



The Carpenter

Building our Parish Community

No. 3 January - February 2026

Diocesan Formation Gathering - Shepparton

On 11 October the Diocesan Formation Gathering Day was held in Shepparton. Fr. Vijay, Oliver & Lisa Raschke, Eleanor Macnamara, Max Rankin and Victor Nduka attended this extremely worthwhile day. Entitled 'Building Communities of Belonging', the day offered a keynote speaker in Dr. Paul Sharkey, workshops, round robin dialogues and a plenary session, all interspersed with calls to the Holy Spirit in song, ... and a lovely lunch.

Dr. Paul linked his family history of early Irish settlers around the Elmore area and an almost total immersion in Irish & Catholic upbringing with the way family works these days. Faith & Church are no longer the foundation of people's lives. He made it clear that we are in a new era now, where we can see community building as a challenge or an opportunity. Patterns of the past are no longer the way forward. He said there has been a break in transmission in recent generations, and we need a new conduit. This new conduit must be synodal (working together), missionary and outgoing to find a path forward.

Fr. Junray from St. Kilian's Bendigo talked about how his parish has adopted an Intentional and Invitational method where they aim to make all people feel accepted and welcome. He had great ideas and stressed that how we make people feel is what matters.

The Echuca parish spoke about their 'Men Alive' Saturday morning group where men of the parish have grown in faith and participation through prayer, discussion, companionship and a light breakfast.



Photo from Diocesan website

There were six Workshops and each participant chose one to attend. Subjects included learning from others' experiences, how to Build Communities of Belonging - in general terms, for young people, for children & families, in Parish - School partnerships and in essentials such as welcome, hospitality and belonging.

Overall the group came away feeling invigorated, optimistic that we can make a difference and with quite a lot of new ideas that will be discussed and we hope that many will be implemented over time in our Parish.

St. Joseph's Parish 150th Anniversary in 2026

Next year we will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph's Catholic Parish in Benalla. Yes, it's actually the 150th! This milestone deserves celebrating!

A Committee has been formed with approx. twelve parishioners with a variety of strengths and the first meeting was very productive. Discussion included suggestions for how to celebrate, our aims, time-lines, budget, and much more.

The first thing we hope for is a big banner along the fence to announcing our year of 150th celebrations.

ST. JOSEPH'S PARISH BENALLA

Parish Priest:

Fr Vijay Bandanadam

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Office Hours

Tuesday to Friday 10am to 4 pm

Office Staff

Secretary - Michelle Cooke

Admin Officer - Cath Donehue

FCJ Sister

Sr. Liz

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Child Safe Officers

Xavier O'Kane

Cath Duncombe

Parish Pastoral Council

Chair - Cath Duncombe

Parish Finance Committee

Chair - James Flynn

Mass Times

Benalla

Saturday 6 pm, Sunday 9.30 am.

Week days Tuesday - Friday 9.15 am

Thoona

3rd Sunday of each month at 12 noon

Cooinda 3rd Wednesday of month

Estia 2nd Wednesday of month

Morrie Evans 2nd Tuesday of month

Reconciliation by appointment

Baptism Preparation

Next date: Contact Michelle at the Office for latest information

What's Coming Up in January - February

In this section we hope to give you all the important dates for the following two months, with details as they become available.

JANUARY

Tuesday 6th	Epiphany 'Jubilee Year - Pilgrims of Hope' ends with the Closing of the Holy Door at the St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.
Wednesday 7th	Low Impact Exercise Group
Friday 9th	Benediction & Rosary
Saturday 10th	Cuppa after Mass
Sunday 11th	Cuppa after Mass
Sunday 18th	Thoona Mass

FEBRUARY

Sunday 1st	RCIA resumes
Friday 6th	Benediction & Rosary
Saturday 7th	Cuppa after Mass
Sunday 8th	Cuppa after Mass
Sunday 15th	No Mass at Thoona
Tuesday 17th	The Carpenter no. 4 out
Wednesday 18th	Ash Wednesday Mass & Imposition of Ashes at 6 pm - Fr. Joe Taylor
Friday 20th	Stations of the Cross at 6pm
Friday 27th	Stations of the Cross at 6 pm

MARCH

Sunday 22nd	Keep the date free for the Opening Mass of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of St. Joseph's Parish
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We, the Parish of St. Joseph's are working towards being a welcoming, supportive community, which encourages active participation in our life.

CHRISTMAS NOVENA

16th - 24th December

The Filipino community invites you to join them in the Novena on week days from

Tuesday 16th to Friday 19th Dec at 7 pm and Monday & Tuesday 22 & 23 Dec at 7 pm.



CHRISTMAS SERVICE TIMES

Christmas Eve Carols	6 pm
Christmas Eve Children's Mass	6.30 pm
Christmas Eve Vigil Mass	9 pm
Christmas Day Mass	9.30 am

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults - RCIA

The RCIA team are asking for the support of all our Parish community, by making our candidates feel welcome when you see them at Mass and in praying for them, their sponsors and the RCIA team.

The group will pause for the school holidays and resume on Sunday 1st February.

For further information please contact RCIA team members Cathy Duncombe, Clare O'Brien or Jane Branigan.



Peter, Julieann, Kirsty & Renae

LOW IMPACT EXERCISE GROUP

Commencing
Wednesday 7 January
9 am at '31'



Benediction & Rosary

Fri 9 January at 6 pm &
Fri 6 February at 6 pm.



The 'Cuppa' is back!

On the 2nd week-end of the month after both Masses, in the Parish House (enter through back door) or in the garden, depending on the weather.



18th February 2026

Mass with Imposition of Ashes
at 6 pm.



Low Impact Exercise group will commence on 7th January in the old 31 building area - inside or outside.

It will be on Wednesdays at 9 am and run by Helen Munro. There will be no charge as this is for parishioners of St. Joseph's Parish; another initiative to encourage friendships and welcome new people to our parish.

The coffee van isn't far away either!

Thanks to the Parish Financial Committee for their support in allowing the group to use 31 at no cost.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS DURING LENT

Walking and praying the Stations of the Cross in St. Joseph's Church on Fridays during Lent
Friday 20 & 27 February & 6, 13, 20 & 27 March
at 6pm

Sunday 22nd March

Opening Mass

of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations
of St. Joseph's Parish

There will be

No Mass at Thoona in February



The Past Two Months ...

World Day of Migrants and Refugees was established by the Church 111 years ago, in 1914. On the week-end of 4th October at both Masses we had the prayer for Migrants & Refugees read in the languages of some of our parishioners; Spanish, German, Filipino and Indian.

The Mass of Remembrance was held on Saturday 25 October at the Benalla Cemetery, followed by morning tea. Special thanks is extended to the Feehan brothers for their support.



On Friday 31st October **St. Joseph's Primary School** held a special **Farewell Mass for retiring Principal Mary Dunstan**. Fr. Jophin celebrated the Mass in Fr. Vijay's absence. A tribute was delivered by former deputy Principal Sam Kerlin. An abridged version is included here.



I stand here today feeling very humbled with the honour of sharing a final farewell for Mrs Mary Dunstan as we gather for her Thanksgiving Mass and say Farewell. It was Mary's wish that we gather in this sacred space, a place that means so much to her and to us as a community. It is a testament not only to her faith, but also to her deep understanding that our school is more than classrooms and offices, it is a community rooted in faith, care, and belonging. Mary wanted no fuss for her farewell - just a simple Mass together. And I think that says so much about who Mary is. She is unassuming, generous, and always more concerned about others than herself.

Over the past five years, Mrs Dunstan has led St Joseph's with a spirit that is hard to put into words. She has faced each challenge of principalship, whether it was guiding our school through times of change, or navigating the daily demands that come with leading a vibrant community: always with a remarkable calm and friendly smile. That calmness has been her strength. It has given stability to our school, reassurance to our families, and courage to her staff. Mrs Dunstan has shown us what dignified leadership looks like. She does not rush to speak the loudest or to act the quickest, she listens first. She pauses, considers, and then leads with wisdom. This calm, thoughtful approach has taught us all that true leadership is not about reacting, but about guiding with steadiness and respect. While you will be sorely missed, the lessons you have given us, will continue to shape this community long after you leave. And I know I speak for everyone here when I say how grateful we are for your presence, your leadership, and your unwavering care for this community.

On behalf of St Joseph's, thank you Mary for five years of dedicated service, for leading with such calm dignity, and for leaving behind a legacy of kindness that will stay with us always. We wish you every blessing as you step into this next chapter of life. Thank you

Fr. Vijay in Tanzania From 11th - 15th November Fr. Vijay was a Delegate of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit Fathers (his Order) participating in the General Chapter, a representative body of that religious order, held in Tanzania in East Africa. More details and photos in the next edition.



On 11th November, two of the 2026 FCJ school captains Bryce Cooney and Samuel Gates, accompanied by FCJ Principal Joseph Mount, represented the school at the cenotaph for the

Remembrance Day Ceremony.

Bryce delivered a heartfelt Reflection with distinction, and a beautiful wreath was laid. The students were introduced to the M.P Annabel Cleeland, the Mayor Bernie Hearn, returned servicemen and representatives of the R.S.L.

[from FCJ Facebook page]



On the last week-end in December we had **Fr. Michael Grace** celebrating the Mass. He lived up to his surname when a plethora of problems presented themselves. As he said, after 58 years as a priest, he was used to just continuing on regardless of the issues surrounding him.

Well done, Fr. Michael

Father Paul Sireh conducted the week-end Masses in November whilst Fr. Vijay was overseas. During the week Fr. Paul is the Chaplain at Whitefriars College in Donvale.

We were delighted when he played his guitar and sang a reflection on Mother Mary one week. On his last week-end he sang 'God has no face, we are his face' which was very moving, delivering a strong and thought-provoking message.

Thank you Fr. Paul for making the trip to Benalla every week-end, we have appreciated your time and talents, your positivity and wise words.



Fr. Paul used the poem The Train of Life by James Tippet to illustrate his homily one week.

Sr. Liz has compiled the following two pages with a copy of the poem, a reflection and a report on Fr. Paul, his homilies, his music and something of his personal story.

Thank you, Sr. Liz.

The Train of Life - by James Tippet

At birth, we board the train and meet our parents,
and we believe they will always travel by our side.

As time goes by, other people will board the train;
and they will be significant i.e. our siblings, friends,
children, and even the love of your life.

However, at some station our parents will step
down from the train, leaving us on this journey
alone.

Others will step down over time and leave a
permanent vacuum. Some, however, will go so
unnoticed that we don't realise they vacated their
seats.

This train ride will be full of joy, sorrow, fantasy,
expectations, hellos, goodbyes, and farewells.

Success consists of having a good relationship with
all passengers requiring that we give the best of
ourselves.

The mystery to everyone is: We do not know at
which station we ourselves will step down.

So, we must live in the best way, love, forgive, and
offer the best of who we are.

It is important to do this because when the time
comes for us to step down and leave our seat
empty, we should leave behind beautiful memories
for those who will continue to travel on the train of
life.

The Train of Life - a poignant reflection on the human experience

"The Train of Life" by James Tippet, is using
the metaphor of a train journey to illustrate the
inevitable comings and goings in our lives. It is
a timeless piece that beautifully encapsulates
the journey of life and its many passengers.

It encourages us to value our relationships and
live with love and forgiveness. From the
moment we are born and board the train, we
are accompanied by our parents, who we
assume will always be there. However, as time
progresses, they and others will disembark at
various stations, leaving us to continue our
journey.

The poem captures the essence of cherishing
every moment and relationship. He uses the
analogy of the train to emphasise the idea that
success is not about material achievements
but about forming meaningful connections and
treating others with kindness and respect.

The uncertainty of when we will step down
from the train serves as a reminder to live fully
and authentically, ensuring when that time
comes, we leave behind a legacy of beautiful
memories.

Fr Paul Sireh O.Carm.



On October 9th, at our 6pm Sunday Mass, walked onto our sanctuary a beaming young priest who appeared to be full of joy. He had come to replace Fr Vijay during his absence. His name was Fr Paul Sireh, a Carmelite priest, who had originated from Papua New Guinea. At his first Mass, he shared with us several precious stories which I wish to share with each of you.

He told us that for the past 9 years, he had been the Chaplain at Whitefriars Donvale. As this was a weekly position he had decided 9 years ago to offer his services as a supply priest for our diocese of Sandhurst. He kept his promise to the Bishop and has travelled extensively throughout our Diocese celebrating weekend masses for these last nine years. Rumour had it that he had an amazing singing voice and played the guitar. The Parishioners were keen to hear him sing.

Prior to arriving in Benalla, he had recently returned from Rome where he had been present at a very momentous occasion, the canonisation of their first ever saint from Papua New Guinea, on October 19th. He oozed such joy, as he relived the moment when Peter To Rot, from Papua New Guinean who had been a lay catechist became Saint Peter To Rot. His short life was one of exemplary faith which eventually led to him being tortured to death by the Japanese in WWII. In the midst of the 1000's who had gathered, Fr Joe Taylor, recently retired from St Brendan's Shepparton, saw Fr Paul in the crowd and they were able to enjoy the moment together and travelled on together to Assisi.

Even though this had been a momentous occasion for Fr Paul, God had another surprise. He was the leader of 18 pilgrims who were in Rome and after the Canonisation they set off to Assisi. Prior to their departure, he rose early and went alone to Saint Maria Maggiore to spend a quiet time at the grave of our late Pope Francis. You could tell by looking at him how this would become a moment in his life that he would never forget.

The following weekend, he brought his guitar to sing during Mass. Some of us had pestered him to sing for us and sure enough he did! He sang THE IRISH BLESSING, with all its verses. The homily that weekend was when he told us about THE TRAIN OF LIFE which I've included for all to read. His thought, after sharing this poem was about life and death. We cannot have one without the other.

His last song for us, was one he wrote dedicated to Mary. This was a special moment for all those who were present at Mass. At the end of Mass, he shared with us the news that after being a supply priest for the Diocese of Sandhurst for the past 9 years, he has now been missioned to be the new Prior, for his Order in Brisbane. He said during these 9 years, he has made so many friends that his heart is sad to be leaving but also excited for what lies ahead. Donvale's loss is Brisbane's gain! We also heard that our former Bishop Shane who is now Archbishop of Brisbane, requested Paul to come up to Brisbane.

Out of curiosity I asked him about his call to join the Carmelites. Apparently, a missionary nun who came to give Catechist lessons in his village on a regular basis, had a great influence on his life and led him to develop an interest in St Teresa of Avila. This interest led him to joining the Carmelite Order of priests. I guess none of us really know how we touch other peoples' lives. On December 14th he informed us that he'll be celebrating 20 years as a priest. Once again he beamed with joy.

On a sad note, I noticed in our Parish Newsletter that Fr Paul's brother has just died. Let us pray for the repose of the soul of Peter Sireh and for all Fr Paul's family as they grieve their loss.

* * *

Do not be afraid for I am with you Isaiah 41.10

Fear not, I have named you; You are mine, I am with you always Isaiah 43:1

From Fr. Paul's homily 15/16 Nov: Words of encouragement for us, such as Fear not or Do not be afraid, can be found very many times throughout the Bible, in both the Old & New Testaments.

The Last two Months continues ...

Welcome to new Principal at St. Joseph's Primary School, **David Keenan**. The Parish extends a warm welcome to David and his family.



David was previously principal at St. Luke's Primary School in Shepparton.

Photo from St. Luke's School website

The Parish Christmas Party was a huge success with a record crowd covering all age groups, lots of delicious Filipino food including the popular roasted pig, barbecued sausages & onion, carol singing with Kieran and a visit from Santa. It was a perfect night of celebration, thanks to the organisers, cooks and all who attended.

Fr. Vijay's Anniversary of Ordination

On 2nd December Fr. Vijay celebrated the 16th anniversary of his Ordination. He was ordained in 2009 in his home village of Veeravally in India.

His recent trip to India coincided with his anniversary and he celebrated in his home village and with his family.



A garden setting, a long queue for the food, Marianne & friend carving the pork & what an array of side dishes and desserts. Michael, Fr. Vijay & Brendan cooking the popular Rettke sausages, Kieran serenading with Christmas carols & 'top of the class' to Santa.

Let's Meet Carmel Weston, a Vinnies volunteer

My 30 Years with St. Vincent de Paul Society - by Carmel Weston

I joined the St Vincent de Paul Society in July 1993. With Greg Hoskin, Graham Elliott, Terry Farrell, Terry Trende and myself, we were given the task to find a shop for the Shop of Opportunity, now Vinnies.

Our first shop was the foyer of the picture theatre, now the Indian restaurant. Shop found, and we opened in November 1993. Then the flood came and it had to be used for storage of mattresses. After fifteen years we moved to Nunn Street.

I still volunteer at the shop and am involved in the twinning with the Conference, which is writing to our other Conferences in India.

That is my 30 years, a most rewarding time. You are most welcome to join as a volunteer at the shop.

Footnote from editor - Carmel has actually been volunteering for over 32 years, badge of recognition was a little late arriving. Congratulations and very well done Carmel.



Children's Memorial Garden

David Donehue and Brian Ragg have been spending time working on sprucing up the Children's Memorial Garden, with special advise from Maree Hanlon. For those who are unaware of this special place, it is located between the Parish house and the church. The garden was initially established for all parents and families who had lost children either through miscarriage, stillbirth or loss of a child. A quiet place for reflection for grieving families.

The pond and water feature is no longer viable so will be renovated into a garden; but Our Lady's Grotto will remain as a symbol of hope for all mothers who have lost a child, as she knows too well the pain suffered by parents everywhere losing a child.



[With thanks to Cath Donehue]

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Jubilee Year 2025 - Pilgrims of Hope Pilgrimage in the Diocese of Sandhurst

This Jubilee Year will come to an end on 6th January 2026. Five pilgrimage sites within the Diocese of Sandhurst were chosen so that we might have an experience of renewal gained from visiting these sites. This is the last of those sites.

Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop Indigenous Garden and Historic Trail at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Numurkah



St Joseph's Parish is a Child Safe Parish. We are committed to the wellbeing and dignity of all children and vulnerable adults. The Diocese of Sandhurst Safeguarding Committee is part of the structure under the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

31

The PPC would like to see the 31 building being used by parish groups to increase social connection, for welcoming opportunities and fun occasions. Suggestions have been for crochet lessons and a book group. Could you lead any of these or other suitable activities? Do you have any other suggestions?



Let the editor know if you or a family member is celebrating a special birthday, wedding anniversary or other celebratory occasion. Email to thecarpenter3672@gmail.com or speak to Eleanor or Cath D (either one!)



Do you like to sing, can you play a musical instrument? We are very keen to gather together a group of musically minded people to support our liturgies. This could be either weekly or on occasions, we just want to hear from you now if you would enjoy being part of this group. Contact Fr. Vijay.



Do you come from a culture that celebrates special days that we could celebrate together? Speak to Fr. Vijay or contact me on thecarpenter3672@gmail.com if you have an idea.



The Tap n Go machine has arrived and is installed in the narthex. You can make donations to St. Joseph's Church by using your credit or debit card and selecting an amount shown or by pressing Custom Amount and entering your desired amount. Tap your card over the machine and your payment will have been made.

Would you like a behind-the-scenes task that can give you a great sense of service? Are you reliable, organised, committed? Would you like to serve your parish and assist with preparation for services?

Fr. Vijay would very much like a SACRISTAN, or two, or even a team! The role requires you to set up for the Mass by preparing the vessels and altar, checking the tabernacle, lighting candles and making sure all is ready for the service to begin.

After Mass the sacristan also handles the clean up, putting away and checking candles & lights are out.

Fr. Vijay will explain what specific tasks he would require of you, and you will receive training. Please speak to Fr. Vijay if you are even a little interested.



**SACRISTAN
WANTED**

Epiphany Door Blessing

Do you know the Epiphany door blessing? Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season, 12 days after Christmas, so 6th January. It commemorates the visit of the Magi or Thee Wise Men to the infant Jesus.



The door blessing is chalked (often with blessed chalk) above your door with the symbols **20+C+M+B+26** and a prayer read. The outer numbers recognise the year and the letters represent the

Magi: Caspar, Melchior & Balthasar. The letters also stand for the Latin words *Christus Mansionem Benedicat*. (May Christ Bless this House).

There are several prayers that can be said, this is a simple one. 'Visit, Lord, we pray, this home with the joy of your presence. Bless all who live here with the gift of your love'.

The Epiphany Blessing is for hospitality, health, kindness and peace on the home and all who enter it.

We acknowledge the custodians of the land of the Yorta Yorta Nation and the Taungurung clan of the Kulin Nation whose lands are within our parish. We remember their ancestors with respect.



Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day - The word shrove comes from shriving, the confessing of sins & absolution before Ash Wednesday. Commonly known as Pancake Day, it was the last occasion to feast or use up rich ingredients such as butter and eggs before the Lenten Fast.

The term Mardi Gras also refers to this celebration before the beginning of the Lenten season. Mardi Gras is translated as 'Fat Tuesday'.



to **Glenys & Pat McDonald** on their 63rd wedding anniversary last month. Not a 'Big O' but an occasion well worth celebrating.

Congratulations also to **Vince Branigan** who is now a Benalla Rural City Councillor, gaining the position after a count back, and filling the vacancy left by the resignation of Nathan Tolliday.

The Buy, Swap and Sell Board

is ready for your participation. There are already some good buys available so have a look.



It can be found on Saturday evening and Sunday morning at Mass times, in front of the old Piety Stall building, to the left as you enter the gate way from Arundel St.

Cards are available for you to record the item you wish to sell and your details. Place it on the board with a pin.

If you wish to buy something mentioned on the board you can take the card and contact the seller.

There is no charge for using the Buy & Sell Board, it is offered as a safe means of buying and selling, amongst friends, and also encourages conversation amongst people you may not yet have met.

Oliver Raschke will oversee this initiative.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord

Annie Bernice 'Bernie' O'Brien

29 September 1930 - 15 Oct 2025 - aged 95 years

Frances 'Jean' Fuleky

1922 - 21 October 2025 - 103 years

Michael John Dwyer

24 August 1943 - 15 November 2025 - 82 years

Kevin Patrick Donnelly

19 January 1930 - 8 December 2025 - 95 years

*We Wish You All
a
Happy & Holy
Christmas*



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