

'LAUNCHING OUR PARISH YEAR OF ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN OUR NEIGHBOUR' –
HOMILY – 4 DECEMBER 2017
1ST Sunday Advent 3rd December 2017

YEAR OF MERCY 2016

Two years ago in the Catholic Church worldwide, we learnt more deeply that we are called to be a people of mercy.

This happened in the [JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY](#) launched by Pope Francis.

YEAR OF PRAYER 2017

This last year we have celebrated our own [PARISH YEAR OF PRAYER](#)

Thank you to all who participated.

Thank you Debbie for composing a children's hymn '[Prayer is a Treasure](#)' for our primary school.

Thank you to our prayer groups.

Thank you for the new initiatives of a Prayer Blog and weekly Friday Night Prayer Vigils.

YEAR OF YOUTH 2018

Internationally the Catholic Church in 2018 holds the Year of Youth (for ages 12-30).

We will draw on the insights of

- Our Youth,
- Pope Francis,
- Dialogues leading to the forthcoming [Synod on Youth](#) in Rome, and
- Plans by the Australian Catholic Church for the Year

Thank you to Damian, Jess and Sarah who were commissioned as our young adult coordinators for the parish SALT group.

Thank you to Emma and her team who assist our parish youth group ROCK.

YEAR OF ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN OUR NEIGHBOUR 2018

This weekend we launch our parish [YEAR OF ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN OUR NEIGHBOUR](#).

As Australians tend to shorten names, another title will be the [YEAR OF ENCOUNTER](#).

Though inclusive of the [YEAR OF YOUTH 2018](#), there are ongoing and new initiatives for us as a parish community including:

- Our relationships with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and Murri Ministry,
- The richness of our multicultural heritage,
- Our senior citizens and their experience and insights,
- Our recent consultation on sexual abuse,
- The Nouwen Network in supporting all those suffering from mental illness,
- The pastoral outreach of our St Vincent de Paul Conference,
- Our relationships with South Sudan and Blackall/Tambo Parish,
- The 40th anniversary in 2018 of St Joseph's School,
- The evolving ministry of the parish Care for Creation group,
- Ongoing social media ministry,
- Hospitality ministries
- And many other parish ministries,

HOW DOES the WORD OF GOD SPEAK TO US?

ALERT AND AWAKE TO OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Today's Gospel passage from Mark 13:33-37 to "KEEP ALERT", to "KEEP AWAKE" uses the image of a person going on a **journey**, leaving everyone with their **responsibilities** to fulfil. No one knows when the Master will return.

AS A LOCAL PARISH COMMUNITY, WHAT ARE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES THAT GOD HAS ENTRUSTED TO US?

One of our responsibilities is expressed in the parable in Luke's Gospel of the **Good Samaritan, to care for our neighbour.**

WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOUR? HOW DO WE ENCOUNTER OUR NEIGHBOUR?

Another responsibility is to be **people of mercy.**

In mercy when we reach out to our neighbour, we reach out to God, as seen by the **Last Judgement** story in Matthew's Gospel last week. This includes the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, imprisoned.

WHO ELSE DOES IT INCLUDE?

UPDATE ON OUR PARISH RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ABUSE

This weekend there is **an update on our parish response** to sexual abuse in three areas –

1. In the Church,
2. In Families, and
3. In Society.

Knowing God's desire for us to be alert, to love our neighbour and Jesus in our neighbour,
WHAT GUIDANCE CAN ASSIST US IN THIS ESSENTIAL ENCOUNTER?

POPE FRANCIS – CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER, DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

Pope Francis has written on a culture of encounter.

One of his most recent writings is Friday's Address in Bangladesh to an **Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting for Peace.**

He spoke of shaping a culture of encounter, dialogue and cooperation in the service of our human family.

Part of Francis address says:

"This entails more than mere tolerance.

It challenges us to reach out to others in mutual trust and understanding, and so to build a unity that sees diversity not as a threat, but as a potential source of enrichment and growth.

It challenges us to cultivate an openness of heart that views others as an avenue, not a barrier."

Pope Francis spoke of essential features of this *"openness of heart"* –

a **DOOR,**

a **LADDER,**

a **PATH** and that this heart is

a **STRONGLY BEATING HEART.**

The four quotes below are from the address of Pope Francis.

1. DOOR

*“First, it is a door. It is not an abstract theory but a lived experience.
It enables us to embark on a dialogue of life, not a mere exchange of ideas.
It calls for good will and acceptance,
yet it is not to be confused with indifference or reticence
in expressing our most deeply held convictions.
To engage fruitfully with another means
sharing our distinct religious and cultural identity,
but always with humility, honesty and respect.”*

2. LADDER

*“Openness of heart is also like a ladder that reaches up to the Absolute.
By recalling this transcendent dimension of our activity,
we realize the need for our hearts to be purified,
so that we can see all things in their truest perspective.
As with each step our vision becomes clearer,
we receive the strength to persevere in the effort
to understand and value others and their point of view.
In this way, we will find the wisdom and strength needed
to extend the hand of friendship to all.”*

3. PATH

*“Openness of heart is likewise a path
that leads to the pursuit of goodness, justice and solidarity.
It leads to seeking the good of our neighbours.
In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Saint Paul urged his hearers:
“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21).
This is a sentiment that all of us can echo.
Religious concern for the welfare of our neighbour,
streaming from an open heart, flows outward like a vast river,
to quench the dry and parched wastelands
of hatred, corruption, poverty and violence
that so damage human lives, tear families apart,
and disfigure the gift of creation.*

4. A STRONGLY BEATING HEART

*“A spirit of openness, acceptance and cooperation between believers
does not simply contribute to a culture of harmony and peace;
it is its beating heart.
How much our world needs this heart to beat strongly,
to counter the virus of political corruption, destructive religious ideologies,
and the temptation to turn a blind eye
to the needs of the poor, refugees, persecuted minorities,
and those who are most vulnerable.
How much, too, is such openness needed*

*in order to reach out to the many people in our world,
especially the young, who at times feel alone and bewildered
as they search for meaning in life!"*

Inspired by these words of Pope Francis,
and with a strong beating heart, let us be alert to God's invitation to love.
Throughout the year ahead, we know that God will surprise us.
This weekend we launch our 'PARISH YEAR OF ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN OUR NEIGHBOUR'.

Fr Gerry

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – Launching Our Parish Year of Encountering Jesus in Our Neighbour -
4 December 2017]

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/120417.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook04122017>]

Other:

Synod 2018 - Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment

Year of Youth 2018 - Australia

Pope Francis Address: Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting for Peace, Dhaka 1 December

'Letter to Our Parish Community' 3 December 2017 (parish response to sexual abuse)

