garden, and regularly shows his support.



The Hobart centre acknowledged 60 years of foundation on 11 November 2021 with Mass, and a gathering of faithful friends.



Feast of St George Preca at Preca Centre, Carss Park.



The Indian community enjoy a moment at Preca Centre, Hobart.



Fr Robert Galea from the Diocese of Sandhurst shares a moment with St George Preca in the grounds of St Patrick's cathedral, Melbourne.



High Commissioner of Malta Mario Farrugia-Borg meets the Adelaide Members in June 2022.



Rite of Election group from Holy Eucharist, St Albans gather at St George Preca monument in the grounds of St Patrick's cathedral, Melbourne.



Joseph Micallef, Moderator of the Melbourne centres presents the High Commissioner of Malta Mario Farrugia-Borg with a gift on his visit to the Westmoreland Road centre on 28.12.21.



Feast of St George Preca celebrated at St George Preca school, Caroline Springs.



Sharing comradery at Annual Reflection Weekend – three distinct vocations; Erick, Passionist priest, Oliver, lay consecrated in the Preca Community, and Valan, married with two children. Valan is also a Preca Associate.

International Focus



A new residential dwelling in in the course of erection for students who attend the Preca Community in Ruiru, Kenya.



Fr Ben Brooks from the Archdiocese of Hobart presides at Mass for the community at Westmoreland Road, June 2022.



Pope Francis on a pastoral visit to Malta, makes an impromptu visit to the Miraculous Medal chapel that houses the effigy of St George Preca.



Superior General, Roberto Zammit addresses the community in Australia on 31.08.22.



Meditation Garden, designed by Richard England taking shape. The garden is located at the Good Samaritan centre, St Venera, Malta.



Annual Reflection Weekend held at Holy Cross, Templestowe, July 2022.



Crowds pressing to enter and be part of the funeral mass.

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF ST GEORGE PRECA

The last three years of Fr George Preca's life were consumed by serious health problems which eventually led to his death; now sixty years ago.

Fr George Preca died at 7.45pm on Thursday 26 July 1962, the feast of St Anne. The news of his death quickly spread throughout Malta.

His death brought great sorrow to the Maltese, and especially among Members of the SDC, which was founded by him fifty-five years earlier in 1907.

His final moments were centered on Christ the Beloved. Only one person was necessary for George Preca: The Lord God - Soli Deo. He not only wrote and prayed; but embodied in his life the words: "Everything from you, everything with your help, and everything for you." Today we can only imagine what the SDC Members went through sixty years ago at his death.

When news of his impending death reached the people, crowds gathered in front of the door to his house. They wanted to come and see him and give him one last greeting. The police were required to be at the door of his home.

Those who knew him and lived outside of Malta conveyed their sorrow to show their unity with their brothers and sisters in Malta.

From newspaper briefs, the virtues of George Preca appeared to have affected the Maltese people. There were those who wrote about how much his heart was not linked to material things, and worldly honours. There were those who recalled his priorities that, although they did not seem rife with the wisdom of the world, they had come out of the heart of a man who lived what he taught.

There were some who were grateful for his prophetic council during two dreadful world wars.

There were those who believed that, George Preca wanted his word to reach out to everyone and to have listeners change their lives for the better.

Prior to the death of George, the Secretary General, Joseph Schembri, informed Archbishop Michael Gonzi that its Founder was approaching death.

The Archbishop was given a suggestion that George Preca be buried in the crypt of the chapel of the Central House, at Blata I-Bajda.

The Curia of Malta agreed to this request.

On the day of the funeral on a very intense July summer, George Preca's funeral took place, with several electric fans frantically doing overtime over the coffin.

The Ħamrun parish church, St Cajetan's was very well attended for the funeral mass, celebrated by Bishop Emanuel Galea.

The funeral cortège made its way through the streets of Ħamrun, at which an assorted set of faldetta; the traditional dress of the women Members, was visible. This would have been a rare sight for Malta even in 1962.

What is the legacy of St George Preca following his death?

After 60 years from his death, the Preca Centres extol joy, and peace in a very challenging world.

People who come to us may feel the energy coming from our centres and from those who are connected with the Preca Centre.



Funeral procession of St George Preca.

Children, Members, young people, and parents, are inspired with this influence which Fr George has had on us.

This is the joy of our communities following in the footsteps of the Founder.



LIVING BELOW THE MOUNTAIN

Many are familiar with Mt Wellington, the mountain that overlooks Hobart, the capital of Tasmania. No matter where you are in Hobart you are never far from the city's treasured mountain.

The port of Hobart, which happens to be the second deepest harbour in the world, sits under the mountain and has often been compared to cities like Geneva, or Zurich in Switzerland, among others; all possessing untold beauty. The mountains in these cities add to their beauty, and give a majestic impression to the towns. Mt Wellington also conveys a blanket of protection for the city of Hobart.

If time permits, visitors to the Preca Community in Hobart are taken up to the summit. They are always suitably impressed but cannot believe how cold it is when it is otherwise mild at the base.



The view from the town of Kingston, south of Hobart.

The mountain is snow-topped for a great part of the year.

In recent times, much protest has arisen over the proposal of placing a cable car across the mountain.

The “Organ Pipes” are another feature of the mountain.

There are many walking tracks traversing around the Organ Pipes. They are a spectacular sight to behold.

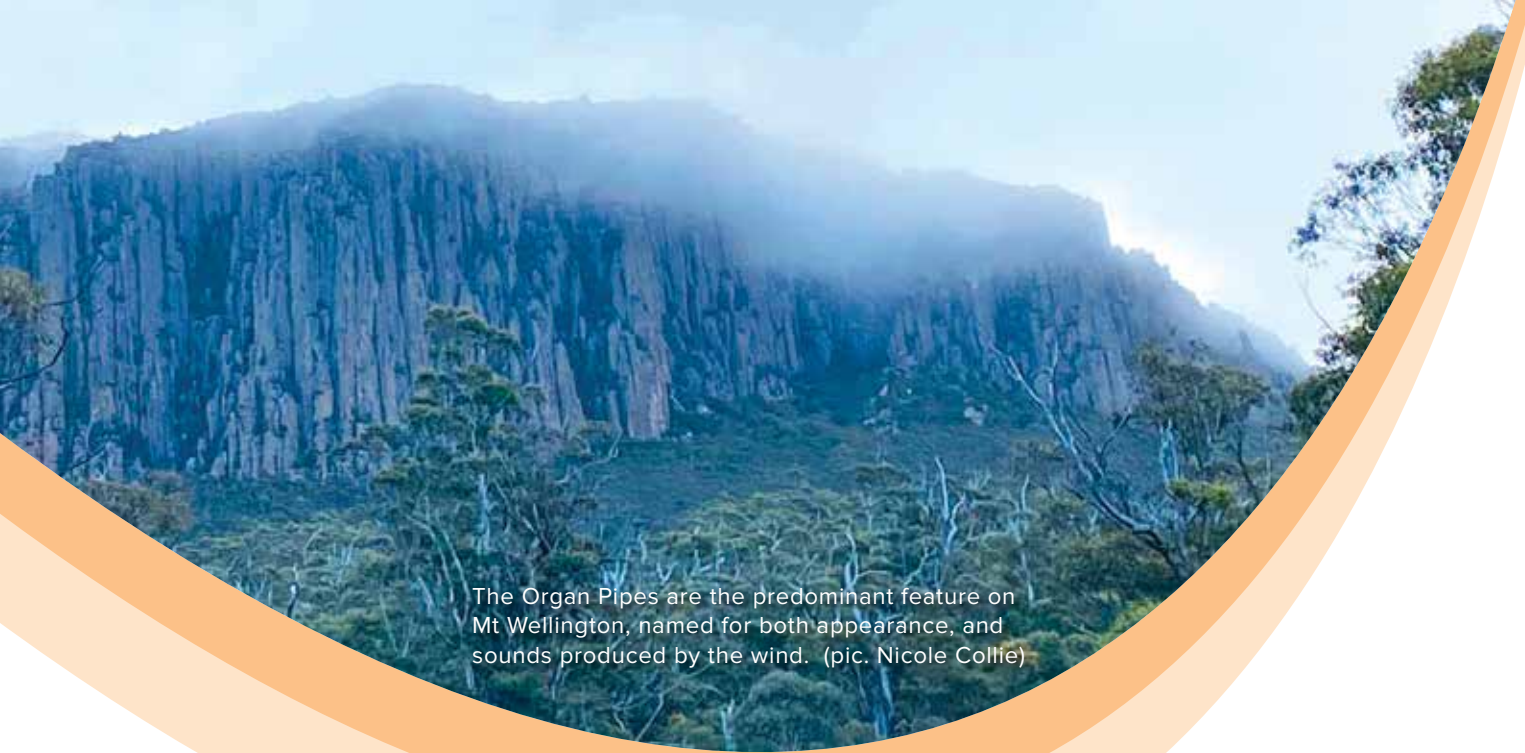
What does it mean to live in the awe of a mountain?

Having found myself in unexpected isolation during March this year; I reflected on the beauty, and found great comfort and spirits raised in the majesty of our mountain.

Surrounded by so much beauty, we are reminded of *Laudato Si'*, with this year acknowledging the seventh anniversary of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on creation care.

The whole Church strives to be ‘Listening and Journeying Together’ in response to this beautiful and challenging teaching from Pope Francis. We have the capacity to know God through nature and *Laudate Si* certainly makes this possible. Pope Francis followed up the encyclical two years ago, issuing a call to all for real action.

Our participation in efforts to care for our common home; starts with making simple choices about our stewardship of God's creation: turning off unnecessary lights, recycling where possible, walking wherever we can, avoiding wastage of food, water etc. This can translate into the Preca centres, giving example to the young people, and parents who join us. In Hobart, we only need to look up to the mountain to remind us of this responsibility of creation care.



The Organ Pipes are the predominant feature on Mt Wellington, named for both appearance, and sounds produced by the wind. (pic. Nicole Collie)



Having many name changes, between 1822 and 1824 it was re-named Mt Wellington after the Duke of Wellington. Mt Wellington lies directly behind Hobart and is the city's dominant feature and is 1,270 metres high.

Coupled with the mountain is the River Derwent that spans its way from the Central Highlands, over 200 kilometres in length. The river flows through Hobart, before emptying into Storm Bay and flowing into the Tasman Sea.

I heard a recent reflection on God's creation which went like this:

Both the mountain and the river complement each other, and leave each alone. The mountain never says to the river, 'why are you doing that today?' and vice versa. What a beautiful way to reflect on nature, and the harmony that it represents, and of course all that it has to offer!

***“Laudato Si, mi’ Signore...
Praise to you, God of all Creation!”***

**Peter L Judge
Preca Community**



Among the beauties of the Mt Wellington precinct is the Blue lake. Referred to as a 'disappearing tarn', it is not a permanent water feature, and only appears after heavy rainfall.

OUR MINISTRY IN POLAND



Visit <http://www.verbumdei.pl>

Marcel Rutkowski, a member of the SDC youth group manages this site. Translation in English is available.

Pilgrimage was a central theme of John Paul II's famous speech in Warsaw in 1979 on his first visit back to Poland as Pope. He understood the value of journeying towards Christ, physically, and spiritually.

In that speech he also said "Without Christ it is impossible to understand the history of Poland." Christ is the central figure of the Polish that unifies the nation. It has been this way since the birth of Poland as a nation in the tenth century following the baptism of King Mieszko I in 966. After his baptism he declared all his subjects Christians. Today approximately 85% of Polish people profess to be Catholic.

The Polish people are a pilgrim people. Seven million Poles make a pilgrimage each year.

Poland has around 500 pilgrimage sites; chief among them is Czestochowa, the home of the Black Madonna. It is common practice for Polish expats on their return to relatives in Poland to find themselves journeying home via one of these sites.

Although Poland is a predominantly Catholic country, the western culture has developed quickly, and the young people are a product of the technical age! It is into this climate, that the SDC patiently began their mission in Poznań in 2010. Their first task was to study the Polish

language, and acclimatise to the Polish weather which is particularly harsh during Winter. The contingent of Members hailing from Malta would have found this difficult.

Paradiso 2022: A Youth Experience

The SDC group in Poznań continue the theme of 'pilgrimage'. Recently from 28 June to 2 July, the group participated in a five-day youth festival organised by the Archdiocese of Poznań. The Paradiso festival was held at Góstyń, on the site of Święty Gory (Holy Mount). The morning sessions were devoted to liturgical prayer, and catechetical sessions. The Eucharist was joyfully animated with songs of praise by the Jordan Choir and Orchestra. The afternoons were devoted to sharing experiences in groups and various creative workshops such as sports, crafts, and art.



SDC Group at Paradiso Youth Festival.

'VESTIS HONORIS' - ROBE OF HONOUR

The Painting of the Immaculate Conception in Cospicua parish church, Malta.

In researching for this article, I am reminded of the Australian composer Richard Connolly, whose iconic hymns co-written with the poet James McAuley were the landmark of 20th century Australian liturgical music. Richard departed this life on 04 May, 2022 at the age of ninety-four.

As well as the liturgical chants in the SDC, in the 1960s we were singing his hymns from the collection "Hymns for the Year of Grace": Jesus in Your Heart We Find, Song of Cosmic Praise, In Faith and Hope and Love, Seek O Seek the Lord, to name a few. The heritage of this wonderful resource of hymns continues to this day.

Origin of Liturgies in the SDC

Fr Preca yearned to share his deep love towards God and the Church with the Members of his Society and he wanted them to commemorate the main liturgical feasts or seasons with intensity.

He wrote prayer services, inspired by the spirit of the liturgy of that particular feast originally established by the Church, so that during their communal meetings the Members will enrich their spirituality. On special feast days, the Members pause from the usual meeting, to participate in prayer services which are inadequately referred to as 'Special Programmes'. These are based on the vast spiritual literature, the varied experiences, and illuminations that Fr Preca encountered. Included in these liturgical programmes, are readings from the Scripture, and chants. Some of the latter are Preca's own prayers which were then accompanied with music.

The early Members in Australia were faithful to this music heritage. Some of the tones were foreign to our ears, but we persevered. Some chants worked, while others did not.

Some have been reworked, with SDC Member, Anthony Messina, and Nick Falzon op rewriting some of the melodies. In Australia we still sing these today.

'Robe Of Honour' and the Cospicua painting

Along with numerous pamphlets, books, prayers, and liturgical celebrations, the texts of hymns written by George Preca reveal his devotion to the

Holy Trinity and to the Mother of God. One in particular that has endured and gained momentum over the years is the 'Vestis Honoris' – 'Robe of Honour', which is dedicated to the Virgin Mary in which Fr George describes how God exalts his mother and gives her the privilege to be the Lady of All His Creation. It is an expression of delight that God has chosen this woman as his own Mother, and also as queen of all creation, as well as Mother of the Church and of all humanity.

The titles given to the Lady are a reflection of imageries in the Bible, based on the Canticle of Daniel, descriptions of saints, and theologians, as well as pagan figures. The words and the melody of the 'Vestis Honoris', which rely heavily on repetition; may come across as vapid but they confidently produce a transcendental effect and show how intensely they were inscribed in the heart of the writer who was fascinated by the Virgin Mary, through whom the incarnation of Christ was made possible.

This painting of the Immaculate Conception at Cospicua church encouraged George Preca to write the Marian litany. The painting is by Peter Paul Caruana, born in Valletta in 1794.

1. The upper part of the painting shows the Holy Trinity with God the Father holding his hand over the head of the Virgin Mary. In the same way, the introduction to the litany explains the relationship between the Holy Trinity, and Mary.

2. The central part of the image portrays the Immaculate Mary. Her crown and the twelve stars on her head proclaim that she is not of this world but in fact Queen of Heaven. She is surrounded by angels and gazing at human beings to remind the viewer that she is the Queen of heaven and earth; of the spiritual world and the human race; of the immortal and the mortal. Likewise, the litany gives these titles to the Virgin Mary. It focuses on honouring her with titles of praise and is usually accompanied by the rich sound of the harmonium.



THE ROBE OF HONOUR

Leader: For his own mother, God chose Mary.
All: For his own mother, God chose Mary.

Leader: The Lord and Ruler of all subjected himself to her.
All: God chose Mary.

Leader: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
All: For his own mother, God chose Mary.

Leader: God made Mary.
All: Queen of all His creation.

Queen of heaven We give you glory
Queen of the sun We give you glory
Queen of the moon We give you glory
Our Lady, intercede for us.

Queen of all stars We give you glory
Queen of all fire We give you glory
Queen of all light We give you glory
Our Lady, intercede for us.

Queen of the earth We give you glory
Queen of the sea We give you glory
Queen of the springs We give you glory
Our Lady, intercede for us.

Queen of the day We give you glory
Queen of the night We give you glory
Queen of the ages We give you glory
Our Lady, intercede for us.

Queen of the snow We give you glory
Queen of lightning We give you glory
Queen of the clouds We give you glory
Our Lady, intercede for us.

Queen of animals We give you glory
Queen of the birds We give you glory
Queen of the fish We give you glory
Our Lady, intercede for us.

Queen of the flowers We give you glory
Queen of all fruit We give you glory
Queen of the trees We give you glory
Our Lady, intercede for us.

Queen of the winds We give you glory
Queen of the depths We give you glory
Queen of the waters We give you glory
Our Lady, intercede for us.

Queen of the powerful
 Queen of the wise
 Queen of all saints
Our Lady, intercede for us.

We give you glory
 We give you glory
 We give you glory

Queen of all sovereigns
 Queen of the human race
 Queen of the spiritual world
Our Lady, intercede for us.

We give you glory
 We give you glory
 We give you glory

Queen of our life
 Queen of our death
 Queen of all rulers
Our Lady, intercede for us.

We give you glory
 We give you glory
 We give you glory

Queen of the whole world
 Queen of all visible things
 Queen of the angels
Our Lady, we give you glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We give you glory
 We give you glory
 We give you glory

Hail, daughter of God the Father.

Hail, Mother of the Word of God.

Hail, unique spouse of the Holy Spirit.

Virgin Mary, you are truly great, because he who has done great things for you is the All-powerful One whose name is awe-inspiring and Holy.

A score for 'Vestis Honoris', in Maltese is provided here:

**LIBSA TA' ĠIEH
 (Vestis Honoris)**

Thanks to Roberta A Caruana in assisting with this article.

Peter L Judge
 Preca Community

SAINT GEORGE PRECA AND THE TRUE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT



Sacred Heart, Hindmarsh, Adelaide in 2021.

In the early days of December 1921, when Fr George Preca shared his inspiration to organise a “demonstration” with the statue of the Baby Jesus on Christmas Eve, he may not have imagined that such a manifestation would continue to become a cherished tradition, as it has been for the past 100 years.

Fr George presented his idea to the Members of the Hamrun centres of the Society of Christian Doctrine, which he himself had founded in 1907. The Members of the Marsa, and Blata l-Bajda centres of the Society were also called to be part of this venture. Fr George told the Members: “This year I want you to organise a demonstration with the Baby Jesus”.

A Demonstration

Although it is more commonly known as the procession of the Baby Jesus, Fr George envisaged it to be a demonstration. He meant this event to be a lively and joyful gathering, openly proclaiming that the baby born in Bethlehem is truly God. He wanted to acclaim in a public celebration his conviction of the Christian faith: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (Jn 3:16)

Even though a true and strong Christian spirit prevailed in Malta at Christmastide in 1921, Fr George wanted to foster even more deeply the spirit of

gratitude for the Divine Infant who became one of us. The inexhaustible mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ inspired and possessed Fr George’s priestly heart during his entire life. That is why the feast of Christmas had a significant meaning for Fr George. In particular, the phrase in the first chapter of the Gospel of St John: “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14) was fondly treasured by him.

In the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi, who in 1223 was inspired to set up the first Christmas crèche in the Italian village of Greccio, Fr Preca envisioned a special Christmas seven hundred years later; among the streets of Hamrun. Fr George was motivated to carry out his inspiration in such an inventive and, inclusive manner, with the participation of one and all. For St George Preca, as for St Francis, Christmas was not just a feast for children, but for every person, young and old, as all have been redeemed by the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man.

The Members to whom he unveiled the idea were not prepared for such an unprecedented endeavour, but soon they all were enthusiastic about it. One of the Members borrowed a statue of the Baby Jesus from the Conventual Franciscan Friary of Valletta. On that first Baby Jesus Demonstration, many people came along carrying candle lanterns, and bicycle lamps. Some Members brought paper balls and palm leaves, and the Christmas Eve demonstration began, with Hamrun residents eagerly joining in the celebration. In their hasty preparations, the Members did not think of obtaining a police permit. Fr George advised them that if anyone were to object, they should turn back to the Centre, but there were no problems; the demonstration went on as planned with no trouble.

During the procession through the streets of Hamrun, a Member reverently cradled the statue of the Baby Jesus in his hands. The children came along singing the familiar carol, *Adeste Fidelis*, and other Maltese traditional carols, particularly the *Ninni La Tibkix l’ġjed*; this signature hymn became synonymous with the procession.

Beyond the streets of Hamrun

The Hamrun demonstration of the Baby Jesus spread quickly to other localities in Malta and Gozo. It became more orderly, centred around a sizeable statue of the Baby Jesus in a manger, with more suitable lights and banners with various words related to the Birth of Jesus. The acclamation “Verbum Dei caro factum est” (The Word of God was made Flesh) prevailed in the demonstration, proclaiming the Incarnation of Christ.

To further emphasise Christmas as primarily a religious festival, Fr George wished that every family would have a crib with the Holy Child in some part of their house. He encouraged the Members of his Society not to let Christmas go by without giving a crib with Baby Jesus, in one form or another, to every boy or girl to take home from their Centres.

The Relevance of the Baby Jesus Demonstration Today

The demonstration of Baby Jesus is still relevant today. While in Malta we have not altogether turned away from the very meaning of Christmas, secular interests have over-commercialised the celebration. Slowly, Christmas, the central feast of the Incarnation, is being promoted as a time of pointless feasting without Christ. Commercialism for its own sake tends to forget what Christmas is really about; it can easily become exploited and reduced to wrapped souvenirs signifying very little. It is sad when people can only wish one another a paltry “Happy Holidays”, instead of a jubilant “Merry Christmas”. In some countries it is not even being called “Christmas” because this is a label in which the word Christ is embedded. Instead, secular influences are now retiring “Christmas” and instead are busily promoting nothing in particular during the “Winter Festival”. In this way the virtues and blessings of Divine Revelation become hollow.

Truly, the demonstration of Baby Jesus reminds us of the Christmas memories of our own childhood. Singing carols in our hearts, we dare to hope and continue to share this holy procession that still attracts so many adults, and children. It is much more than mere past reminiscence. It brings the mystery of the Incarnation close to our hearts and minds.

Joseph Galea
Preca Community



In Lija, Malta.



Korçe, Albania in the bleak of Winter.

FEAST OF THE VIRTUES - A REFLECTION ON ST BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE AND EMBRACING CONTEMPT

Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Benedict was born in Amettes, France, in 1748, the eldest of eighteen children.

His family were successful shopkeepers, but he wanted to become a monk. His health was not good, but still he wanted to join an order leading an austere life, to which he felt called. He tried to enter the Carthusians, Trappists, and Cistercians. All these orders turned him away as being unsuitable.

Hence he quit his studies and went on pilgrimage.

He had no money. So he had to walk. He was desperately poor and lived only by begging. He visited most major shrines in Europe, some several times. He would always travel on foot, sleeping in the open or in a dry corner, his clothes getting dirtier, and dirtier and slowly disintegrating. All along the way he suffered abuse. One time he was given alms, but he felt that a beggar beside him was more in need so he passed the donation to him. The man who gave him the money got upset, dismounted his horse and beat him up... he was abused even for doing good!

Benedict's sight was on God alone, the same as us. And in doing so, he witnessed to Christ as the Son of Man rejected by the world. Yet people did not recognise Jesus in him... would we? What if God is speaking to us through the homeless like Benedict? What if God is sitting on the bench you walked by yesterday? What if God is still waiting for you to show some love and compassion?

People avoided Benedict. In the street and in the church. He suffered great loneliness. He smelt bad. He looked very grubby and unshaven. Even

his rosary beads looked like they would carry some disease. He rarely spoke, but he prayed, he listened to the stories of those in desperate circumstances, and in a real way ministered to the people on the streets, the refugees, the beggars, those with disordered minds, and the homeless - always listening, always praying for them.

Benedict finally ended up in Rome, living in the ruins of the Colosseum, where he hung around the church of Santa Maria ai Monti and always participated in long hours of Eucharistic adoration. He died from malnutrition aged 35, during holy week 1783, a day after collapsing in front of the church.

In Rome, Labre had a confessor, who perceived his holiness. His name was Marconi and he wrote his biography. He attributed 136 miraculous cures to the intercession of Benedict within the first 3 months of his death. It is said that the bells of the churches in Rome started ringing by themselves at the moment he died and that children started running around the streets crying 'the saint is dead, the saint is dead!' Even an American Protestant clergyman in Rome converted to Catholicism based on his experience of this event. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

For Preca Members, the witness to the spirit of 'embracing contempt' comes in two forms. The first form is the attitude we have to being misunderstood - to be able to not only ignore being shunned, looked down upon, or being ignored (especially by members of the Church), but to feel comfortable in that position, and not only comfortable, but able to actually grow in the love of God and neighbour.

The second form is the attitude that we have to those who are themselves despised by society and even by members of the church. This applies especially to those who are homeless, those who are mentally ill, those who live on the outer and struggle to make ends meet, and those who are seen as unfaithful, not practising or not engaged with their faith. We are the ones called to witness to the love of Jesus for all those who are despised, because we know what it is like being despised.

We have a fundamental option not only to the poor, but the poorest of the poor, especially those who are homeless. We are the ones who talk to the homeless, ask how they are, ask if they have particular needs, and pray with them, if they are ok with that... because we are also despised. If we are not despised, if we are honoured and looked up to by those who have authority, we are not living according to the constitutions.

Any Member who provides for their future by investing in property will have a first preference for the homeless, charging the absolute minimum affordable rent so that the poor can have enough left over to eat and clothe themselves and have dignity. We ourselves are homeless, travelling to our true home, walking the earth with a light yoke so that we can proclaim the Gospel with the freedom

of God's children... and because we have promised to rest our gaze on Christ, not on possessions.

Benedict Joseph Labre, patron saint of the homeless, patron of the insane, the mentally ill, the wandering beggars, and everyone rejected by society, and our patron too, may we also walk in your footsteps to our eternal home. Amen.

Joseph Kielnerowski
Preca Community



Benedict Joseph Labre by Antonio Cavallucci (1752 –1795). Housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Image in Public Domain.

RETURNED TO GOD 2022

We hold them in prayer:

- 12.11.21 JOHN MUSCAT**
- 23.01.22 CHARLES GRIMA**
- 21.06.22 RENATA CROSS**
- 13.07.22 DORIS CHIRCOP**
- 18.07.22 PIERINA APAP**
- 21.07.22 MARY MILAETIS**
- 10.08.22 ANTONIA MICALLEF**
- 12.09.22 CARMEL PARASCANDALO**
- 23.09.22 HORACE CASSAR**

'My deeds done in my Father's name are my credentials'. John 10:25

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.



Pledge Before the Lord

I sincerely approve of every good deed that has been done and will be done until the end of the world.

I sincerely disapprove of every immoral deed that has been done and will be done until the end of the world.

I sincerely forgive all my enemies.

I intend to do all things from a motive of faith without which no-one can please God. Amen.

Attributed to St George Preca

RETREATS IN THE SDC



Retreats for Members in the thought of the Founder, St George Preca would have been paramount when drawing up a lifestyle for us. A retreat was timetabled into the monthly programme; strict silence was observed, and a focus on death, would certainly have been a central theme.

Written signs were clearly visible at our retreats that were timely reminders that we are on a journey in this life. We are only travellers on this earth!

While somewhat confronting to some; we must consider the time when George Preca was alive. He no doubt would have been influenced by the scourge of war. His life was sandwiched between two world wars; death would be on everyone's mind especially the inevitability of death.

Certainly, in Malta, and in Australia, retreats were regular in the SDC's programme. There were obviously times of innovation, and changes resulting in a holistic, and sometimes not so holistic outcome. Some experiments worked, some did not.

We all desire to hear the Word of God, especially meditating on the eternal maxims, under the guidance of a capable speaker. In the early days, the sacrament of Penance, and receiving Communion were the goals of the retreatant Members, as with other retreatants from all walks of life.

Prior to Incorporation, Members who were preparing to be installed had a retreat specific for them, and the vocation that they had chosen; to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ, in the spirit of George Preca.

There is abundant documentation from the writings of George Preca that have been a mainstay for days of reflection.

In our communities, St Mary Magdalen is invoked as the protector saint for retreats. She repented from her ways, and became a close follower of Jesus.

IN AUSTRALIA

Retreats for young people

Our archives record that in the 1960s, to name one such event, specifically on 17, and 22 September 1960 at West Melbourne retreats were held for our young people, often referred to as the 'elected' in our centres. While this has never completely taken off, there have been many significant attempts throughout the years. Today even more than ever, there is a need for this. Preca Community, Adelaide is a forerunner in this format.

Weekends

In 1971, Anthony Messina, the leader in Melbourne introduced overnight retreats for the Melbourne Members. The first being held at La Verna in Kew, a retreat house now closed, conducted by the



Young people's retreat, Preca Centre, Adelaide.

Franciscans. Others were held at Christ the King Seminary, Templestowe, St Mary's Redemptorist Monastery, Wendouree, Pallotti College, Millgrove, and more recently Holy Cross, Templestowe.

These weekends grew and in the late 1970s, Members Australia-wide were participating in weekend retreats in Melbourne. We continue with the weekend retreats today.

More recently in Australia for our Annual Reflection Weekend, we have included Associates, and friends of our community.

What is the current reality in Australia? It is definitely a priority of the SDC to strengthen the contemplative dimension among its Members, and formalised Associates. A significant way to achieve this is to rediscover the richness of monthly and annual retreats.

***Lord, that I may know you;
that I may know myself.***

**Peter L Judge
Preca Community**



La Verna, Kew.



Eucharistic Adoration at Holy Cross, Templestowe, July 2022.

