



inform

ISSUE 64 March 2006

Newsletter of the Catholic Bishop of Christchurch



“The 25th February 2006 marked the beginning of a new journey of service for Catholic Social Services with Bishop John Cunneen’s Blessing and Official Opening of the new agency premises in Cashel Street.



Modern, client-friendly facilities, a very central location, easily accessible to all parts of the city and its traditional caring and professional response to community needs, will ensure this diocesan agency will continue to provide significant support to all who require it on a no cost basis.

Thank you all who made our dreams of a new agency a reality. By supporting our work you are supporting your community.”



Bishop’s Deputy for Pastoral Planning

Mr. Mike Stopforth has been appointed to this new position in the Diocese.

His work is to coordinate and oversee the new pastoral plan which the Bishop is introducing to the Christchurch Diocese.

The plan itself has been clearly explained to us all but you will find a full description at www.chch.catholic.org.nz/pastoralplan.

The implementation of it is going to take a lot of commitment, trust and hard work. Mike is there to help us. Please pray for him.

Mike is pictured here with his wife Jacinta, and children Olivia, Andrew, Grace and Niamh.

Apology

The Editor, Fr. Mike Doyle, regrets that a number of articles, photos and notice of events could not be printed due to lack of space.

Letter from Bishop John

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Diocesan Family,

On the weekend of 18th and 19th February our Diocesan Pastoral Plan was launched.

Mother Church calls us, her children, to promote the life of the world according to God's plan. The Pastoral Plan furthers our efforts to serve the reign of God among us, into a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace. As disciples of Jesus that is what we, as always, are privileged and obliged to do. I encourage you all in the diocesan family to bring the good news of God's saving love to all the world.

A number of dioceses both in New Zealand and overseas are reviewing how they are organised to best utilise the various resources available. The process of bringing parishes together into 'groupings' is quite common. In our own Diocese we have done so with parishes now being formed into Pastoral Areas. While most dioceses in New Zealand have undertaken some process of enabling parishes to work together, we are the first diocese to employ a full time person to work at a diocesan level in Pastoral Planning, although this happens in many dioceses in Australia.

The Pastoral Plan is motivated by the call to increase the role of laity in the life of the Church – hence a focus on collaboration in the Plan. There are many ways that collaboration is already happening in parishes with priests and people working together. The Plan allows for opportunities for collaboration across Parish boundaries in the new Pastoral Areas, supporting and enabling existing and new ministries. This collaboration will be a key ingredient in the success



in implementing the Pastoral Plan, where priests and the lay faithful will work together, in Parishes, Pastoral Areas, and on Pastoral Area Teams.

We continue to pray for Vocations to the Priesthood as priests are, and always will be, at the heart of the Church.

I assure you of my prayers and ask you for yours as we undertake this significant step in the life of our Diocese, grateful for all who have developed the Plan thus far.

St John the Baptist, Patron Saint of our Diocese, pray for us.

Every best wish,
Sincerely,

John Cunneen
J Cunneen

Bishop of Christchurch



Sister Marguerita LCM, celebrates her *Platinum Jubilee*

On 15 December 2005 Sister Marguerita Forde celebrated her Platinum Jubilee of 70 years of Religious Profession in the Little Company of Mary. She is presently a patient at Nazareth House. To mark the occasion her niece and all the LCM Sisters joined the Nazareth Sisters and residents for a thanksgiving Mass. It was celebrated by Mons. Bede O'Gorman with concelebrants Frs O'Grady and Conway. In his homily Mons. O'Gorman spoke of Sister Marguerita's life of dedication and service, her ministries of nursing and pastoral care at Lewisham Hospital in Sydney where she entered the convent in 1933, and later in New Zealand. She once climbed Mt Egmont/Taranaki in her earlier days when based at Hawera.

Sister enjoyed the celebration of her special 70th anniversary. Thank you Sister for your faithfulness.

St. Paul Chong Huang Church

The Korean Catholic Community now own the former Redemptorist Monastery and have named the church as above. A grand opening Mass and blessing was celebrated on 15th Feb. A full account of this and their work will appear in the next edition of Inform.

Thanksgiving programme

Parishes reap benefits of Thanksgiving programme

Thirty-one different parishes in the Christchurch Diocese have received the Thanksgiving Renewal Plan in the last seven years, some more than once.

Phil Gourdie, the Thanksgiving Programme Director, said that while this number is pleasing, there are still another 20 parishes that have yet to experience the benefits of the programme.

“The focus of the programme is to encourage people to say ‘thank you’ to God for

everything and every opportunity that He has provided for them. This is achieved by using our God-given gifts of ‘time, talent and treasure’ for the benefit of everyone in our community,” he said.

Phil delivers between five and seven full programmes and some midway review programmes each year. Over the last seven years in excess of \$3.4 million additional dollars have been generated from within parishes to assist in the carrying out of the Lord’s work in the Diocese.

“This has meant the Bishop has been able to better support the clergy of the Diocese, he has been able to proceed with achieving his Pastoral priorities and parishes have been better equipped to support and run their parishes from both a pastoral and practical perspective.

“While there is a definite accent on helping parishes with their fundraising, the programme is much wider than that. The real benefits revolve around the vibrancy it generates within the parish and greater enhancement of the individual’s faith through participation and involvement,” Phil Gourdie said.

Beryl Cartwright, chairperson of St Paul’s Parish, Dallington, was enthusiastic about the programme’s achievements as was council member, Paul Goodwin, of St Peter and Paul Parish, Halswell.

“The focus of the programme is to encourage people to say ‘thank you’ to God for everything and every opportunity that He has provided for them.

Director, Catholic Enquiry Centre

- Key Evangelisation Position
- National Focus

The Catholic Enquiry Centre promotes understanding and knowledge of the Catholic faith in New Zealand. With the impending retirement of the present Director, the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference is seeking applications for the position. Leading a highly committed team of staff and volunteers, the Director will:

- Have a passion for evangelisation and an empathy with people;
- Take responsibility for the effective leadership and co-ordination of the pastoral and evangelisation activities of Catholic Enquiry Centre;
- Possess in-depth understanding of the Catholic faith, the Church’s teaching and practices and have a background in theology;
- Manage and administer the media, communications, promotional and financial resourcing activities of the Centre;
- Be an excellent communicator and networker.

This is a challenging and demanding leadership position in evangelisation requiring a pastoral approach and resource management skills.

Contact Mike Hurdle at MICAH Partners for more information on phone: 0-4-499 4749, mobile: 021-552929, fax: 0-4-499 7375 or e-mail: contact@micahpartners.co.nz or send your resume by Friday 17 March 2006 to PO Box 499, Wellington.



Catholics returning home

It is a **gentle, affirming, welcoming** course for people who are wondering how to find their way back to life in the Church.

“It is short, simple and it works.” These are the words of Sally Mews of USA who devised the programme.

One course participant says: “I’ve never been happier or more peaceful” and “thank you so much”.

Where To Attend?

It does not have to be in your own parish if you feel uncomfortable there at first. You will be welcome at any place or parish where it is being run.

Who Can Join?

Statistically in NZ for every 20 Catholics, 11 are not there at church.

So if you have a relative, friend or neighbour you would like to invite do so, and anyone else you think this wonderful course might help to find their spiritual home again.

No matter how long people have been away the phrase we would like them to hear is ‘WELCOME HOME.’

For more information

please phone Mary Redding
Ph 357-8400.



After Mass:.. “Daddy says he likes your sermons best ‘coz he gets to sleep through them”.

From the Archives

Last year's centennial of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament created renewed interest in the archives of the Diocese, which are housed in the Cathedral and are under the care of the Diocesan Archivist, Father Kevin Clark.

The first sign of interest was that a small group of people began a project to catalogue and correctly store the many photos in the archives. They go to the Cathedral every Thursday, copy the photos onto master sheets and then store the originals in acid free materials. To date more than 1500 have been catalogued.

To gauge the level of interest in the subject an archives day was held on November 26. The organisers anticipated 10 or 12 people would attend and were amazed when, with limited advertising, 26 turned up. They were told about the photo project and about continuing research into the

background of Bishop Grimes. They also visited the archives room and saw for themselves the huge amount of work that is yet to be done in the areas of cataloguing and storage.

Where to from here?

Another archives day is planned for later in the year, possibly with a professional archivist as a speaker. We would really like to hear from people from anywhere in the Diocese who would like to attend and learn more about caring for archives, or who would like to go on a mailing list for an archives newsletter that has been started.

The photo project has reached a stage where we can think about asking people in all parishes to identify some of the people, places and events depicted. To do this we need people who are prepared to co-ordinate this in their own areas, and would like to hear from interested people.

I, Michael Hanrahan, can be contacted at mhhh@xtra.co.nz or phone 03 308 8853 in the evenings,

Indian Mission

The Annual Bring & Buy and Appeal for the work of Fr Bernard Donnelly SJ of the Bryndwr Parish and his colleagues will be over when you read this. However if you couldn't be there we would be so glad to receive your donation at any time. Fr Berny works among the 'poorest of the poor' in central India alleviating poverty, disease, bringing health care and education to THE unknown. The Bring and Buy is the focus for this Appeal.

Greg Donohue
c/o Parish of St Matthew, Bryndwr.

Hospitaller Order of St John of God

Historic Hobday Organ gifted to St John of God Chapel, Halswell, Christchurch.

This organ was built in Wellington, and completed in 1901, by Arthur H. Hobday for St Mary of the Angels Catholic Church, Wellington, where it remained until 1958 when it was replaced by a new Croft organ. It was then removed to Christchurch and spent a time in St Peter's Catholic Church in Fisher Avenue Beckenham, before being transferred to the chapel at the Redemptorist Monastery in Bower Avenue, New Brighton in 1967.

When the Monastery closed in 2002, the Redemptorist Fathers gifted the organ to the Christchurch Organists' Association Inc. on condition that the Association find it a new home, preferably Catholic and in Christchurch. After all, the instrument had lived and served all its 100-year life in Catholic churches.

After considerable discussion and investigation, the Hospitaller Brothers of St John of God were



approached with a proposal that the organ be gifted to them and installed in their magnificent Chapel. They were very enthusiastic and agreed that the project should proceed.

The dilemma facing the Organists' Association was how to proceed, given that the organ was 100 years old and had never had any extensive maintenance done on it. Quotations were obtained for work ranging from: only do what is absolutely necessary; to a full restoration.

The question was then of course how to finance the \$180,000.00

cost. Armed with a very positive report from the New Zealand Organ Preservation Trust, John Scott, the Organists' Association treasurer, got to work and from various sources including the local membership of 72, Association funds and grants, the money was raised and a contract let with the South Island Organ Company Ltd for a full restoration and installation in the Chapel.

Installation commenced in the Chapel on Monday 17th October 2005 and was completed on the 5th November. The musical and visual impact of the organ in the Order's Chapel is superb and all that was hoped for.

The opening event on December 17th included the handing over of the instrument from the Association to the Brothers, blessing of the instrument and an opening recital by Association member, Michael Stewart.

We all look forward to hearing and playing this aesthetically and musically pleasing organ over the coming years.

Centennial Dinner

18 November 2005

Riccarton Park Function Centre, Christchurch

The celebrations marking the centennial of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament have included the Grand Ball, a deeply spiritual occasion and social. All events highlight a worshipping community and none more so than the Centennial Dinner held at the Function Centre, Riccarton Raceway. This is a beautiful place and ideal for the 216 people attending. The organizing committee, Mrs. Joan Adams, Mr. Barry Gadsby, Mrs Pauline Oliver and Mrs Lily Willemsen had given attention to every detail to make this a unique and special occasion.

A centennial cake was cut by Mrs Nance O'Connell and Father Hubert Hayward; Nance a parishioner since 1938 and Fr Hub the oldest Priest in the Diocese, whose father was on the building committee of the Cathedral. It was a truly memorable occasion and the Cathedral, as the mother church of the Diocese, was reaffirmed.

Schools



What a weekend! The 100 years celebration at St Anne's was an amazing occasion of rejoicing, celebration and sheer joy. Over 400 attended the Friday night celebration and Saturday morning Jubilee Mass, with 200 attending the formal dinner, and over 500 at the Sunday Mass and BBQ.

At the Saturday Centennial Mass, Father Bill Middleton spoke to us of the commitment of the people of Woolston and his real affection for the Catholic community. Sister Peter Chanel spoke of the incredible devotion of her fellow Mission Sisters over 86 years at St Anne's. The Sisters

Marriage and Family Studies



Celia and John Kennedy, who last year attended the John Paul II Institute in Melbourne completing the Graduate Diploma in Marriage and Family Studies. The Institute, part of the Lateran University in Rome, was founded in 1982 by Pope John Paul II to promote the study of the Church's teaching on marriage and the family. There are seven international campuses. Among the ten topics studied by Celia and John were Marriage in the Catholic Tradition, the Theology of the Body, and Educating in Sexuality, Marriage, Family, and Life. They hope to be able to contribute in the Diocese to education about marriage and the family.

were supported by the parish penny collection until the 1950's. Sister spoke of Mrs. Hall (Granny Hall, grandmother of the church neighbours, the Duncans) who made the Sister's lives bearable by her incredible gifts of time and food for over 20 years. Sister acknowledged that Woolston was a special place in her heart and memory and extolled the values of Catholic Education.

Michael Sweeney, representing the old pupils, spoke with deep respect and affection of his first teacher, and the fact that it was at St Anne's, at the age of six, that he met his future best friend and the love of his life, his wife Cathy. His words took us all back to the magical days of the old school yard.

Bishop John Cunneen moved from table to table at the dinner and spoke with everyone. He left the celebrations feeling like us all - better for having been a part of this amazing

celebration of faith, learning and service at St Anne's School, Woolston. *Peter Callanan, Principal*

Greymouth

John Paul II High School celebrated its Opening Mass for the year on 14 Feb with the theme of Love. Father John Adams and Father Dan O'Connor celebrated the Mass in St Patrick's Parish Church. Our School Leaders were blessed as well as the Mentors from the Senior Forms who are helping Year Nine pupils settling into the school. Mentors are Ashley Birchfield, Steven Eden, Clem Gibbens, Ashleigh Kersten, Matthew Kersten, Anna Roper, Sulianna Teasdale, Rachel Whitcombe and Kang Wei. Head Students are Ashley Birchfield and Steven Eden. Student Trustee is Anna Roper. Father Dan was farewelled at the end of Mass and thanked for all his contributions to the life of our school during the past year.



BELL, LAMB & TROTTER

FUNERAL DIRECTORS LIMITED

A Canterbury Tradition Since 1872

Ian and Suzanne Bell are delighted to have

Dominic Orr as the Catholic representative

of Bell, Lamb and Trotter Funeral Directors Limited, assisting them to provide a caring, professional service that is a unique and fitting tribute, reflecting your loved one's life, personality, beliefs and culture.

Ph 03 389 7999 Fax 03 389 9485

FERRY PARK CHAPEL, 297 FERRY ROAD, CHRISTCHURCH



Visit Our Parishes

Chatham Islands Parish

This parish is an important part of the Diocese of Christchurch. Fr. Bernard Goulding, who makes a pastoral visit four times a year, has provided the following article.

‘The pastoral plan for the Diocese is bringing to fruition a process that has been unfolding for many years, the taking of greater responsibility by the laity for the building up of the parish community. Since the last resident parish priest, Fr. Paul Duncan, left, Bruce Mills and Tim Gregory-Hunt have been leading the Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion at St. Theresa’s at Waitangi on the Chatham main Island. A dozen people attended the Christmas Vigil celebration.

On the smaller Pitt Island, Bernice Lanauze is supported by Dianne Gregory-Hunt in leading the liturgy



Many Catholic generations represented here at a gathering on Pitt Island

etc., at the Chapel of Our Lady of the Antipodese. This Christmas, with myself being there, we had 14 adults and 14 children present at midnight Mass. Home Masses were celebrated on Christmas morning and evening for older people who were unable to attend at midnight at the Chapel. With no electricity in the Chapel, candles and torch lamps provided the beautiful Christmas atmosphere. One enterprising young man wore a miner’s lamp which he usually uses for pig hunting. He kindly loaned it to the Priest. The previous Sunday, Harrison Kemp and Frano Lanauze had received Holy Communion for the first time.

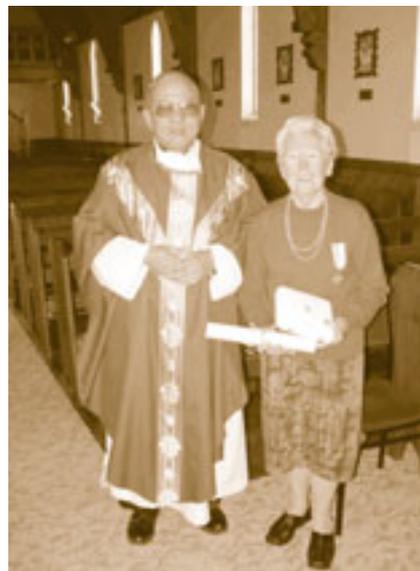
The aim is for the Priest to visit the Islands four times a year, coinciding with the school holidays, especially

Christmas and Easter. The presbytery is let out as a motel except when the priest is visiting. There are two bedrooms with all modcons. Reservations with Bruce and Vi Mills (03) 3050016. Air Chathams flights Monday, Wednesday and Friday to Wellington; Tuesday to Christchurch and Thursday to Auckland. Flight time is about two hours. Chatham Island time is about 45 minutes ahead of NZ time.’

Fairlie Parish

At the Sunday Mass on 27th November, the Parish of St Patrick’s, Fairlie, started the new liturgical year with a special celebration of its own. Parishioners had expected the Cathedral Centenary Medal to be blessed and mounted on the wall in the Church. What they did not know was that the Gallagher family, represented by three generations (Tom, Paul and Megan) was to receive the medal on behalf of all those who have served the parish – both in the past and in the present. The Medal is mounted with the words “To honour all who have served our parish”. It now hangs proudly near the entrance of the Church. There was a further surprise at hand; Miss Mary MacDonald was invited up to receive a Benemerenti Papal Medal. Fellow parishioners are very pleased that Mary’s outstanding service to St Patrick’s Parish is now acknowledged. Since 1941 she has shared her exceptional musical talent and skill as an organist. Her ongoing involvement also includes the Liturgy

Fr Michael Pui and Mary McDonald



and Altar Committees. “She is a fountain of knowledge and practical support in the Parish”, said Fr Michael Pui, the Parish Priest. The process to obtain her the medal was initiated many years earlier, but was put on hold because of the moratorium placed on Papal awards in light of the Centenary medals that were being considered for the Cathedral Centenary celebrations.

Mairehau, Our Lady of Fatima



Fr Paul

The New Year commenced with our Parish Priest becoming ‘ice-bound’. Father Paul went on duty to Antarctica for just over three weeks. The ice continent was very much in the news while he was there - both the television and newspaper reporting - a rugby match played on solid ice; a Russian icebreaker having to undergo repairs to its propeller to ensure vital supplies for the winter could be brought in and visiting American Senators assisting at Mass with Father Paul. How can our Parish provide such excitement?

It is always pleasing to see one of our young parishioners achieving success. Daryl Linton - a Catholic Cathedral College pupil and a faithful Fatima parishioner for fourteen years, has been selected to attend a training camp near Sydney for promising young ballroom dancers. At the N.Z. Junior Ballroom Championships in October, Daryl and his partner were finalists in every event they entered.

Our St Vincent de Paul Conference raised \$766 through our Christmas Angels and with \$400 raised by the Junior School children, a total of \$1,166 will be sent through the St Vincent de Paul Council to aid the flood victims of Guatemala.



Our Lady of Perpetual Help St Albans

Our vibrant Parish community has swelled over recent times with our Sunday Children's Liturgy often numbering in excess of 30 children. Fr. Jack O'Connor's 'down to earth' approach appeals to a broad range of people and his very distinctive personality captivates the young and old alike – and certainly makes for a very interesting sermon!

After an extremely good School/Parish gala held on 4th November, we are now eagerly awaiting the commencement of the first part of the alterations to the front of the Church. Meanwhile, the second part of the CAFE 11 course runs with the help of dedicated folk in the cafe approach to learning more about the Sacraments of our Catholic Faith. It has been an enriching way to relax for an hour or so in delightful company.

Methven Parish

It was a busy weekend at Methven, with Confirmation on the Saturday evening followed by Mt Somers Church closure on the Sunday. The closure and deconsecrating of the St Theresa's Church, Mt Somers as a Mass centre was something that was inevitable, and had been put off for many years. Packed into a beautifully decorated church the past and present parishioners celebrated Mass with Bishop John Cunneen, Mons. J. Harrington and Fr Frank Kennedy S.M. Then, during a luncheon in the Mt Somers Hall, many recalled the faith life of the community over the last 80 years.

Temuka Parish

We would like to say thank you to Fr. Bernard Goulding who was with us for the months of August, September and November. Fr Bernard left us after spending a couple of special days with the school children. On All Saints Day we celebrated the day with a School Mass, and on All Souls Day the senior classes went down to the cemetery to visit and pray at the graves of their deceased relatives, and our parishioners.

We welcome Fr Leslie Colaco who arrived on the 3rd November direct from the United States and will be with us over the Christmas holidays up until the end of January. He brings with him some interesting ideas of different ways things are done around the world, unfortunately we do not celebrate Thanksgiving.

On Sunday 20th November we had a school Mass, followed by a parish luncheon. It was an opportunity for all to get together before the end of the year when many head away on holidays. At this we acknowledged service to the parish by children and young adults as Altar Servers, Projectionists and Readers at weekend Masses. They were presented with a certificate and a pen as a thank you.

St Ita's, Rakaia

Recently parishioners from the Rakaia and Methven Parishes joined together for a pilgrimage visit to the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Christchurch for their Centennial Year.

Mass was celebrated in the afternoon by Monsignor James Harrington and

parishioners from both churches took an active part in the proceedings.

Following Mass, two centennial medals which had been suitably framed and mounted, were presented to each of the Parish Chairpersons. These medals are now displayed in the churches as a tribute to all parishioners who have supported their parishes over the past years.

Upper West Coast

On November 6th the combined parishes of Cobden-Rununga, Grey Valley, and Greymouth travelled to the Cathedral to celebrate the centenary of that building. They were joined there by many West Coasters now residing in Christchurch, many of whom are part of the Cantabrian ex-West Coasters group who meet regularly in ChCh. Eight Priests, all of whom have served the parishes of the West Coast, concelebrated at the Mass, and the music was provided by the parish choir from St Patrick's in Greymouth. The West Coast parishes presented the Cathedral parish with a plant to mark the occasion. The verger of the Cathedral counted 260 people in the congregation. Many old friends remembered their time on the West Coast at the light lunch held in the Music Centre following the Mass.



RETIREMENT VILLAGE

Have you visited Maryville Courts Retirement Village?

369 Manchester Street (Next to St Mary's Church) Phone 379-0357

Experience quality of life in your active retirement years ...

- Two bedroom self-contained units
- Central to city living and close to shops
- Companionship, outings and activities
- Dining facilities available
- Independent living with 24 hour security

Registered under
the Charitable
Trusts Act (1957)

Under the Patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Christchurch. It is never too early to plan ahead for a comfortable secure lifestyle. Villas available.

Open 1-4pm Monday-Friday or call 379-0357 for an appointment.





cavell leitch
law

Friendly people - Expert Advice - Awesome Service

- We will:
- help you grow and protect your assets
 - update your will
 - discuss enduring powers of attorney
 - form your family trust
 - help you solve a legal case or represent you at Court

For further information contact
Michael Sweeney, Mark Callaghan,
Clare O'Neill

Cavell Leitch Pringle and Boyle
Level 15, Clarendon Tower
Cnr Oxford Terrace & Worcester Street

Telephone (03) 379 9940
Fax (03) 379 2408
Email cavell@clpb.co.nz, www.cavell.co.nz

God is Love

(Deus Caritas Est) and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 1 John 4:16

It is almost a year since the death of Pope John Paul and the election of Pope Benedict XVI. In those Easter days, our favourite TV entertainments were set aside. We spent hours watching and waiting, waking and waiting again. Then, at last, where there was smoke, there is Pentecost fire. In the months since, we have seen and heard the Holy Spirit in a new teacher evangelizing with unexpected gentleness and deceptively gentle power. We have heard the Gospel of Jesus proclaimed afresh by a new Peter.

We were hopeful as we waited in every part of the Church to hear Pope Benedict preach. In his first homily, he assured us that we were not alone. "We are a part of the community of the "friends of God." "God is with us" and as a result, "the Church is alive!"

In these words, Pope Benedict reveals the conviction that inspires and sustains him as a disciple of Jesus. We are not 'alive' because of any energy we might muster. We are alive because Jesus is alive. The Church is not of our making. The community of faith is God's creation and its growth is the work of God. Our new Pope suggested that we had evidence of this reality: no human agency could have created the gathering we witnessed in St Peter's Square in those April days.

We noted with joy that the young had gathered to outnumber the old. What had drawn them to this bastion of Catholic orthodoxy? We were surprised that they had come to mourn the passing of the one who was so often accused of raining on their parades of 'post-religious freedom'. With precision and clarity, Pope Benedict addressed the heart of the issue:

"Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us?"

Pope Benedict seems to suspect that his

hearers might think there is no adequate answer to these meaning-of-life-in-Christ questions, so he responds quickly quoting Pope John Paul II's first words as Pope in 1978. With one voice two popes now proclaim:

"If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.

This exhortation touches our hearts, since divine design has created the human heart to be deeply drawn, driven even, to intimacy with the Creator. Yet human history has become the tale of

"We are alive because Jesus is alive. The Church is not of our making. The community of faith is God's creation and its growth is the work of God."

our pathetic attempts to play games of resistance with and without God. More often than not our struggles with erotic love are the arena for this tragedy.

In one of his first public addresses in 1978 Pope John Paul II spoke of the difficulty that humans have in accepting their bodies as an essential component of the human condition. In the name of 'freedom' we begin to live as animals, or, with equally serious consequences, we seek to abandon our bodies and strive to be angels. Either way we are resisting the gift of life as embodied images of God.

Pope Benedict takes the reality of human love and life in Christ a step further in his first encyclical "God is Love" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 25 January 2006). In this letter, he entices us into awareness of the

divine attributes of the human experience of erotic love.

It is no coincidence that the language of erotic love is the preferred voice of the mystics as they tell of their intimacy with God. While "eros" may need to be "disciplined and purified" it provides the reflective human person with a most powerful indicator of their personal health and happiness. If my human experience of intimacy does not deliver what it promises, then I may be ready to hear the voice of God leading me to a truly life-giving experience of love, which "is a foretaste of the pinnacle of the existence for which our whole being yearns." This yearning is satisfied in the marriage of eros and agape: no longer a self-seeking lust, but life-giving love, expressed in a human body, and fully the image of the Creator.

The first part of the encyclical is a necessary preparation for the second section in which the pope reflects on the expression of love in charity. True Christian charity is the natural and inevitable overflowing of personal experience of the love of God in Jesus:

"Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Since God has first loved us, love is now no longer a mere "command": it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.

This is the heart of the faith of Pope Benedict. This is the faith of the Church. God is love. Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. As one surprised journalist found herself writing: "this encyclical "is the work of a lover, a true lover of God."

*John C. O'Connor
Parish Priest, Our Lady of Victories,
Sockburn*

Inform

A quarterly published by the Catholic Bishop of Christchurch.

Deadline for the next issue will be 20th May 2006

Send material to

The Editor,

252 A Ilam Road, Christchurch 8005,

Phone 03 351-3291, Fax 03 351-9912, Email: mjdoyle@paradise.net.nz

Diocesan Web page: www.chch.catholic.org.nz