



Archbishop Christopher Prowse

“The Catholic instinct will not be satisfied with simply a ‘stay at home’ faith.” *Pastoral Letter: “The Return to our Eucharistic Home”*

# CATHOLIC VOICE

ARCHDIOCESE OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN



My heart is low on the first anniversary of my son Etienne's death. Grief is brutal. Jesus said “I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you.” In faith we trust and hope.

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## ‘Stay at home’ faith no option

THE Catholic instinct will not be satisfied with a ‘stay at home’ faith, Archbishop Christopher has declared, saying he expects Mass numbers to return to normal now that restrictions have eased.

In a pastoral letter ‘The Return to our Eucharistic Home’, the Archbishop likened the Covid-19 pandemic to a ‘Eucharistic fast’ but said returning to Mass would be “sheer joy” for many people.

“Some lonely voices are saying that Mass numbers will not return to their earlier numbers,” the Archbishop writes.

“... Some suggest the movement from comfortable couches and armchairs to wooden Church pews is a distance too far. I respectfully disagree ...

“The Catholic instinct will not be satisfied with simply a ‘stay at home’ faith. We are radically communitarian both as human beings



South Tuggeranong priest Fr James Antony was elected Chair of the Council of Priests at its meeting today (June 25) replacing Fr Mark Croker from Holy Spirit Gungahlin. Missing from photo are Fr Tony Percy, Fr Luke Verrell and Fr Mick MacAndrew.

and as people of Christian faith.”

The pastoral letter offers a reflection on ‘Eucharistic fasting’ which the Archbishop says is not new to Australians.

He refers to three periods of

Eucharistic fasting in Australia’s history:

- Prior to the arrival of our first official priests in 1820, some priests did visit the colony but could only stay a short time as they were

viewed as a threat to authorities.

The priests left the Blessed Sacrament with the Davis and Dempsey families and Catholics would gather to pray in those family homes. There was no Mass,

- The Eucharistic fasting requirements of earlier times when Catholics had to fast from the night before one received Holy Communion at Mass.

“Perhaps ... we have lost a sense of the long spiritual tradition of fasting before the Eucharistic feasting,” Archbishop Christopher writes.

“Should this be considered afresh today?”

“... The stomach pains of hunger did remind the pious of the spiritual hunger for ‘panis angelicus’ (the bread of angels).”

- The current Covid-19 induced Eucharistic fast, which the Archbishop says has deepened our Catholic instinct that the Eucharist is the centre of our lives.

“We are not really ‘e-Catholics’ in the sense of electronic Catholics but we are ‘E-Catholics’ in the sense of Eucharistic Catholics.”

## The club no one wants to join

*This week (June 23) is the first anniversary of the death of Paul and Felicity de Fombelle’s son Etienne. Here, Felicity shares a personal reflection.*

BY FELICITY DE FOMBELLE

I HUG the photo of my precious five-year-old son, who died one year ago, as I walk to my grief counselling appointment.

Each week I take a different photo with me.

It rests on the front passenger seat of the car as I set off from home.

I dread the sessions but know I need them.

I pack some makeup in my handbag too. The appointment goes for more than an hour and afterwards I need to fix up my tear-streaked face before heading to work.

My grieved self cannot enter the office. People can’t see me that way.

The sharing with my counsellor is intense and it is a challenge to switch to work mode in the office, but we all wear our masks.

Some are thicker than others.

So I arrive at the Red Nose office for my Friday morning appointment. Formerly SIDS & Kids, the organisation was started in 1977 by bereaved parents to support grieving families and reduce child deaths.

I dread the long walk from the carpark, every step reminding me I am a bereaved mum.

I wish there was no such thing. That there was no Red Nose office.

My son Etienne died suddenly on Sunday June 23, 2019. He was having a mid-morning nap on the couch. When I went to wake him he was dead.

A swarm of police, paramedics and doctors invaded our home that long afternoon and a police officer asked if he could pass my details to Red Nose.

It was one of many questions fired at me that dizzy day. I said Yes, and there began my journey of counselling and healing.

I don’t know when, how or if it will end.

While I feel apprehensive in the days leading to each appointment, I ignore the voice urging me to opt out, feeling I have little choice



but to confront head on this beast called grief.

Counselling gives me a safe place to fall apart and vent feelings of rage, resentment, sadness and despair.

And feel protected, because grief strips you bare. Clothed only in vulnerability.

The control you once clung to has gone. The child you once nurtured ripped from you. In its place only pain, a constant pain that is too much for one person.



Etienne de Fombelle  
18 November 2013 - 23 June 2019

As my 10 year old son Eric wrote on my birthday card, “Our hearts are broken and we need to put them back together.”

My counsellor and I explore difficult terrain such as:

- My sense of despair and not wanting to go on living, knowing how much my three living sons need me but yearning to be with Etienne,

- Finding the confidence to say I am a mother of four, with three living sons and one in heaven. That

takes practice,

- Navigating well-meaning friends who want to support when all I want to do is hide,

- Coping with ordinary events that are now nerve-racking and fill me with dread such as meetings and work, and

- Feeling nothing but pain and nothing beyond.

She assures me that life can and will be better and I have to believe that.

Carving out time to talk about Etienne and the pain of his loss is the right thing to do.

My youngest son comes alive, if only through words, photos and memories. And his Mum, ever so slowly, can heal.

A few months into our sessions, I have a confession for my counsellor.

“I hate coming here,” I blurt out.

“I know,” she replies understandingly. “It’s the club no one wants to join.”

I am a member of the Bereaved Parents’ Club and she is with me for the journey.

God is doing his share of heavy lifting too, but that’s another story.

# The adventure God offers

AS a Canberra local, Australian Catholic University (ACU) Canberra Campus Chaplain Fr Paul Nulley is passionate about introducing members of the community to Jesus, and journeying with them as they discover their purpose in life.

As the parish priest at St Joseph's Parish in O'Connor, a vocations director and key figure in his diocese's youth ministry project, Fr Paul sees his campus work as both a privilege and opportunity.

"All ministries are about following Jesus who has a plan for our lives," Fr Paul says.

"It is a privilege to be with young people as they discover who they are and the specific mission God has given them.

"The adventure God offers is much more exciting than anything we could imagine for ourselves."

The former Marist College student worked in the public service while discerning a vocation to the priesthood. Former Archbishop Mark Coleridge advised him, "If God calls, it's important that you answer."

"That gave me great confidence



Fr Paul Nulley on campus with ACU students

to make that leap of faith," Fr Paul said.

"I was at the seminary in Sydney for three years and in Melbourne for four years."

Ordained in Canberra in 2013, Fr Paul said one of the encouraging

aspects of ACU chaplaincy is that many students are studying nursing, social work and teaching and go on to work in Catholic institutions.

"I am very aware that I am the face of the Church in many ways," he said.

"I wear my collar and try to be there for students to answer questions and help them identify positively and personally with the Church, rather than seeing it as just an institution with the failings we hear so much about."

Fr Paul impressed with the way ACU offers students a pathway to discover faith.

"Often it begins with food and friendship, then faith can emerge," he said.

"I like thinking of it as the four Bs: belonging, becoming, believing and being supported."

"Connect groups are the basis of student ministry and a way to check in with each other and cover different topics. It's great that 'Frontier' students are taking the lead so we can offer student-to-student ministry."

An upcoming opportunity open to the whole Canberra community is the Alpha program, which will soon be offered in the Watson parish.

Alpha is an 11-week course of conversations about faith, life and God.

Contact the Watson Parish Office on 02 6248 5925, or email [watson@cg.org.au](mailto:watson@cg.org.au) with any queries.

• **For more information about ACU Canberra Campus Ministry go to:** <https://campusministry.acu.edu.au/>

## VINNIES CEO SLEEPOUT 2020

**ALMOST 170** Canberrans slept rough last Thursday evening, June 18, to raise money for homelessness as part of the annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout. Many were Catholic principals and teachers with the ACT participants so far raising \$522,293. Nationally, 1550 business and community leaders joined in, raising more than \$5 million. Here, principals Loretta Wholley (below left) and David Austin (below right), who together raised \$20,000, share their Sleepout stories.



## Soup, bread and sleeping rough

MORE than 60 Merici students joined staff "sleeping rough" in the school's New Quad to raise funds for Canberra's homeless.

The group braved the minus one degree temperature to experience a small part of the reality of homelessness and learn about the issue, sleeping on cardboard but with the luxury of sleeping bags and warm clothes.

Principal Loretta Wholley said the night was a bonding experience that helped promote empathy for the cause.

"With over \$11,200 raised this year, I am so appreciative to the Merici families and wider community who have supported the College," Loretta said.

"We are fortunate! We get to go home and have a hot shower which is not what homeless people in Australia get to do.

"This is just a one-night experience to raise awareness. In the end, it is a very small bit of pain for a lot of gain."

Social Justice Captain Jacinta Wright said her top priority in the role was raising awareness about homelessness and Vinnies' valuable work.

"Sleeping outside in freezing temperatures is a reality for some that many people do not understand," Jacinta said.

"The Sleepout really opened our eyes to their situations and we could experience their struggles by physically putting ourselves in their shoes."

The group shared a meal of soup and bread before reflecting on the harsh realities of not having guaranteed food every day.

Vinnies Youth Liaison Officer Therese Canty spoke to the group about homelessness in Canberra while two volunteers from the Night Patrol Van spoke about how the community can help homeless people.

*"The Vinnies Sleepout has given me a tiny glimpse into what people without a secure home in Australia have to do from day to day."*

**College Captain Zoe Beresford.**

*"It made me grateful that I have a warm bed and a roof over my head. And to realise the harsh conditions people face and how grateful we all should be."*

**Amy Redmond, Year 10.**

*"The night patrol opened my eyes to the conditions people across Australia are living in daily."*

**Lauren Toole, Year 12.**

• **To donate to the Vinnies CEO Sleepout go to** [www.ceosleepout.org.au](http://www.ceosleepout.org.au)

## A piece of cardboard on my front porch

BY DAVID AUSTIN

IT astounds me that more than 116,000 Australians sleep rough each and every night with many people on the streets.

Last Thursday evening was my third Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

To be able to sleep rough for just one night, in the middle of Canberra's freezing winter, and raise funds and awareness, is the least I can do.

In previous years I have participated with many other CEOs in an iconic Canberra location.

This year, due to the pandemic, we could sleep rough on our couch, in our car or in our backyard.

The choice for me was easy; sleep rough with a piece of cardboard under me, a sleeping bag and pillow out in the freezing elements on my front porch.

The evening started at 7:30pm watching a 'live stream' of the event and hearing stories of people who have been homeless and have come out the other end, because of the support from Vinnies.

These interviews had a profound effect on me, and we were encouraged and challenged to reflect on the plight of homelessness every time we woke up ... which I did ... a lot!

They should change the name to 'CEO

Wakeout', because it is extremely difficult to sleep on a piece of cardboard, on top of concrete, in the height of a Canberra winter with temperatures dropping below freezing.

I felt I could get warm enough with plenty of layers and burying myself in my sleeping bag but the challenge was comfort; how to actually sleep on the hard surface and being aware of every noise around you.

I reflected, often, that this is the reality for many in our community and how unacceptable that is.

To raise over \$8000 for this cause is something I am extremely proud of. And I am extremely grateful for the financial support from family, friends, students, parents and other schools.

I was blown away with people's generosity.

As a volunteer with the Vinnies Night Patrol for more than six years, I not only see the great work this program provides, but also see the plight of homelessness first hand when I meet and speak to people doing it tough in our city.

It is an outstanding service that needs financial support as there is no government funding.

• **David Austin is the principal of Good Shepherd Primary School in Amaroo.**