

THE MUSEUM

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

ISSUE 27 | 2024

FEAST OF THE VIRTUES

– A REFLECTION ON
ST THOMAS AQUINAS
AND SIMPLICITY

PAGE 13



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 adults at risk, in our faith communities.

CONTENTS

- 3 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024
- 5 THE WAY WE WORE
- 7 PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE
- 12 URGINGS OF THE HEART – BOOK REVIEW
- 13 FEAST OF THE VIRTUES – A REFLECTION ON ST THOMAS AQUINAS AND SIMPLICITY
- 15 SANTIAGO WAY
- 17 BEGINNINGS IN SYDNEY – MY MEMOIRS
- 19 FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
- 21 PRESERVING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE SDC
- 22 RETURNED TO GOD 2024

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.

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

Front cover: Stained Glass window depicting St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in the Cathedral of Mechelen, Belgium.

Back cover: Peace from Kenya where we have ministered since 1989.

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024

The Annual General Meeting for 2024 was held at St Mary's University College, Melbourne in early January.

The week consisted of reflections, reviewing of ministry, and commandry.

Bishop Charles Gauci of the Diocese of Darwin supported us during the week.

Our prayer during the week, among others, included;

That the Preca Community may experience strong faith in Jesus and advance in grace.

May all who are associated with the Preca Community work for the unity of the Christian Church, the Body of Christ.

A Safeguarding unit was presented. This consisted of a number of possible scenarios that were presented at the 2023 AGM. We are ever conscious of the need to be abreast of all that pertains to safeguarding. A rather daunting aspect of our ministry; but a necessary one.

Each centre also reflected upon their ministry in 2023. Significant was the involvement of visiting speakers especially for the young at a number of centres; and the steady growth of family groups.

Members, and Associates renewed their commitment to the Preca Community. We do this yearly.

Reno Gauci's fiftieth anniversary of Incorporation was celebrated. Joyful Jubilee indeed.

We concluded with a meal at a restaurant in Caroline Springs, celebrating with Reno, and in spite of challenges during the year, celebrating with each other.

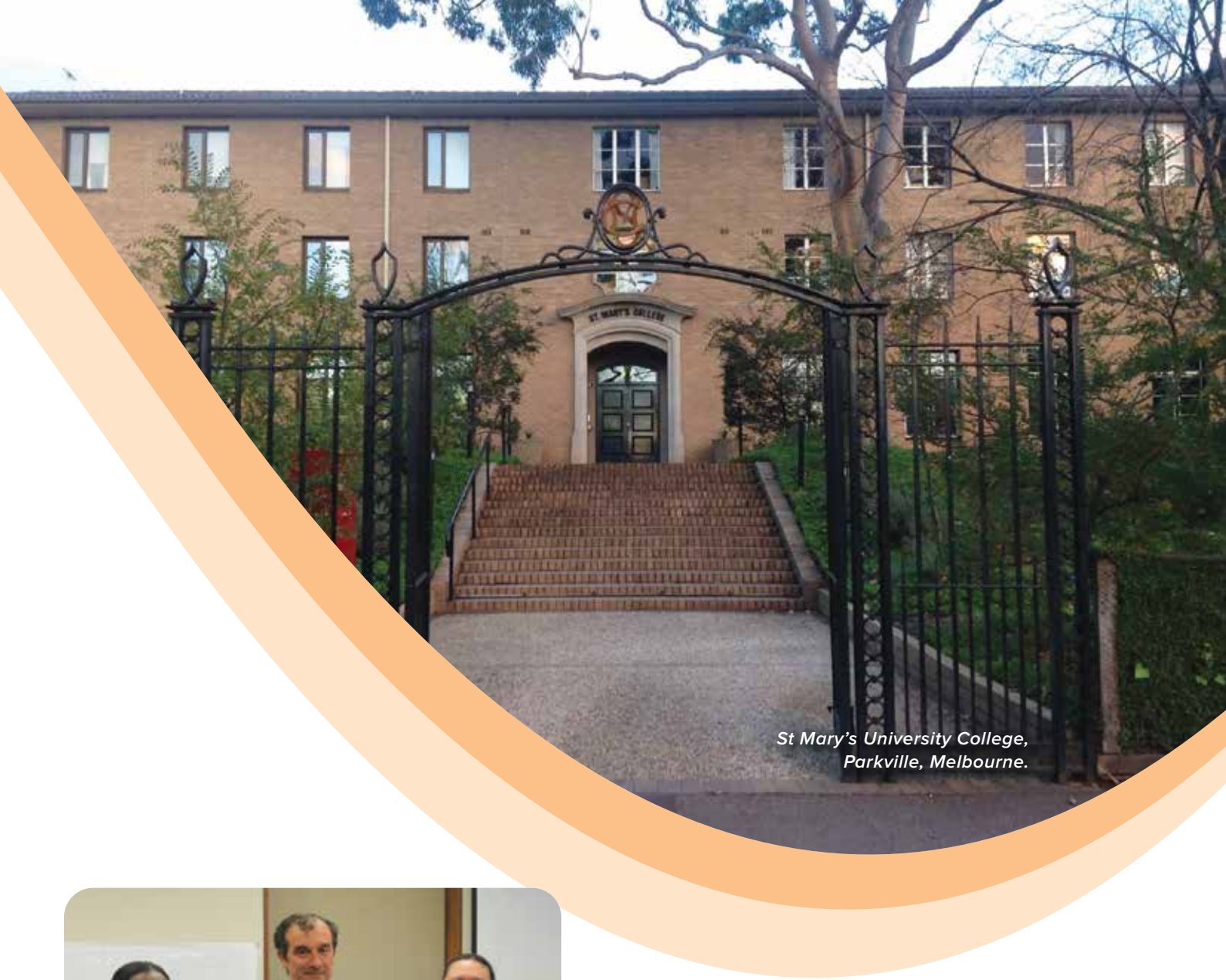


Reno Gauci's fiftieth anniversary of Incorporation.

We attended Sunday Eucharist at Holy Eucharist church, St Albans South with Bishop Charles Gauci presiding. The church is in the suburb of St Albans where we minister. Bishop Charles set everyone at ease, and was accompanied by Fr Patrick Corbett CSsR, who ministers in the parish of St Albans South.

Fr Patrick, a Redemptorist is a great supporter of our work. We have connected with the Redemptorists in the 1960s in Hobart, and attended many a retreat at the Redemptorist Monastery in Wendouree, Ballarat, Victoria.

The first Annual General Meeting in Australia was held in 1957; only one year after our official beginning in 1956. This following a request from the General House that we meet yearly; helpful foresight from the very beginning of our foundation in Australia.



*St Mary's University College,
Parkville, Melbourne.*



Gloria Rulinda, and Phung Dong from Preca Centre, St Albans pictured with the Delegate, John Micallef joined us at the AGM. Both Gloria, and Phung participate significantly in our ministry.



Sunday Eucharist at Holy Eucharist church, St Albans South with Bishop Charles Gauci presiding, assisted by Fr Patrick Corbett, CSSR. tieth anniversary of Incorporation.



From the St Thomas Aquinas family, Dominican sisters in Sydney in the 1970s, outward signs of penance, and commitment.

“THE WAY WE WORE”

The thoughts of St Thomas Aquinas offer some explanation to the penitential quality of religious dress especially with the controversies associated with the mendicants. In 1244, Thomas received his Dominican habit from the Prior of the community in Naples.

His family did not want him to join religious life, and worked hard to stop him from doing so. They tried to remove his habit but Thomas fought vigorously against it. His habit was a sign of his commitment.

Eventually Thomas taught at the Sorbonne in Paris, and wrote extensively about the value of the habit as a sign of penance.

Members of the Society of Christian Doctrine - Preca Community have always avoided the trends in fashion. This is intentional, harking from the early days of our foundation.

In 1896, George Preca read Alphonsius Liguori’s book, ‘Preparation for Death’.

This left an enduring impression on George.

The early days would have been very difficult for the followers of George Preca; in fact, the younger ‘crowd’ were requested to wear ‘stockings’. Trail blazers they were not; and with their buzz haircuts, and the avoidance of wearing a tie; they would have been a point of ridicule. I recall a young man who attended our activities in the early days lamenting the ridicule he received in abiding to these restrictions.

What do we make of this? Was George Preca misguided? What was his aim, and what did he hope to achieve?

No doubt, George Preca would be aware of this ridicule, and would insist that his community have the same attitude to the wearing of clothes, and outward signs of grooming.

New Monastic Movement

George founded the SDC not solely for faith formation, but he wanted it to be prophetic; to be counter-culture for the sake of the Kingdom. In many ways, this was the beginning of what we now refer to as the ‘New Monastic Movement’. A monastery without borders, but a monastery among the people.

But it was a bit more than appearance which at a glance seems obsolete to the world. The Members were to be inwardly prophetic in the admiration, and modelling their lives on the greatest of prophets, Jesus Christ.

This policy of self-effacement even though it had its drawbacks also had a positive effect. The SDC became well known and it was evident that Members were prepared to resist worldly trends in a spirit of humility.

Did the early Members survive? After one hundred and seventeen years, it seems so. The SDC grew, and the story has been told many times; with almost every village in Malta having a Centre of the SDC, either with men or women in formation. Not to mention the growth of the SDC overseas.

Now, to return to dress code for the Members.

Pauline's Reflection

Pauline Dimech, a Member of the SDC in her memoirs recalls;

I became a Member of the Society in June 1982. The Society was still very much a traditional one when I first joined. Members were required to dress in black, to not wear jewellery or make-up, and to not pursue the changing fashions of the time. I started wearing the black dress when I was thirteen, five years before I became a Member.

The women Members in Malta were perhaps the last group to wear the Faldetta, a head covering of generous black cloth forming what appeared to be a habit for the women. Again, how do we view this? In today's climate, an extraordinary penance. No doubt, many of the women Members found this very difficult.

George Preca advocates single-minded attention and simplicity in living so that it will be only God who is the witness of one's actions.

Like St Benedict who didn't want "ostentation of fine clothes and nor "rags" but wanted the monks to wear inexpensive clothes found in the area where the monastery was located. The Founder wanted the Members to wear simple clothing, and hairstyles, and never adorn themselves with ties and bowties, not to wear gold or silver items, and at all costs to avoid being photographed. These were strict guidelines for his Members.

Besides the modesty in dress, the insignia bearing the words 'Verbum Dei Caro Factum Est', is our outward sign of commitment.

Modesty

Modesty has always been a main-stay of the Preca Members. We may well recall the days when Members wore suits on the beaches, and the leader also insisted on a secluded area for the Members, and young people to swim. Young as we were, we often wondered why everyone was swimming on the sandy beach, and we were perched on rocks.

A former Member also lamented that he never cherished being the centre of attraction as Members swam wearing a "neck to knee" bathing attire.

This has also been a point of ridicule for the Members, and especially the teenagers who joined in our activities.

The modesty of George Preca is difficult to fathom. Even his writings; which number quite a few never carried his name. He always wrote under a nom-de-plume. The non-signature of articles, immediately crept into the raison-de-entr ee of the SDC, remaining



Women Members in 1957 wearing the traditional Maltese Head covering, the 'faldetta'.

in some circles of the SDC until the present day. He was also very firm about not giving any earthly honour to those who have died. Difficult again to comprehend, but nevertheless a deep, and spiritual motivation abides.

Over the last few years, the signing of published articles is deemed necessary. Albeit for in terms of literature accuracy, it is acceptable in the current climate. We understand George's reasoning, but a review is now welcomed.

We have survived, and even more, the Members integrate with the rest of society.

More recently, the scarf which he also wore, and various fashion modifications have become our norm.

We can say that the SDC does add its mark to the New Monastic Movement. Like a monk without borders, the SDC Member, who knows that he or she is "not of this world" (John 8:23), but "born of the spirit" (John 3:6), leaves the "city" to dwell in the "desert" of The Interior Life.

The SDC Member prays when the night approaches:

God the Holy Spirit, enlighten the minds and enkindle the hearts of the followers of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hide me in your divine wounds, good Jesus. Who glorifies God? Who merits? Only the person who nourishes the interior life.

**Peter L Judge
Preca Community**

PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for all you have done for us through your life, death, and resurrection. You are the living gospel that we should follow in our lives each day. Help us to teach people about you as St George Preca did. May we share your Word with others following his example of faith. Amen.

Youth Community Recognition

We rejoice with Phung Thien Dong who missions at Rosslare Parade centre, St Albans. She was awarded a Brimbank Youth Community Recognition 2023 from the Brimbank Council.

Phung in her own words when asked; What's one piece of advice you have for other young people who would like to get more involved in the community?

Sometimes you may feel sad or left out, not because of who you are or what you've done in the past, it's just you haven't forgiven yourself yet and let yourself find a newer path to walk into.

Now is the time, no matter who you are or how you live now, open your eyes and heart to connect with the community you are living in now to find your part of the community by getting involved in activities, events or just a little place that's just right for you.

If you ever need some help or support, the Brimbank Community is there to help through many ways. Stay safe, safe healthy and walk on the bright path.



Archbishop Patrick Regan of Adelaide visits community at Nazareth Catholic College on 17 November 2023.



Family Night at Preca Centre, Altona Meadows.



Hobart Preca Associate, Cody Harwood supported by Raymond De Bono, and Peter Judge in being awarded Master of Counselling.



President of Malta Visits St George Preca Monument

This year marks 75 years since Australia and Malta signed an assisted-migrant-passage agreement that enabled more than 60,000 Maltese immigrants to settle in Australia from the late 1940s to the 1960s.

To acknowledge this, the President of Malta H.E. Dr George Vella attends Mass at St Patrick's cathedral, Melbourne on Sunday 15 October 2023.

Following Mass, the President had a chat with Archbishop Peter Comensoli, and was photographed at the St George Preca Monument.

The President also had a photo at the Monument with Mario Farrugia Borg, Malta's High Commissioner in Australia, and Preca Members.

A Birthday Celebration

SDC Member, Miriam Belli celebrates her 90th birthday at Westmoreland Road centre. Born on 20 December 1933 - what an achievement!



Twenty-Five Years of Active Prayer and Devotion

The Cenacle group from Carss Park centre celebrated 25 years of weekly meetings this year.



Easter in Adelaide

Preca Youth staged stations of the cross on Good Friday morning.



Easter Recall

Seder display, recalling the Passover, and escape from Egypt. Westmoreland Road.



PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE CONTINUED

Walk a Mile in My Shoes

The *Walk a Mile in My Shoes* retreat (6th April 2024), convened 28 youths, spanning ages 13 to 27, for a day of immersive exploration and connection. Facilitated by Eloise Meyer from the Melbourne Archdiocese, the event delved into the complexities of communication and mental health in today's individualistic culture.

Fr Robin Lomangkok, CSsR, provided spiritual guidance, underscoring the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in personal growth. Feedback from participants underscored a hunger for further mentorship and dedicated reflection time, indicating a deep yearning for connection and spiritual development. The retreat fostered a nurturing environment where youth felt empowered to explore their struggles and seek purpose, ultimately contributing to their holistic well-being.



Feast of St George Preca

Included in the many celebrations, Holy Eucharist, St Albans on 03 May, St George Preca Primary School on 09 May, and St Martin de Porres, Laverton on 09 May.



Musicians, Anne, Natalie, and Michael. St Martin de Porres, Laverton.



Choir - Holy Eucharist, St Albans.

Preca Influence in Guatemala, Central America.

In Guatemala we celebrate St George Preca with the support of Fr Anton Grech.



Family Weekend

The Winter Preca family weekend was held between the 12 and 14 of July 2024 at Port Hughes, a two-hour drive northeast of Adelaide. The weekend's theme was Preca Spirituality, and the theme prayer was "O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like yours." Oliver Aquilina, the Assistant Superior General, facilitated two workshops for parents and young adults. The local members facilitated four other workshops with the same theme. The sacraments of reconciliation and Holy Communion were celebrated daily. The weekend was a real bonding experience, especially for the young adults in the community. A small group of young men stayed an extra day to share their life journey.



Annual Reflection Weekend

The Annual Reflection Weekend held at Holy Cross, Templestowe over weekend 05 - 08 July 2024 reflected on the theme; 'Soul of the Apostolate'. Some participants stayed a further day to immerse into deeper silence.



Visit of Assistant Superior General



Assistant Superior General, Oliver Aquilina addresses the gathering at Westmoreland Road on 10 July 2024.



Preca representatives in Adelaide, John, Brandon and Ben attend Diocesan Assembly in June 2024.

International Focus

On 4 August 2024, a group of SDC Candidates left Malta to begin a missionary experience in the SDC Centres of Julio C Tello and Puente Piedra in Peru. This missionary exposure is fundamental to their formation in the SDC vocation.



PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE CONTINUED

Blessing of Meditation Garden

The final stages of the Dar Hanin Samaritan Meditation Garden at Santa Venera adjacent to the retirement village of the Preca Members has been completed. Designed by renowned architect, Richard England, a haven has been established to enjoy for all those who pass that way.

We are inherently attracted to beauty. It is beauty that impels us to change so as to transform into a more kind and just person. This is the journey of each person towards truth, towards the discovery of God.

The DHS Meditation Garden, a project designed by Architect Richard England, was inaugurated on Saturday 27 April 2024. It is a sacred space where anyone who enters can recollect and enjoy silence. But above all, this space permits the person to experience the beauty of colours, shapes, and light.

Fr Kevin Schembri, Ecclesiastical Assistant to the SDC in Malta blessed this garden in the presence of those who contributed to make this project a reality.



Notre Dame Surprises

Cardinal Mario Grech during a recent stay at Notre Dame University, in South Bend, USA, met with two people who had a connection: Bishop Peter Baldacchino, Bishop of Las Cruces, who is attending the meeting held by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops ... and Mrs Ruth D Lasseter stewardess of the "Preca Cottage" in this State. Mrs Lasseter is completely committed to propagate the charism and spirituality of St George Preca.



Headmaster of St Michael School Retires

On Wednesday 17 April 2024 the Superior General, Roberto Zammit met with staff to inform them that Mr Raymond D'Amato's term as head of the school is nearing its end. He also announced that from 1 September the school will have Mr Johann Tabone as the new Headmaster and Mr Karol Debono as new Assistant Headmaster for our School.

The Superior General thanked Mr D'Amato for 45 years of service at the school, 34 of them as Headmaster and congratulated Mr Tabone and Mr Debono on their new roles, persuaded that they will play this role with commitment and professionalism.



URGINGS OF THE HEART – BOOK REVIEW

Urgings of the Heart, published by Preca Publications, is a collection of writings, and prayers written by St George Preca, over many years, and translated in English.

This book is recommended to those who wish to grow in their life of prayer through the spirituality of St George Preca.

Human beings are pilgrims on earth. That is one of the several metaphors Fr George Preca uses to describe the human condition. However, today more than ever, people are like alienated pilgrims who have lost their way. They are like the blind leading the blind. We all know that insecurity shrouds the whole spectrum of our life.

Fr Preca had first-hand experience of life's uncertainty. At the young age of twenty-five he almost died. Then as a dynamic pastoral priest he touched people's anxieties, and miseries. But the eternal truths he had embedded in the core of his heart kept him going 'till the very end. Deep in his heart, his inner reflective compass always marked north towards the Divine and the eternal destination of life. His anchor was steadfastly held in place by trust in the infinite love of God in whom Fr Preca enjoyed rest as at the lap of a gracious Father.

Fr Preca constantly beheld the suffering Holy Face of Jesus, the Son of God who became flesh in order to raise us humans up to the Divine. Fixing his gaze on the Divine Wounds of the crucified Christ, Fr Preca felt called to share the Word of Life with all, especially with the poor who lacked an education in faith in order to help them feel loved by God, and who in Christ draws us all to behold his radiant Face.

This book contains "springs from this well of living water" which sustained St George Preca throughout his pilgrimage of 82 years until he came to that joyful hour of meeting his Beloved Lord. May we take strength for our journey from these springs which welled up from the heart of Fr Preca who as a faithful servant walked before us in the light of faith.

As a meditation, it is most helpful on our journey.

Some extracts from *Urgings of the Heart*

It is one thing believing in Jesus Christ and quite another trusting in him. Every Christian, good or bad 'believes in Jesus Christ' because this is what is required of faith. But trusting in Jesus Christ means submitting yourself to his maxims. Many admit their belief in him, but deny him by their deeds.
A Spiritual Directory (Page 13)

The world pokes fun at believers, and regards as fools those who follow the Gospel - even though the world's own darkness is unfathomable!
A Letter on Meekness (Page 20)

Set yourself ablaze with the fervent desire of giving souls to Jesus, but first give him your own, and then those of many others.
A Spiritual Directory (Page 37)

Copies of this publication are available on request.



FEAST OF THE VIRTUES – A REFLECTION ON ST THOMAS AQUINAS AND SIMPLICITY



The virtue of Simplicity is not simply about being simple...

That is because the opposite of simplicity is not complexity. Take a mechanical watch or clock, for example. Absolutely simple on the outside – two hands and some numbers. But look inside... look at the mechanism... beauty of workmanship, incredible detail, almost too hard to comprehend. Yet this simple watch is a most powerful driver of people's lives. What makes the watch simple is its purpose. Its single purpose, and therein lies its power. The complexity is part of what makes it simple, what drives it, its hidden core. The opposite of simplicity is not complexity, but clutter... whether a messy life, a messy mind, a messy relationship. Unfocussed, chaotic, scattered, fragmented. A broken watch.

The power of living life in harmony with a single purpose is especially seen in the life of Thomas Aquinas, who St George Preca chose for us as a model of the virtue of simplicity.

Who was Thomas?

Thomas was smart. Almost too smart. But looked dumb. Almost too dumb. A big guy built like a bull who could be mistaken for a bouncer. He moved very slowly, and rarely spoke a word... like someone you would not want to tangle with. His nickname was 'dumb ox'. But he moved with purpose, and when he spoke, it was worth listening to, because it had been thought through and was worth saying... as one later teacher said "...one day this dumb ox will let out a bellow that the whole world will hear". How prescient he was!

And the purpose of Thomas was... God. God is so simple... God is Love. Yet God is unknowable, infinite, immense, the veiled core behind what we see... which is Love. And Thomas wanted to prise apart the mechanism that was God, to see the complexity behind the veil, to understand as far as humanly possible what it was that made God tick... so that he himself could come closer to God and delve deeper and deeper into Love.

The mark of a simple person is that they remain open to the new, yet do not deviate from their chosen path. In Thomas' case, this was the examination and comprehension of all things relating to God. Like George Preca, he was in love with God, in love with everything about God, and always eager to learn more, to explore more, with an insatiable thirst to

know, to understand and to explain it to others... with an overpowering joy in seeing them fall in love with the unknowable depths of God.

And, in common with all those who immerse themselves in God, it came at a cost. A personal cross.

The story of Thomas

Thomas Aquinas was born in 1225 in one of his family's castles near Aquino in central Italy. Thomas came from an important family. A very important and very powerful family. This was at a time when family held the power of life or death over their children, and groomed them for social positions and political power as if playing a game of chess. Some of his brothers were senior officers in the military. His uncle was abbot of the great and famous Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino - and from the age of five, Thomas was groomed to take over this role from his uncle. In preparation for this, he studied many subjects and went to university and there discovered the great Greek, Muslim and Jewish philosophers who influenced his thought and inflamed his desire to know God.

At the age of 19 he decided to join the Dominicans, an order of preachers and be ordained a priest. His family was not amused. They were angry. The Dominicans tried to spirit him off to Rome, but on the way, his brothers caught up and kidnapped him, taking him to a family castle and imprisoning him for over a year, trying to change his mind by any means. At one point, two of his brothers hired a prostitute and locked her in with him to seduce him. In the end, his mother, seeing that her attempts had failed, arranged for him to escape through a window, so that the family would not have the embarrassment of admitting their failure by releasing him.

So began Thomas' amazing career. As an undergraduate at the University of Naples he had studied many diverse subjects including arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Now aged nineteen he entered the Faculty of Arts at the University of Paris, studying philosophy and also theology under the greatest scholar and teacher of his time, Albertus 'Magnus' (Albert the Great). When Albert went to Cologne in Germany, Thomas followed him – it was at this time that Albert made his famous and prophetic 'dumb ox' (*bos mutus*) comment.

Now 23, Thomas was appointed an apprentice professor, teaching scripture, and he started writing. For the next 20 years he wrote. Studied, and wrote. First, commentaries on Old Testament prophets, and then on returning to Paris for his three-year master's degree, a massive thesis commenting on the 'Sentences' of Peter Lombard, which at that time was the main textbook used for the teaching of theology. Shortly after completing this, he was appointed regent master in theology at Paris.

But his focus and first love was God. All his writings were about questions. Questions and commentaries about the things of God, especially about what is true, and what is not.

One of the characteristics of a person with the virtue of simplicity, is that they are single-minded but not narrow-minded. If Thomas was to focus on God, then he needed to know everything that would relate to this. From the beauty of music to the discipline of mathematics, from the philosophical thoughts of Greek and Roman pagans to the spiritual understandings of Muslim scholars. From the writings of the early Church Fathers to the scriptural interpretations of contemporary Jewish rabbis. All this to clearly encounter the simple Ultimate Truth that is God.

As he deepened and expanded his knowledge, so he deepened his love and relationship with God. He wrote the *Pange lingua* (whose final two verses are the *Tantum ergo* that we sing in Benediction today), and *Panis angelicus* which is still so often sung.

In February 1265 at the age of 39, the newly elected Pope Clement IV summoned Thomas to Rome to serve as papal theologian. Here in Rome, at a new school for training Dominican Friars, Thomas began his greatest work, the *Summa Theologiae*. This he intended to be easy to read, not too wordy and clear in its thinking, as he wrote "...as the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, '...mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food...'; so our proposed intention in this work is to pass on things that belong to Christianity in a way suited to instructing beginners." And of course, it starts off with the big questions about God. Questions and answers. Of course, he used techniques of logic acquired from the pagan Aristotle, ideas from Muslim scholars Averroes and Avicenna and understandings from Jewish mystic scholar Rabbi Moses Maimonides. This work, in many volumes, became the primary textbook of theology for the next 700 years, and his ideas have steered the course of the Church through the Middle Ages until today.

The more Thomas learnt - the more he reflected and wrote - the more he fell in love with God... God who became the only object of his heart. He began to fall into ecstasy during mass (that is, lost in an overpowering joyful experience of God), especially when experiencing the Eucharist. People began to notice that at these times, sometimes his feet did not

quite touch the floor... And one day in 1273 his sacristan overheard a dialogue with an icon of the crucified Christ... "You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward would you have for your labor?" Thomas responded, "Nothing but you, Lord."

On 6 December 1273, while Thomas was celebrating Mass, he had an intense experience of God after which he refused to write anything again. He said "... everything I have written now seems like straw". He never completed his *Summa Theologiae*. A few weeks afterwards, he was summoned to the Second Council of Lyon which was to try to reunite the Catholic Church in the West to the Eastern Orthodox Church. On his way to the council, he had an accident on the road and suffered a bad concussion. A few days later he had a relapse and was taken to a local monastery for nursing care. He died while giving a commentary to those around him on the Song of Songs. Even while dying, his focus was on God, the intimate beauty of God. He was 49 years old.

What we learn from Thomas

From the life of Thomas we can learn how to grow in the virtue of simplicity.

Thomas had a single focus in life and all of his endeavour contributed to that vision. Our vision is summarised in our motto to evangelise (M.U.S.E.U.M.) and in our vision statement to form the formators (2 Timothy 2:2). Our work, our recreation, our studies, our lifestyle, our relationships, and all the underlying complexities of daily life should be directed towards these two simple statements. No clutter.

Thomas nurtured a love of learning, across many fields. For us in the Preca Community, we learn the importance of reading widely to avoid being narrow minded, which is a barrier to our mission. George Preca was very widely read and all of his acquired knowledge, and understanding contributed and gave clarity to his single-minded vision.

Thomas grew in holiness as he grew in knowledge. We learn that simplicity is not something just of the mind but also of the heart. Thomas' intellectual focus on God inflamed his love of God which in turn gave energy to his focus on God. In the Preca Community, our assignment and studies should feed our spiritual life and in turn impel us to learn more, so that through our teaching, Jesus will be better known and loved.

May the life of St Thomas Aquinas inspire us to grow in the virtue of simplicity through fixing our gaze on Christ all the days of our lives, learning about him and teaching people to not only know and love him, but in turn to teach others. And along the way, encounter the living God, who alone should be the object of our hearts.

Joseph Kielnerowski
Preca Community

SANTIAGO WAY

Dr Stephen Parnis, shares his experiences in walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

Accompanied by his son, Luke, Stephen shows how to maximise a pilgrimage experience, and make its graces, and challenges part of one's ongoing spiritual development.

The walk was completed in July this year, reaching Santiago de Compostela on the Feast of St Ignatius of Loyola on 31 July.

Highlights of his journal are provided here.

First Day 18 July:

León, España

León is just beautiful, and the Cathedral took our breath away. That a thirteenth century town of just 5000 people could oversee its construction in just 50 years is hard to comprehend. The high Gothic majesty of the stained glass, and to be there as Vespers was sung - a powerful reminder that this was why I wanted to travel so far. We begin our walk in the morning.

Villar De Mazarife, Castilla y León, Spain

A special start to El Camino for us. Morning Mass at León Cathedral - a universal language and the familiar rhythms that we have known and participated in for all our lives. The gospel today spoke of letting burdens go.

The fields and plains of Castille remind me of the Western District, though the French and German fellow pilgrims we walked with today reminded me that we are in a very different place. It is lovely to listen to their stories.

21km today, 30 tomorrow (he says with some trepidation).

Astorga, Spain

My aching legs remind me of our 31km walk today, as exhilarating as it was tiring. Vast Plains, burgeoning with crops.

An unexpected pleasure of receiving some wonderful hospitality from locals beside the path, which got us the last few km today.

And Astorga - dating from Roman times, with a late Gothic/Baroque Cathedral that again deserves the "awe inspiring" description, and a Gaudi building (rare outside Catalonia) housing a museum of the Camino.

Rabanal Del Camino, Castilla y León, Spain

A gentle day. Gentle in terms of the distance (21km), the gradient, the weather. We met a man along the way whose Camino began in Belgium! Staying in a beautiful village, we participated in Vespers at the local Benedictine monastery.



Villafranca del Bierzo, Spain

Long, arduous walking, rewarded with spectacular views and aches in places I have never felt before.

Time at La Cruz de Ferro. At this place, the aspirations, prayers, laments and desires of generations of pilgrims have been expressed.

And I uttered a prayer for those innocents who are suffering - and there are so many - and for those who have an opportunity to relieve their suffering.

Villafranca del Bierzo, Spain

A long walk today (>30km) with an afternoon at 34 degrees, but the mornings are gentle and inviting.

The city of Ponferrada, and later through glorious vineyards. It's a wonderful thing to just focus on the next step, then the next one...

Las Herrerías, Castilla y León, Spain.

A nice, low-key day. The food, the weather, the quiet village churches, the shade, the end of the day. The things that run through my mind along the way.

O Cebreiro

Short, sweet and very sweaty today, as we climbed 400m over 8km today to reach the tiny mountain village of O Cebreiro in Galicia.

As we were savouring a cold drink, we encountered our own (preferred) version of the Running of the Bulls. In this case, it was the Stroll of the Cattle, to their next pasture. So much more sensible than their male colleagues.

At one point today, I looked up from the path to see a magnificent vista, back across León.

O Cebreiro is frozen in time, and its pre-Romanesque church dates from the 9th century. A place of timelessness and welcome.

It has been such a beautiful evening in O Cebreiro. A gentle summer breeze in a place when it snows from time to time in winter. It has a charm and peace that makes it incredibly valued by pilgrims.



We learned that over the >1000 years of the pilgrimage, there have been times where its practice has waned. It underwent a resurgence in the 70s when the local priest - Don Elias Valina Sampedro promoted El Camino. His doctoral thesis was in its history, and he is known for the yellow paint which guides us to this day. At his early death aged 60 in 1989, he was mourned and celebrated across the world.

Tríacastela, Spain

We passed the halfway point today, and we savoured the beauty of Galicia. Downhill is easier than uphill, and our legs were thanking us for a relatively light day yesterday.

We have become accustomed to walking through villages where little has changed in a century.

Finished off with a dinner of three courses, two bottles of good wine, all for 28 Euros. I am content.

Sarria, Lugo, Galicia, Espana

A beautiful day walking through Galicia's forests, and savouring the warmth and camaraderie among fellow pilgrims.

Portomarin, Galicia, Spain

It got busier today, as many joined the Camino in Sarria to walk 100km. I missed the quiet today, though we have had a good run over the last ten days.

Lovely chats along the way, and we ended up in Portomarin, established by the Knights Hospitaller of St John, over 300 years before they took possession of Malta (the eight-pointed Maltese Cross is everywhere).

Palas De Rei, Galicia, Spain

The rolling Galician hills and countryside continue, and the distance to Santiago is now <70km away. More walkers change the dynamic, and the solitude is more elusive. The many eucalypt trees make us feel at home.

Arzúa, Spain

28 km today, and the afternoon was particularly hard, necessitating plenty of rest stops. The Galician countryside continues to spoil us with its beauty. Only two more days before we reach Santiago. I'm surprised I still have all my toenails.

Arca O Pino

Our penultimate day on The Way. It is strange to think that we now regard a 20km walk as pretty straightforward. More to say tomorrow, I'm sure, but it has always been less about the destination, and more about spending these days with Luke, and allowing my mind to wander as widely as our feet have taken us.

Nothing really courageous about it. But immensely satisfying to finally realise a goal that has been on my mind for years. And if I ever see another 20-year-old using those noisy, cumbersome walking poles, it will be too soon.



Final Day 31 July:

Santiago de Compostela

A moving conclusion to a beautiful experience.

The last 20km felt different, knowing our now-embedded routine was coming to an end.

A few kilometres in urban environs meant we were saying goodbye to rural Galicia.

Nothing can prepare you for the grandeur and gravitas of the 11th Century Cathedral of St James the Apostle, and as we reached the Cathedral Square, it was time to stop walking...

The International Pilgrim Centre was welcoming and surprisingly official and efficient. On checking our pilgrim passport and credentials, we obtained our certificates. Nothing tokenistic about it.

This evening, we attended the Pilgrims' Mass at the Cathedral. People from the world over were there, and we recognised many familiar faces from the journey as the common language of the liturgy took place. Today is 31 July, dedicated to a Spanish saint whose life has had a significant impact on both my life and Luke's - Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Jesuits.

As we sat together, I said to Luke that I think that only with hindsight, we will appreciate how special this time together has been.

And these fifteen days and 310km, I have carried with me so many who matter to me.

To all who have followed my posts, I hope you've found them of interest. If it has brought back memories of your own Camino or special journey, then I'm so pleased. If it stirs interest in doing something similar, then all I can say is this: it's a risk worth taking.



BEGINNINGS IN SYDNEY – MY MEMOIRS



Fr Carmelo Sciberras, a diocesan priest, and a Member of the Society of Christian Doctrine has written his memories in a book 'Looking Down the Valley'.

The book recalls the many memories that has shaped his life; especially family

connections. It also looks kindly on the Church in Malta from where Carmelo's faith was nurtured.

Over the years Carmelo has kept in contact with us. When discussing his memoirs with him, it was suggested that he records the early days of the establishment of the SDC in Sydney. This summary written by Fr Carmelo certainly highlights the struggles, and tenacity of the early Members; an enduring mission. Although we have covered his reflections in the past, the passage of time provides more reflection, and insight of the early days of the SDC in Sydney.

This article is very apt as it was in 1954, seventy years ago that the seed was planted in Sydney with the arrival of four Members, and a Candidate. They join a Member who was already in Sydney. Quietly, the first SDC activities begin in Sydney.

Fr Carmelo's Story

From the end of WWII European migration to Australia was welcomed, and encouraged with the saying, "Populate or perish," and a \$20 a head assisted passage. St George Preca, the Founder of the Society of Christian Doctrine, our society, known in Malta as – MUSEUM - now also known as Preca Community, and the leaders of the church of Malta saw the need for pastoral and religious care for the children of Maltese migrants. Our Founder answered the call of an SDC Member from Melbourne and sent, with their consent, a few Members who founded a branch in that city.

With my family I arrived in Sydney on 3 March, 1956, and soon entered St Columba's Seminary at Springwood on the Blue Mountains to complete my secondary education and continue my formation and studies for the priesthood. I was ordained on 18 July

1964, and this year, with God's grace and merciful, loving kindness, I will celebrate my Diamond Jubilee of priestly ordination.

In Malta with my two brothers, I attended the Salesian Oratory in Sliema, the suburb where we lived. One of my brothers encountered the Society and began attending classes and activities at the Sliema branch.

Soon after we arrived in Australia, my brother, Alfred obtained an apprenticeship in fitting and turning and attended the technical college in the city. He kept wearing the "Verbum Dei" badge. Emmanuel Baldacchino, one the four original Members, noticed this and contacted him. He also, informed Emmauel (Alan) Gauci, then a candidate, who came in his van to our home, and talking to my brothers he took them to meet the Members at the Broadway branch. At this stage the Members were meeting at St Benedict's parish, invited to teach catechism in his parish by Fr John Roche. Seeing their ability and dedication he gave them the responsibility of preparing the candidates for Confirmation. He provided rooms for them in the then vacated school formerly run by the Christian Brothers and now the city campus of Notre Dame University.

My brothers soon became Candidates and were incorporated. I attended during my holidays from the seminary and was incardinated some years later. With the Society at its infancy there was a lot of work to do. I bought a typewriter and taught myself to touch type. The Australian founder, Fr Joseph Abela, use to send me material from Melbourne to translate from Maltese to English. This included the "Watch." Eventually my brothers manually put together and printed some hundred copies of the Watch.

The people of Broadway, close to the CBD, and the surrounding suburbs, were poorer people, many of them migrants and refugees. Experiencing the warmth, care and Christian love of the Members, the number of children attending the branch increased expeditiously. Some of the Members bought VW kombis and used to go around the neighbouring suburbs, and collect the children from home, and take them back after the class. Branches in Paddington, Toongabbie, and finally at Carss Park were established.

Though Broadway was the first official branch the original Members, Paul Carbut, Emmanuel Baldacchino, Joe Pace and Arthur Archer, all Maltese migrants and Members of the Society in Malta who settled in Sydney, met one another in different circumstances. They began to meet informally at Erskineville, not far from the city centre, at Arthur's married sister's home. Meeting Fr T Licari, the Maltese migrant chaplain, at the celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Victories, at St Mary's Cathedral (National Day in Malta) they sought his help. He found them a room on top of a shop ran by another Maltese migrant, Victor Demicoli, in Woolloomooloo near the naval dockyards on Sydney Harbour. They began to meet there regularly and gather the Maltese, and Italian boys for catechism and recreation. Many Maltese migrants accustomed to working at the dockyards in Malta, gravitated to this poor suburb, as did Italian fishermen. St Columkille's, the mensal parish of St Mary's cathedral, was their parish church. Sir Norman Thomas, Cardinal Gilroy, the Archbishop of Sydney heard about the Society and took an interest in the Members from the Society's infancy in Sydney. Many Members used to go to confession to him at the cathedral late on Saturday evening. He came to know them personally.



Cover of Fr Carmelo's memoirs "Looking Down the Valley".

The Members also involved themselves with their local parish. They instructed children and their parents in preparation for the sacraments of initiation. They took the children to Mass on Sunday. Parish priests began to enquire if it were possible for them to establish a branch in their parish. After the heyday years with rich harvests, the Society in Sydney began to decline. Though candidates continued to attend in good numbers, few persevered to full Members and final incardination. The original Members were getting older, and some moved on to other divisions as in Melbourne, Hobart, and Brisbane.

God bestows on the Members of the SDC a unique calling, given only to a chosen few. Living a life of total dedication in the laicised state, they faithfully observe the Ten Commandments, and promise to practice the Councils of Perfection, including celibacy.

MUSEUM is a pneumatic, dreamt by the Founder, for "Magister Utinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus" the Latin words for "Lord may the whole world follow the gospel." As membership and activity in Sydney have dried up, Members from Malta are venturing as missionaries overseas, especially in countries formerly dominated by atheistic communist governments. Members including from Australia are preparing to go and set up a branch of the society in the Philippines. The Society is still flourishing and ministering to the Church in diverse ways, in Melbourne and Adelaide.

As a gift for my ordination, 60 years ago, the Members gave me a donation for me to engrave on my chalice, a chalice I used for many years and now I use every day in my retirement. One of the engravings is that of the Society of Christian Doctrine. As I offer the great sacrifice of the Mass, I recall with thanksgiving my membership in the SDC and pray for all Members, past and present.

Fr Carmelo Sciberras



Fr Joseph Abela, Cardinal Norman Gilroy, Fr Carmelo Sciberras. Annual General Meeting, Holy Cross College, Ryde, 1966.

Feeling more settled and confident at Broadway, the Members began to observe all the rules, and traditions of the Society of Christian Doctrine. After their petition they were recognised by the Founder and the leading committee in Malta as an official branch. They met every evening for the Assignment, and observed the other traditional devotions handed to the Society by St George Preca. Helped by others, Joe Abela and I continued to translate from Maltese to English the Founder's writings and his recommended acts of devotion. My teaching session, when on holidays, was dogmatic theology.

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

In the 2023 issue of *The MUSEUM* we wrote about the chimes that draws the Members to prayer. When a fifth Sunday falls, “The Watch”, a prayer manual of Members, and Associates is prayed in common. This is a long-held tradition in the Preca Community; being a great source of unity for us all.

During the chanting of this prayer, the chimes are sounded every fifteen minutes. Undoubtedly, the sounding of the chimes is connected to the pealing of bells, common in villages, and also introduced by the Society from the early days, calling young children to the lessons in Malta.

When the North Sunshine centre was established in 1957, a large bell was either purchased or donated; no doubt to reciprocate the tradition of ringing a bell before the catechism class. For some reason or other, this did not proceed. Perhaps council permission was required, and the Members felt that the neighbours would be uneasy given that every day the bell would be rung.

Foundation

In Malta, where the Preca Community was founded, bells play a significant role in the life of the villages. Calling people to prayer, Mass etc. is a common occurrence.

The use of bells in churches, according to most sources, dates back to the 5th Century when St Paulinus, the bishop of Nola, introduced them as a way to alert monks to the times of worship.

Two hundred years ago, Lord Byron referred to Malta as ‘an island of yells, bells and smells’. There are between 500-600 church bells in Malta. Every church has from three to seven bells.



A bell sways in the wind at Preca House, Hobart.

In the early days, bells would have signaled the arrival of a fruitier, a fish-monger, or other provider. In Australia, while this did occur, many today would be more familiar with the calling of the ice-cream van, Mr Whippy. More recently, but less frequent the van sends out a jingle.

The Founder, George Preca introduced the chiming of five rings before the Members meet. This is likened to the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard; Matthew 20:1-16.

St Helen’s Church, Birkirkara, Malta

The largest church bell in Malta is housed in St Helen’s Church in Birkirkara; it is also claimed to be the third largest in the world. The bell is 10.25 feet (3.1 metres) high, has a diameter of 8 feet (2.44 metres) and weighs in the order of 8.34 metric tonnes, including the clapper. It replaced two previous large bells which failed, and was cast in the Baricozzi foundry in Milan in 1931; the Maltese composer Carlo Diacono was entrusted with the bell’s tonality.

Myself, and Preca Member from Adelaide, Franco Zardo were given a tour of St Helen’s, thanks to former Sydney Member, Alfred Borg.

St Patrick’s Cathedral, Melbourne

Easter Sunday 31 March this year, marked 150 years since Melbourne’s designation as an Archdiocese. To mark the occasion, and Archbishop James Alipius Goold’s enthronement as Melbourne’s first Archbishop, the bells at St Patrick’s Cathedral were pealed for more than three and half hours!

Bellringers from Catholic cathedrals around the country, including St Mary’s Cathedral Sydney, St Francis Xavier Cathedral Adelaide, and St Patrick’s Cathedral Parramatta, joined the St Patrick’s bellringers, and rang the bells in celebration of this anniversary.

In Death

Hearing the news that George Preca had died in 1962, the bells in every village began to peal.

When the period of national mourning began following the death of the monarch, Elizabeth Regina in 2022, a single bell tolled 96 times; one for each year of her life. This was at Westminster Abbey, the ancient shrine of St Edward the Confessor, and final resting place of 17 monarchs.

Franco, and Peter,
St Helen's Church,
Birkirkara.

Appreciation and Use

Bell-ringing is nowadays only appreciated by the older folk as the younger generation has little idea of the significance of the messages in bell-ringing. Our post-modern society has taken over the idyllic Maltese life that was centered around the village church bell core. Those were the days when most churches employed a 'Kampanar' (church steeple man) in the belfry. His duties began in the early hours of the morning with the tolling of the 'Pater Noster' – 33 strokes of the bell.

The church bell-ringing woke up the country folk by the sound of the 'Pater Noster' at 4am to start off a day's work in the fields away from the scorching sun of the late morning hours. Likewise, the church bell kept time for the people in practically all their timetable, and tasks; whether be it work, rest, and prayer.

The same peal was repeated at dusk, and again 1 hour later, to mark the arrival of night. This hour was known as the 'Siegħa Lejl' (the night hour), or 'Tal-Imwiet' (the hour of the dead).

The 'Angelus' and the 'Ave Maria' (at midday) were familiar sounds of the bell ringing for regulating lives, which have now lost most use and appreciation. The bell-ringing regime in Malta most probably hailed from the traditions found in Sicily and Southern Italy.

Everybody now can has clocks, mobiles, ipads, wrist watches which at that time were non-existent. Clocks and watches could only be afforded by the upper classes. Thus the church clock was the clock of the people as each peal was a message that the people understood.

Modern technology has replaced this.



The sound of the bell at the Żurrieq centre Malta calls young people in the village to prayer, and formation in the faith.

A Good Detective Story

For a good read, 'The Nine Tailors' by Dorothy Sayers provides a good account of the science of bell ringing, as well as being a very compelling detective story.

Set in England, *The Nine Tailors* of the book's title are taken from the old saying "Nine Tailors Make a Man", which Sayers quotes at the end of the novel. As explained by John Shand in his 1936 *Spectator* article *The Bellringers' Art*, "'Nine Tailors' means the nine strokes which at the beginning of the toll for the dead announce to the villagers that a man is dead. A woman's death is announced with 'Six Tailors'. The mind wonders at this!

For whom the bell tolls, it tolls for THEE.

Peter L Judge
Preca Community



PRESERVING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE SDC



26 April - Feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel is one of the most beautiful titles given to Our Lady, venerated and propagated by the Augustinian family.

St George Preca had also great devotion to Our Lady under this title. It is recorded that his devotion to Our Lady of Good Counsel strengthened during a time of trial when he was ordered to close the Preca centres.

In those days, once he was at home, and as he passed in front of a sacred image of Our Lady of Good Counsel, hanging in his home, he heard a voice telling him “Serva Silentium” (Keep Silent).



This is an image of the altar of the Founder's house. It is a private chapel where the Founder celebrated Mass in the last years of his life. Still preserved in St Venera, Malta.



It was in 1954, seventy years ago that the seed was planted in Sydney with the arrival of four Members and a Candidate in Sydney. They join a Member who was already in Sydney. Quietly, the first SDC activities begin in Sydney.

In 1955, this house at left 11, Corfu Street, Woolloomooloo, NSW owned by late ex-superior Vince Demicoli, who placed one of its rooms at the disposal of SDC members for their early meetings.

Can you help?

This photo recently found of a chapel is not ringing too many bells!

We believe it may be the chapel at Dixon's Creek farm. Can anyone enlighten us?

The chapel at Dixon's Creek was situated in the front of the farm house, lhs as you enter.



RETURNED TO GOD 2024

We hold them in prayer:

*May you see God's light on the path ahead
When the road you walk is dark.
May you always hear, Even in your
hour of sorrow,
The gentle singing of the lark.
When times are hard may hardness
Never turn your heart to stone,
May you always remember when
the shadows fall,
You do not walk alone.*

03.08.23 PETER DUNN

01.10.23 MARGARET CARUANA

03.11.23 JIM SHEEDY

06.11.23 JOSEPHINE MARTINELLI

12.11.23 PAUL BUTTIGIEG

26.12.23 NANCY BEZZINA

22.12.23 VINCENT VELLA

25.12.23 CICILY UMMACHAN

13.02.24 PATRICIA BELLI

28.02.24 TERRY YARD

15.04.24 CARMEL CUTAJAR

05.05.24 MARIA PULLICINO

14.05.24 ANTONIA PACE

29.07.24 CHARLIE DESIRA

15.07.24 KEVIN MANNING

02.08.24 ROSARIO BRIFFA

08.08.24 MARY MIFSUD

08.08.24 GIORGINA CAMILLERI

13.08.24 CHARLIE BALDACCHINO

IN MEMORIAM



Patricia Belli was incorporated as a Member of the Society of Christian Doctrine in Malta in 1956 with her sister Jane. She emigrated with her family and her fellow Member sisters, to Australia, arriving in Melbourne on 3 March 1961.



Over a span of a 40 years Patricia worked hard teaching the faith in various locations, and settings.

She was particularly active in preparing children for the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Patricia loved her work in the SDC. The stability in her vocation, and the faithfulness to the spirit of George Preca was exemplary.

"Dying is a gradual diminishing and final vanishing over the horizon of life. When we watch a sailboat leaving port and moving toward the horizon, it becomes smaller and smaller until we can no longer see it. But we must trust that someone is standing on a faraway shore seeing that same sailboat become larger and larger until it reaches its new harbour. Death is a painful loss. But when we think about the One standing at the other shore eagerly waiting to welcome our beloved friend into a new home, a smile can break through our tears." HM Nouwen

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.



Amani iwe nanyi
- Peace be with you