

Risen



Christ

Fourth Sunday of Lent - Year A

14 & 15 March 2026

The Catholic Communities of Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham & St Francis Xavier, Montmorency



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

Communal Rite of Forgiveness (Reconciliation)

- **Monday 23rd March,**
7pm at Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham
- **Tuesday 24th March,**
7pm at St Francis Xavier, Montmorency

Dear Parishioners and
Friends of Risen Christ Parish,

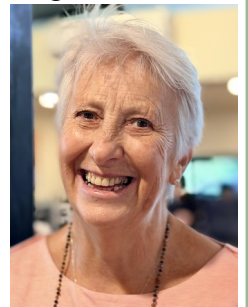
As part of our Lenten Journey for 2026 - we are offering two opportunities for this Communal Rite of Forgiveness along with our grade 4 students and their families for a prayerful time of reconciliation together in preparation for Holy Week and our Easter celebrations.



Parish Ministry Gatherings Great News!

On Thursday night we held the first workshop for the Prayer and Worship Ministry as part of our Pastoral Plan, and it was a wonderful evening of reflection and conversation.

Margaret Heyhoe was elected with unanimous support - or did she just volunteer - cannot remember, and her task for the next 12 months is to help coordinate the many ministries that fall within this Pastoral Plan for Risen Christ Parish.



Parishioners gathered together to share ideas, hopes and practical ways we can continue to deepen the prayer life and liturgical experience of our community. It was encouraging to see people generously offering their time, insights and faith as we work together to strengthen this important pillar of parish life. Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed so thoughtfully to the discussion.

Now we hope that this same energy is transferred to these next 2 gatherings of Hospitality and Social Justice (naturally, we are looking for a coordinator for both).

You're invited to join!

We invite you to join us at 7pm for a cuppa, followed by a 7:30pm meeting start on Thursday 19th March.

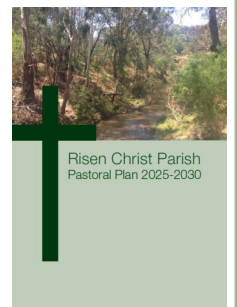
Hospitality - OLHC:

Transport to Mass, Gardening .
Funeral Hospitality and After
Mass Hospitality (OLHC & SFX).

Social Justice - RCP Office:

St Vincent de Paul, Kadasig,
Refugee Assistance, Parkview
Retirement Village, ASRC Food
Collection, Days for Girls and
Social Justice Committee.

We look forward to coming together as a community in service and mission.



**Dear Parishioners,
for the
4th & 5th
weeks of Lent,
the
Sacrament of Anointing
will be offered
to everyone
at the conclusion
of our Parish
Celebrations
of the Eucharist.**

*This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community.
We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.*



PARISH TEAM & INFORMATION

OUR PEOPLE & OUR CONTACT DETAILS



Parish Priest

Michael Sierakowski - Moderator

Michael.Sierakowski@cam.org.au

Parish Office

all correspondence to:
86 Mayona Road,
Montmorency Vic 3094
9435 4742

RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au

Kate Kogler:

Parish Secretary
Tue-Fri 9am-3pm

Peter Williams:

Safeguarding Officer
RisenChrist.ChildSafety@cam.org.au

Volunteers

Marisa Capuana: Various

Kerry Mash: Wed & Fri 10am-3pm

www.melbcatholic.org/risenchristparish

Facebook: [Risen Christ Parish](https://www.facebook.com/RisenChristParish)

Risen Christ Parish Bulletin items:

RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au

Schools

Holy Trinity Primary School

Principal: Vince Bumpstead: 9431 0888

principal@htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

www.htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School

Principal: Rudy Vail: 9439 7824

school@olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

www.olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

St Francis Xavier Primary School

Principal: Jo Nolen: 9435 8474

principal@sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

www.sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

Risen Christ Parish Calendar of Events

Saturday 14

12:00pm Baptisms: Harry, Felicity Montmorency

6:00pm Mass Montmorency

Sunday 15

8:30am Mass Montmorency

10:00am Mass Eltham

12:00pm Baptisms: Hudson, Mae, Alfred
Isa, Damien Eltham

Monday 16

2:00pm Mass St Vincent's Care

7:30pm RCIA Class Eltham

Tuesday 17 - St Patrick's Day

9:30am Mass & SFX Yr 6 Montmorency

10:00am Rosary Montmorency

10:00am Craft Group Montmorency

11:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry Eltham

2:00pm Bethany Small Church Community Montmorency

Wednesday 18

6:30am Meditation Montmorency

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Eltham

1:00pm Kairos Small Church Community Montmorency

Thursday 19

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Montmorency

10:30am ASRC Food Collection Montmorency

2:30pm Meditation Eltham

7:00pm Parish Ministry Gathering
Hospitality Eltham

7:00pm Parish Ministry Gathering
Social Justice Parish Office

Friday 20

9:30am Mass Eltham

Saturday 21

6:00pm Mass Montmorency

Sunday 22

8:30am Mass Montmorency

10:00am Mass Eltham

Monday 23

7:00pm Communal Rite of Forgiveness
Sacrament of Reconciliation Eltham

Tuesday 24

9:30am Mass Montmorency

10:00am Rosary Montmorency

RECONCILIATION

available half an hour before
any weekday or weekend Parish Mass.

Collections: 15 & 22 Feb 2026

Thanksgiving	Cash	\$1,545.70
	Electronic	\$6,800.17
Presbytery	Cash	\$1,392.85
	Electronic	\$300.00

Thanksgiving Offering

Month	Total
December	\$18,205.17
January	\$20,974.17
February	\$20,922.62

Thanksgiving

Dear Parishioners,

Following is a list of ways in which you can give towards the running of our Parish (left to right):

A) EFTPOS terminals

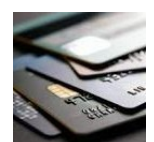
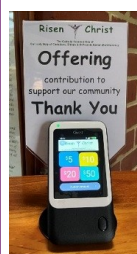
B) scan the QR code (<https://bit.ly/45ifhRp>) & donate to any Parish finance campaign including Thanksgiving, Presbytery Offerings, baptisms etc

C) cash/coins in the collection baskets at each church

D) thanksgiving envelopes

E) set up payments from credit/debit cards/bank account

Thank you for your generous support,
Michael



Gospel: John 9:1-41

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?' 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered, 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.'

'As long as the day lasts I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.'

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (a name that means 'sent'). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' The man himself said, 'I am the man.' So they said to him, 'Then how do your eyes come to be open?' 'The man called Jesus' he answered 'made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I could see.' They asked, 'Where is he?' 'I don't know' he answered.

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath.' Others said, 'How could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' 'He is a prophet' replied the man.

However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, 'Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?' His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don't know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.' His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough; ask him.'

So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, 'Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner.' The man answered, 'I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?' At this they hurled abuse at him: 'You can be his disciple,' they said 'we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from.' The man replied, 'Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing.' 'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir,' the man replied 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.' The man said, 'Lord, I believe, and worshipped him.'

Jesus said: 'It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind.'

Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, 'We are not blind, surely?' Jesus replied:

'Blind? If you were, you would not be guilty, but since you say, "We see", your guilt remains.'



Reflection: Break Open the Word 2026

Last week, WATER. This week, LIGHT. Next week, LIFE. Three great Lenten gospels.

Light is a powerful symbol both at Eastertime and in our baptism. The Easter Vigil will begin around the holy bonfire with the lighting of the Paschal candle, symbol of the light of Christ. Then, in our baptism rites, each candidate is presented with a candle lit from the Easter candle.



A different way to see: Ignatian contemplations for all

Ignatian spirituality invites believers to enter the gospel stories with their senses, to be there with Christ in the scenes of his life and death. But for two legal blind, Ignatian-inspired religious, when their own formation encouraged them to ‘picture’ Jesus surrounded by thronging crowds, or to ‘see’ the landscapes he walked through, they found they needed to reframe St Ignatius’ method.

Fr Just Glyn SJ and Sr Mary O’Shannessy FCJ both grew up navigating the world without relying primarily on vision. Now, drawing on their personal experience and pastoral practice, they have adapted Ignatian contemplations so they can be prayed by people with diverse sensory and cognitive experiences, including those who may not read or process language easily. Their adaptations have evolved into an ongoing project, *We Walk By Faith: Accessible Spiritual Contemplation for All*, a series of written and audio contemplations.

‘The point is that we’re trying to open these things to people who wouldn’t necessarily read the exercises or pray the exercises themselves,’ Fr Justin says. ‘We’ve actually had to reimagine the stuff for ourselves to pray it properly. So what would that be like for other people? And can we make this something that will be useful for more people?’

Fr Justin, a Jesuit civil and canon lawyer, describes his own prayer life as one rooted in non-visual senses. ‘I tend to work a bit on physical senses like smell and hearing,’ he says. ‘I find smells instantly evocative; a smell will bring me back to a place that I haven’t been in in decades.’

Sr Mary, a retired teacher and pastoral care coordinator, is more about the internal and the interpersonal. ‘I don’t concentrate so much on the other senses,’ she explains. ‘I concentrate particularly on hearing and seeing my inner feelings and how I react, and on picking up vibes from other people.’

The obvious friendship between the two and a mutual respect play a big part in why the partnership works. Sr Mary jokes that she has some peripheral vision and Fr Justin has, with the help of telescope glasses, some central vision, between them they have ‘normal’ sight.

Their work is equally complementary: contemplations from the narrative passages of the synoptic gospels are divided into sub-categories: ‘Rest a while’ (Fr Justin’s shorter, descriptive pieces) and ‘Stay a while’ (Sr Mary’s lengthier, free-flowing pieces). They offer what they describe as ‘a gentle and accessible introduction to the gospel scene,’ followed by a set of thought-provoking questions to aid prayer and conversation with Jesus.

‘Ignatian spirituality grounds the story in something that we can understand instead of talking about things that we may not

know,’ Sr Mary says. She invites the reader to become a character in the story, giving as an example of how she might do that [in] the story of the haemorrhaging woman seeking to be healed by Jesus. “‘I’m in the crowd, and you know, it’s really crowded. I’m bumping into everyone, and it’s hot and sweaty. I don’t want to get away from Jesus. I want to hear what he’s saying. And there’s this woman who keeps on pushing up forward, trying to get to Jesus. What is she doing?’” - that sort of thing,’ she says. ‘I might be the woman who is touching Jesus’ cloak and I’m frightened, and I can get into that.’

‘I assume you’re just you,’ says Fr Justin, explaining that he writes as though the reader is there with Jesus. In one example, from Matthew (4:1-11), he writes of the temptation of Jesus, where ‘we’ are in the wilderness with him. After a simplified retelling of that passage, readers are encouraged to ponder what Jesus is going through and how they deal with feeling alone.

The guiding questions are far from trivial, and the reader still has to put in the work to answer them. But the whole project is welcoming and respectful of the different ways people contemplate God. Its accessibility is further widened through the ongoing recording of each contemplation into mini podcasts, accompanied by stunning illustrations by artist and Loreto Sister Susan Daily CJ. Fr Justin has engagingly voiced his, while Sr Mary’s are still in the pipeline.

Their work challenges the way disability is seen, but also brings up personal issues. They recall how certain Scriptures, particularly healing miracles, can be alienating and even painful for people with disabilities. They point to the Gospel of John, chapter 9, where the disciples assume a man’s blindness is a punishment for sin. ‘Those kinds of readings of disability as being associated with sinfulness or problem - for those of us who have disabilities, that stuff can be a text of terror. “Well, you’re blind. Why aren’t you healed? What did you do?”’ Fr Justin says.

Both have faced the assumption that their blindness is a problem to be solved or something to be pitied. They separately had immense difficulties because of it. Fr Justin describes growing up in Apartheid-era South Africa as an unbelievably brutal time. Yet he also gained payoffs, such as an exceptional memory and a talent for music and languages.

Sr Mary’s entry into religious life was a battle to prove blindness would not hamper her. It gave her a unique perspective and a deep well of empathy for others on the margins, and now she says she would not change a thing. ‘I’d have to think carefully if I were to ask for my full sight, because this is the way I am, and it affects everything,’ Sr Mary says.

She worked throughout her career with children and adults with disabilities, and looks back on those times with gratitude. ‘People with disabilities [are] a tremendous gift, because they call forth help from other people. You know, there’s an awful lot of good in them, and I don’t think we always realise that.’

Disability is part of the human package, Fr Justin says, but society’s obsession with ‘perfect’ bodies can give rise to the notion that some lives are worth less than others. ‘Everybody’s limited,’ he says. ‘You don’t get perfection this side of death. Jesus had to be born at a particular time, place and gender - disabilities are just part of those packages of contingency of what it means to be a person.’

These insights have coloured *We Walk By Faith*, with its express mission to ensure others are not excluded from developing a rich spiritual life. Through their writing and podcasting, Sr Mary and Fr Justin are opening the doors of Ignatian spirituality, ensuring that the ability to ‘picture the scene’ is available to everyone, regardless of how they see.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/a-different-way-to-see-ignatian-contemplations-for-all>



Pope Leo XIV prays for leaders to 'abandon projects of death' in peace prayer video

Pope Leo XIV prayed for world leaders to 'abandon projects of death' in a video message released by the Vatican on 5 March, calling on people around the world to pray for peace.

'Today we lift up our prayer for peace in the world, asking that nations renounce weapons and choose the path of dialogue and diplomacy,' Pope Leo said in the

video.

'Help us understand that true security does not come from control fuelled by fear, but from trust, justice and solidarity among peoples,' he added.

The four-minute video, published by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network as part of the Pope's monthly prayer intention for March, shows Pope Leo holding an olive branch inside the Church of San Pellegrino in Vatican City.

'Disarm our hearts of hatred, resentment and indifference, so we may become instruments of reconciliation,' the Pope prayed.

At the start of each month, the Pope releases a video offering a prayer for a specific intention, inviting the faithful to join him.

The selection of March for a prayer intention focused on disarmament and peace had been announced in 2025 but takes on added significance following the

outbreak of the US/Israel-Iran war earlier this week.

'Lord, enlighten the leaders of the nations, so they may have the courage to abandon project of death, halt the arms race, and place the lives of the most vulnerable at the centre,' Pope Leo prayed. 'May the nuclear threat never again dictate the future of humanity.'

In the video, Pope Leo also repeated the words with which he began his pontificate from the loggia of St Peter's Basilica on 8 May: 'Peace be with you,' a phrase drawn from the Gospel of John 20:19, which Jesus speaks to his disciples after the Resurrection.

'Ord of Life, you shaped every human being in your image and likeness. We believe you created us for communion, not for war, for fraternity, not for destruction, the Pope prayed.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/pope-leo-xiv-prays-for-disarmament-and-peace>



Vatican unveils initial synod findings on digital culture and priest formation

The Vatican has released the first two final reports from its Synod of Bishops study groups, offering recommendations that span the Church's digital engagement and the formation of future priests. One study groups proposes the creation of a new Pontifical Commission for Digital Culture and New Technologies to guide the Church's presence in online spaces, while another

outlines updated guidelines for seminarians - including a call for greater involvement of women to aid their formation.

The General Secretariat of the Synod published the study group reports on 3 March, and will publish 13 more in the coming days and weeks.

The study groups were established by Pope Francis following the first session of the synod on synodality in October 2023. Twelve groups were originally formed to examine issues raised at that assembly, including women's participation in the Church, the role of papal nuncios and the liturgy in a synodal perspective.

The groups, composed of cardinals, bishops, priests and lay experts from both inside and outside the Vatican, had originally been asked to submit their conclusions by June 2025.

After the death of Pope Francis, Pope

Leo XIV extended the deadline and requested the reports be made public to ensure transparency and accountability.

The first report contains recommendations on navigating the Church's presence in digital spaces, including a proposal for a Vatican office or commission to monitor emerging theological, pastoral and canonical questions; prepare guidelines and training strategies for bishops, priests, religious and laypeople; and support bishops' conferences in integrating digital mission into their pastoral plans.

The 26-page document reflected on feedback gathered from Catholics throughout the global synod process, citing clergy who said they felt 'ill-equipped to navigate digital spaces'.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/vatican-unveils-initial-synod-findings-on-digital-culture-and-priest-formation>



Caritas Australia warns of escalating humanitarian emergency in Lebanon

Caritas Australia is urgently calling for support as a rapid escalation in hostilities has triggered a major humanitarian crisis across Lebanon, forcing tens of thousands of people from their homes in a matter of hours.

On 2 March, widespread airstrikes hit multiple regions including Baalbek-Hermel, Bekaa, Beirut's southern border,

South Lebanon, Nabatiyeh, Saida and Tyre. The sudden escalation has caused mass displacement, following evacuation orders across 56 villages. More than 32,000 people have sought safety in 191 activated shelters, many of which are already at or beyond capacity. It is estimated that more than a million people are likely to be displaced as the conflict continues.

In a statement, Caritas Lebanon said, 'The humanitarian consequences of this escalation are severe. Thousands of civilians have been forced to flee their homes, essential services are disrupted, and many communities are cut off from basic assistance. The resulting fear, trauma and uncertainty have a deep impact across entire communities already strained by years of hardship.'

Official reports continue to indicate rising civilian casualties, with more than 50 people killed and over 150 wounded

in the initial waves of bombardment. Roads out of conflict-affected areas are severely congested, complicating both evacuations and the delivery of aid.

Caritas Lebanon has begun operating under a state of emergency and has mobilised teams across the country. Community kitchens have begun providing hot meals; medical mobile clinics are operating in areas hosting displaced families; and preparations are underway to expand shelter support, health coverage and distribution of essential items, including mattresses, blankets and ready-to-eat food. However, with Lebanon already facing deep funding cuts to humanitarian operations, resources are being rapidly outpaced by need.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/caritas-australia-warns-of-escalating-humanitarian-emergency-in-lebanon>

Roster for week ending 15 Mar 2026	
Bacani, Brian	W6:00
Bucknell Family	H10:00
Capuana, Marisa	CLNR
Capuana, Marisa	W6:00
Cseh, Nika	C10:00
Dunell, Linda	ASE
Dunell, Linda	E10:00
Haines, Jan-Marie	E10:00
Mallia, Anthony	E10:00
McKenna, John	CLNR
McKinley, Michael	W8:30
Ramsdale, John	W8:30
Reardon, Kathy	E10:00
Rigg Family	PRSE
Said, Marie	ASRC
Said, Mike	ASRC
Scully, Greg	R10:00
Skipper, Patsy	LoW-01 Thu
Smith, Neil	E10:00
Williams, Anne	PRYR
Williams, Peter	PRYR
Roster for week ending 22 Mar 2026	
Armstrong, Miranda	E10:00
Capuana, Marisa	LoW-01 Thu
Donnellan, Denise	E10:00
Drljo, Frank	CLNR
Furtado, Lorraine	C10:00
Kenny, Michael	W6:00
Kulkens, Mark	W6:00
Lodi, Liduina	H10:00
Reardon, Kathy	ASE
Reardon, Kathy	E10:00
Renny, Teresa	H10:00
Renny, Tom	H10:00
Rough Family	PRSE
Scully, Greg	E10:00
Stone, Nan	CLNR
Sullivan, Frances	W8:30
Taylor, Trish	PRYR
Williams, Peter	E10:00
Wood, Marie	W8:30
Zerjal, Frida	CLNR
Zylstra, Diane	R10:00
ASE = Altar Society @ Eltham; C = Commentator; CLKR = PowerPoint Clicker @ SFX; CLNR = Cleaner @ SFX; R = Reader; E = Eucharistic Minister; H = Hospitality; LoW-01 = Liturgy of the Word with Communion @ SFX; PRSE = Pilgrim Rosary Statue @ Eltham; M = Music; W = Minister of the Word	



*Let us pray for all those who have gone
before us marked with the sign of faith ...*

For those in need of **healing**, remembering especially:

Darby (13 years old),

*Stephen Andrew, Des Arneson, Bill Boyce, Penny Boyce, Ruth Decker,
Nora Edmond, Pat Hosmer, Siobhan Lappin, Alice Ley, Mary Luttick,
Jarrod Mizzi, Cindy & Ed Morrissey, Bernard Murray,
Regina Roszczenko (mother of Liz Gray), Phil Rovtar, Audrey Tunks,
Jeanne Vanderwert, Brian Witten*

For those whose **anniversaries** are at this time:

*Joyce Arundell, Isabelle Borg, Terry Boyd, Jack Feil, John Frawley,
Mary Greenwood, Lawrence Gatt, Frank Hermans, Joyce Jakubik,
Peter Lamers, Margaret McKinley, Angelina Monteiro, Michael Morabito,
Carol Said, Paul Andre Said, Terry Peter Said, Gianluca Salvitti,
Ben Vincent, Denise Wraight*

To include an anniversary please contact Parish Office
9435 4742 or RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au.

Prayers of the Faithful for 15 March Fourth Sunday of Lent

Leader: Inspire us, Lord, to be generous in spirit, that we may sow seeds of hope and nurture a future where all may share in the fruits of your creation. We ask this as we pray.

As a faith community may we share the light of the Gospel with all who are struggling to recognise good from evil, truth from lies, and selfless love from self-serving activity.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Loving God, give us a spirit of respect, that we may honour each person who enters our lives, especially those with physical or emotional limitations. Help us to see the dignity and gifts within every person. Encourage each of us to use our own talents and abilities to build up and enrich our community. May our words and actions reflect kindness, understanding, and compassion.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord, lift up all those who are seeking to enter your Church this Easter. Open their hearts to recognise your presence in their lives. Grant them clarity of faith, courage in their journey, and a deep awareness of your love calling them forward. May your Holy Spirit guide them gently, strengthen them in moments of doubt and fill them with joy as they draw closer to you.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For insight and openness to care for our environment. Lord, help us to see the damage that has been done to our air, water, and land and guide us in developing policies that will protect the environment from further harm.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord of Life, you shaped every human being in your image and likeness. We believe you created us for communion, not for war, for fraternity, not for destruction. You who greeted your disciples saying, 'Peace be with you', grant us and the world the gift of your peace and the strength to make it a reality.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord, embrace and support all who are experiencing illness and those who care for them, especially those in our parish communities. We ask that you bring them your healing, comfort and peace.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who have died recently, and those whose anniversaries occur at this time, including *Joyce Arundell, Isabelle Borg, Terry Boyd, Jack Feil, John Frawley, Mary Greenwood, Lawrence Gatt, Frank Hermans, Joyce Jakubik, Peter Lamers, Margaret McKinley, Angelina Monteiro, Michael Morabito, Carol Said, Paul Andre Said, Terry Peter Said, Gianluca Salvitti, Ben Vincent & Denise Wraight*. Also, for those who have no one else to pray for them, that they may be welcomed into God's eternal home.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Jesus, won't you cleanse our blind eyes? Wash away the mud and move us from unseeing souls to believers? From bystanders to disciples, walkers in darkness to lamps for your light. Let our souls see! We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen

Regime change would remove a cruel and despotic central authority; it might also lead to chaos with unpredictable consequences for the people of Iran and for the wider region / **By John McHugo and Diana Darke**

The ghosts of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran has exported terrorism and has a revolutionary ideology that aims to unite the Muslim world behind it, Sunnis as well as Shi'i. It denies legitimacy of any kind to the State of Israel and has encouraged Holocaust denial. It is a tyrannical regime that kills its own citizens. What's not to like about regime change?

Iran's constitution gives the religious establishment a stranglehold on politics. The Supreme Leader (or "Guardian Jurist") who heads this establishment can veto candidates from standing in elections and appoints the holder of many key offices. After Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who ruled the Islamic Republic for nearly 40 years, was killed in an Israeli airstrike, Mojtaba Khamenei, 56, the late ayatollah's second son, was confirmed as his successor by the Council of Experts. This assembly of senior clerics can strike down legislation. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (the IRGC) is directly responsible to the Supreme Leader and protects the revolution. It is estimated to have 190,000 active personnel and 400,000 reservists. During the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988 teenage members of its Baseej militia walked across minefields to clear the way for the army, carrying a symbolic shroud in their kit. They were told they were on their way to Paradise. Later generations of slightly older Baseej have shown themselves willing to shoot protesters dead. Many are recruited from the left-behinds of Iranian society, and had little sympathy for those demonstrating against the compulsory wearing of the hijab. The IRGC also has a big stake in the country's economy, and it would be naïve not to expect the proceeds to be used to provide privileges for its troops. Corruption? Remember we are dealing with ideologies for whom the end justifies the means. Despite the mullahs' best endeavours - or maybe because of them - there have been fundamental changes in Iranian society since the revolution in 1979. More women than men now graduate from university, leading to a well-educated female population that is refusing to breed at population replacement level, despite government incentives: ironically, a consequence of the mullahs' own policy of spreading education. Though ethnic minorities are usually blended into the general population in the cities, many are concentrated in

border areas: the Kurds in the west, the Baluch in the south-east, the Azeris in the north-west, Turkmen in the north-east and Arabs in the oil-rich south-west. The government registers all children born to Muslim parents as Muslim, which effectively masks the true personal beliefs of the younger generation - some of whom have turned away from religion in disgust at the Islamic Republic's regime. It does not, however, collect ethnic details in its census data so figures are of necessity estimates. But the World Population Review 2026 gives a 51-61 per cent core of Persians, 16-24 per cent Azeris, 7-10 per cent Kurds, 6 per cent Lurs, 6-8 per cent Mazandarani, 2-3 per cent Arabs, 2 per cent Baluch, and 2 per cent Turkmen and other Turkic groups.

"We never did Islam the way they wanted us to," was a refrain Diana heard when she was last in Iran. The empty mosques bore witness, serving largely as places for men to sleep on the carpets during the lunch hour. Though its 92 million people are from many different ethnic backgrounds there is a widely shared cultural identity. The joke is that in every Iranian home there are two books, Hafez and the Qur'an. One is read and the other unread. Hafez, the fourteenth-century national poet, represents the rich complexities of Iran's identity. His tomb in Shiraz, Iran's most liberal city, is a place of pilgrimage, with streams of devotees stroking his alabaster sarcophagus. His poetry, besides lauding the joys of love and wine, also targets religious hypocrisy. "Preachers who display their piety in prayers and pulpit," he wrote 600 years ago, "behave differently when they are alone. Why do those who decree repentance do so little of it?"

It is an open secret that clerics and businessmen enrich themselves despite sanctions. When Diana lacked the cash to buy a rug in Isfahan, the dealer simply rang a friend in Dubai and processed a supposedly banned credit card transaction. The calls to the Iranian people from President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu that they are creating for conditions for them to rise up and take their freedom into their own hands are likely to prove hollow unless Israel and the US can remove the IRGC. So long as it can coordinate, the IRGC will carry out its sworn duty to defend the Islamic revolution. If its communications structure is destroyed, expect it to dissolve into gangsterism to

keep control of its assets privileges. Even with the boots of the IDF on the ground, Israel has failed to remove Hamas from Gaza after killing over 70,000 people, not counting those buried under the rubble. Netanyahu and Trump appear to have no intention of risking the lives of Israeli and American soldiers by sending them into action against the IRGC.

The regime has made sure there is no united opposition. If the central authority were to collapse, it could trigger a significant splintering in specific regions with historical grievances. The Kurds, who are concentrated along Iran's western borders with Iraq and Turkey, are the most organised and potent ethnic opposition. A power vacuum could see a resurgence of other movements seeking independence.

Iran is the only state in the world with a constitution underpinned by an extreme interpretation of Twelver Shi'i theology (*Velayet-e Faqih*, a theory of Islamic government developed by Ayatollah Khomeini that effectively transferred the political power of the state to senior clerics). By assassinating Khamenei, the Israelis and the Americans have opened the door to the possibility of a fanatical response. Before Iranian missiles targeted the Arab Gulf States, there had been something of a rapprochement between Iran and the leading Sunni Arab powers. That is now in the dustbin of history, as is Iran's hope to lead a Sunni-Shi'i alliance.

The US and Britain removed the democratically elected prime minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953 because he nationalised the Iranian oil industry. Previously the Treasury in Whitehall had received more money from Iranian oil than the Iranian government. In 1941, Britain and the USSR had installed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as a puppet under the exigencies of the Second World War, overthrowing his strongman father Reza Pahlavi whom Britain had imposed on Iran in 1925. Going further back, Britain and Tsarist Russia came close to partitioning Iran in the years leading up to the First World War. Earlier still, Britain had defended a much resented tobacco monopoly in Iran in 1890.

If Netanyahu and Trump bring chaos to Iran, the scene is set for anti-western ghosts to arise from the past.

John McHugo's books include *A Concise History of Sunnis and Shi'is* (Saqi); **Diana Darke's** latest book is *Islamesque: The Forgotten Craftsmen Who Built Europe's Medieval Monuments* (Hurst).



1. What is a Synod?

A Synod is a moment when the Church deliberately pauses to listen, pray, and discern together. It is not simply a meeting or a conference, but a spiritual process rooted in faith that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church today. In a Synod, we ask not only “What do we think?” but more importantly, “What is God asking of us at this moment in our mission?”

2. Where does the word “Synod” come from?

The word *Synod* comes from the Greek *syn-hodos*, meaning “walking together on the road.” This reminds us that the Christian life is never meant to be lived alone. Faith is a shared journey, where we support one another, listen to one another, and discern together how best to follow Christ.

3. Synodality is not new

Synodality is not a modern invention. From the earliest days of the Church, Christians gathered to pray, listen, and discern together. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Church faced difficult questions and resolved them not through power struggles, but through prayer, dialogue, and trust in the Holy Spirit.

4. A Synod is not a parliament

The Church is not a democracy where truth is decided by majority vote. A Synod is not about winning arguments or pushing agendas. Instead, it is a spiritual process of listening deeply — to God, to Scripture, to tradition, and to one another — so that decisions are shaped by faith and mission, not ideology.

5. Why listening matters in the Church

Listening is not a sign of weakness. In the Christian tradition, listening is an act of humility and faith. We believe that God can speak through the experiences, joys, and struggles of His people. Synodality reminds us that listening is a form of love and a path to wisdom.



Congratulations to all who celebrate their sacraments this weekend:

Saturday, 14th March, 2026

St Francis Xavier, Montmorency, 12:00pm

Felix Nathan Larosa

Baptism

Thomas Noel Larosa

Baptism

Felicity Rose Murray

Baptism

Harry William Murray

Baptism

Sunday, 15th March, 2026

Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham, 12:00pm

Alfred Jack Buchanan

Baptism

Isla Patricia Buchanan

Baptism

Mae Joan Buchanan

Baptism

Hannah Mia Hobbs

Baptism

Hunter Harvey Hobbs

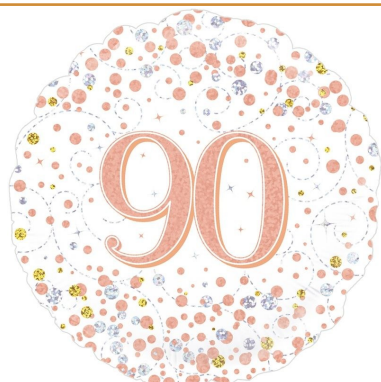
Baptism

Damien Anthony Minutolo

Baptism

Hudson Tate Scarce

Baptism



**Happiest of Birthday
wishes and
many blessings to
Jill McShane**

12 March 2026

