



A Prayer for Peace

God of new beginnings,
in your ways are compassion and hope.
Open our hearts to dialogue and understanding.
Lead us all to answer your call
to become peacemakers
today, and all the days of our life.

Amen.

Catholic Agency for Overseas Development

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SYDNEY NEWS

The National Grail Office 2026

This will continue to be located at –
302, 12 Mount Street
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Other contact details will remain the same. See p.2

Reflection Mornings 2025

On the last Tuesday of the month from February to November a small group of women have been meeting to spend time in contemplation and reflection on various topics related to our spiritual development. This year, 2025, we decided to invite members of the group to suggest short readings for our reflection. We have had such a wonderful range of readings from many authors including: Ilia Delio, Thomas Halik, Richard Rohr, Julian of Norwich, Paul Porteous, Barry Neil Kaufman, Charles Foster, Robert van Mourik and the late Pope Francis. Many topics related to our spiritual growth have been explored and much wisdom has resulted in our discussion. The topics included: happiness, spirituality, our relationship with God, the joy of the risen Christ, contemplation and daily living, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza, God is love and Jesus as a pilgrim.

We plan to continue meeting in 2026 on the last Tuesday of the month. Our first meeting will be Tuesday 24th February from 10.00am to 12 noon. Please contact me by email, kay.hunt@optusnet.com.au, if you would like to attend.

Kay Hunt

WATAC

I attended the WATAC Conference in mid-November, and it was very good. I had lots of reunions with people from many different parts of my life, and we all enjoyed the richness of the event. All the sessions were interesting, enriching and inspiring. But the highlight would have to be the experience of being among more

than 100 WATAC women from around the country, hugging old friends, making new ones, forging connections, sharing meals and stories, and fulfilling the conference's theme: shining bright, living loud, standing together!

Also, I just wanted to let you know - with some excitement - that Sr Laraine Crowe (a Josephite) said to me during the Conference that an American Dominican nun, Sr Arlene Flaherty, was using all five of my *Laudato Si'* lectures that I gave to the Portuguese Grail in 2016 with at least one group that she was leading monthly online. And Alison Weeks, from Canberra, told me that at Holy Spirit parish, Gungahlin, they are using all five of my lectures for study.

Now the only place anyone can access these five lectures is on the Grail website, www.grailaustralia.org.au. Our website has clearly been instrumental in spreading the word about *Laudato Si'*!! Who would have known?!

Patricia Gemmell

We wish all our Grail friends the special blessings of Christmas, especially, Peace, Love and Hope and may 2026 be a better year for our planet and the whole of creation.

Ruth Crowe and the Grail women in Sydney

BRISBANE CALLING

As wind gusts of 30 knots buffet Brisbane, I pen these notes for the Grail Newsletter.

On Saturday, 4 October, **Mary and Darryl Nelson** walked the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Hope, in the Franciscan Parish, from Our Lady Queen of Apostles Church at Stafford to The Church of the Little Flower, at Kedron. On the way they visited the Anglican Church of St Clement's on the Hill and St Paul's Uniting Church, both at Stafford, as well

as the Franciscan Aged Care Community at Delamore, in Kedron, where they were welcomed by Judy Brown, who read Prayers for the Season of Creation. At the Little Flower Church, artist Dianne Minaar's magnificent Seven Days of Creation Icons and an icon of St Francis caressing a Kookaburra were on display. The St Francis Icons were created in response to Dianne's personal grief following the 2019 Bush Fires. Hospitality was provided to more than 50 pilgrims by the Franciscan Parish in the form of cakes, slices and fruit to fortify the group for the walk back to Stafford.

Ann Aboud, Mary and Darryl, continue to participate in the Earthlink Book Club gathering and Ilia Delio's book, *The Not Yet God*, has been the subject of discussion. The group meets under the trees in New Farm Park, where in September the roses were in full bloom and in October the jacarandas were resplendent. Mary and Darryl also presented *The Wisdom of Ilia Delio* to the Archer Earth Community at Boondall and are preparing to present the final chapter of Kerrie Hide's book, *Love's Oneing*, online to the Australian Network of Spiritual Direction (ANSD) nationally, as part of ANSD, Queensland, 2025 Events. This is a presentation they first made to the ANSD Brisbane Community in 2023 and online to ANSD Qld in 2024.

Food for the Soul has been a wonderful addition to my spiritual life and connection to the Grail. I even see Judy Brown there! It complements my membership of the St Lucia Spirituality Group where we discuss research papers written by members of the group and invited speakers – the most notable being Garry Worete Deverell who advocates the Church compensate the original inhabitants of this land.

Ballybrac Reunion Lunch 30 October.

This luncheon was hosted, as usual, by the generous Patricia Daly at her home in Yeerongpilly. We look forward to catching up each year at this happy event. Win

Nugent Manning attended from Mackay. While together, we swapped stories and toasted our good fortune to have stayed at *Ballybrac* in Mackay. We will never forget Pat Sheeran, Joanna Waite, Gloria Lazzarini and Alice Eccles and all the other wonderful Grail women who gave their lives to enriching ours.

Celebration for our Feast Day of *All Saints*. Jill Herbert organised a get together for the Brisbane Grail on 9 November where we had another opportunity to celebrate the Grail and offer thanks for our early foremothers and Grail women around the world who link hands in a special way at this time. We visited Jan O'Donoghue on the way to Jill's so that she felt part of the Grail, as she always is.



FR left - Jill Herbert, Helen Jeffcoat, and Win Manning. BR Left – Mary Nelson, Ann Aboud and Mary Mennis.

The Black Madonna: From her hospital bed the valiant Judy Brown organised an illustrated talk on the Black Madonna by her friend, Nigelle de Visme Oblate OSB.

I am running out of steam now on this hot and windy day. There's so much on these days, I'm asking myself 'When will I make my Xmas cake & pudding?!!!!'

The Grail Group in Brisbane send Christmas greetings - Peace and good will to all our friends.

Ann Aboud

MELBOURNE NEWS

This year, our *Lectio group* has gathered monthly at various members' homes, with Kathy Wayland, Mary McCormick, Ann Niall, Genny Grabau and Andrea Venier our regular hosts. Earlier in the year, Dinny Culican welcomed us into the newly renovated community building at her retirement village for a prayerful reflection and enjoyable lunch.

Unfortunately, over the last few months, Dinny has been confined to home with a fracture. With the constant care of her family and the prayers and support of her Grail sisters, we hope Dinny will recover soon. In addition, our usual numbers of between eight and ten have reduced somewhat due to illness of other members or family. Nevertheless, we look forward to our time together as a supporting constant in our lives. Richard Rohr's *Yes, and...* continues to sustain and inspire, along with a varied selection of spiritual and justice centred commentaries, articles and prayers.

As well as our lectio reflection, we make the most of our time together to discuss important issues and concerns, both social and Grail related. In recent months, we have deliberated on both the short-term future of the Australian Grail and our regional group, as well as the long-term legacy of our movement. In this regard, Genny, Carol and Andrea represented Melbourne members at a Grail weekend in September. We are grateful to Alison, Ruth and Helen, the Sydney members and the National Team for their efforts in hosting this important event. There is still much to consider.

Despite less frequent meetings this year, technology has been a useful tool with WhatsApp hook-ups helping to maintain connections when we are unable to attend in person. Technology is also proving useful for us with seminars such as those provided through Garrett Publishing, a great, informative resource. Several

programmes on synodality have occurred, with noted appearances by Tricia Gemmell and her expert input!

There is no doubt, too, that for an international movement, like the Grail, technology has many benefits. The recent zoom meeting in September attended by many Grail women across the world enabled us all to meet the candidates for a new International Team in the forthcoming elections. It was impressive to hear about their qualities and contributions and, significantly, their proposals and thoughts on the future of the Grail. We thank the current team and secretariat for co-ordinating the zoom and for our candidates' openness.

Earlier this year, we welcomed the arrival of Mary Mennis' *The Grail in Australia, Glimpses and Groups* and were most appreciative for this sincere tribute based on her experiences and the influence of the Grail in her life. Since we more recently received some additional copies, we thank Mary for her extra diligence and the National Team for their support in its production.

We would like to congratulate some dear Grail members and friends who celebrated significant birthdays this year: June Ryan and Brian Fogarty (husband of Pat) for their 90th, and Ann Niall for her 80th! We wish them all many blessings for good health, peace and happy days ahead, and thank them for their dedication, enthusiasm and friendship.

In honour of our Grail Day on All Saints' Day this year, we decided to visit Eltham cemetery in memory of our beloved sisters, Adelaide Crookall, Margaret McCristal, Margo Harrison, Pat Sheeran and Joanna Waite. We prayed and laid flowers at each graveside in gratitude for the dedication to the Grail of these gifted and caring women, and for their continuing influence in our lives. Afterwards, we celebrated with lunch at a nearby café in the beautiful bush.



Andrea Venier, Genny Grabau and Joan Ryan

In a year of turmoil on many fronts, may we enter Advent and the Christmas season with the strength and wisdom of our Grail sisters, past and present.

May the coming of the Lord bring us the light of his holiness.

May the Lord of all joy, make us joyful in hope and untiring in love.

May the Lord of peace give us peace all the days of our lives.

Andrea Venier

CELEBRATING THE SEASONS OF CREATION



Photography by Michael from Unsplash

I co-ordinate the *Laudato Si'* group in my parish, a work that I consider a part of my Grail mission. This year, for the Season of Creation in September, we offered two evenings of talks on subjects related to ecological conversion.

On the first night, Fr Chima Ofor (Manly parish) inspired us with a rich theological exploration of *why* we should care for our common home. He drew on his own lived experience growing up in Nigeria, as well as on faith, science and theology, and impressed

upon us our Christian calling to love God's creation and therefore to care for it. Our second speaker, Anne Lanyon from the Faith Ecology Network, showed us some practical ways of doing so in our local communities. She also shared resources, tools, and examples of simple but effective actions we can take.

Two weeks later, Fr Andy Nguyen SJ (North Sydney) spoke of Ignatian discernment and seeing "God in everything" as practices that deepen our encounter with God and our ecological engagement. As the final speaker in our series, I spoke about living *Laudato Si'*, looking at ways that we could embody the conversion to which we are called.

About 35 people from all over Sydney attended each night, the supper was much appreciated (as were the real cups as opposed to the more usual disposable ones), and conversations were carried on over supper for nearly an hour. Two newcomers joined our group at the next monthly meeting – including one of our assistant priests. We are a very small group of 6 active members, so we are really pleased with the outreach we achieved.

I would like to finish with the final words of my presentation, the words of renowned theologian Elizabeth Johnson at the end of her book, *Ask the Beasts*. She throws out this challenge to us all:

A flourishing humanity on a thriving planet rich in species in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God: such is the vision that must guide us at this critical time of Earth's distress, to practical and critical effect. Ignoring this view keeps people of faith and their churches locked into irrelevance while a terrible drama of life and death is being played out in the real world. By contrast, living the ecological vocation in the power of the Spirit sets us off on a great adventure of mind and heart, expanding the repertoire of our love.

Patricia Gemmell

REFLECTING ON COMMUNITIES WITH A HEART: GRAIL SUMMER SCHOOL IN THE NETHERLANDS



I had the wonderful privilege of taking part in the Grail "Communities with a Heart" Summer School this past summer at Radboud University. The course was taught by Christa Anbeek, who currently holds the Grail Chair at Radboud University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, and Yvonne Sliedregt from the South African Grail. Our group consisted of Grail women and friends of the Grail from twelve countries (The Netherlands, Portugal, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, The Philippines, Ecuador, Honduras, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Zimbabwe, Paraguay and The United States). During this two-week program, we were onsite at Radboud University's summer school and at the Elegast Retreat Center, which is in Ubbergen, near an early Grail training center! **Regina Samar from PNG** was one of the participants.

Throughout these two weeks, we reflected together on how disruptive experiences/ changes can lead us into a place of transition, a place that can open the door to creating a community with a heart. We learned about the history of the Grail as a community with a heart, about critical reflexivity*, authentic leadership, social disruptions and collective response and neurobiology (the study of the nervous system and how the brain works). And we explored

what it looked like in practice to be a community with a heart. We visited the Grail house in Utrecht and also met some of the older Grail members at De Bilt community to learn of their experience with the Grail. We went to two intentional communities for more learning. And in small working groups, we reflected on how we would take our experiences and all that we had learned back home to continue to create communities with a heart.

The experience was transformational for me, and it came at a very critical time. As most of you know, in the United States, we are experiencing many very upsetting and drastic changes and disruptions on a national level. These are happening in all aspects of our lives. I am especially concerned about the way the government is responding to immigration. All of us who took part from the US reflected on how this harmful, xenophobic discourse affects our communities. I appreciated the opportunity to hear from other Grail women, how anti-immigration efforts, gender violence, the climate crisis and other social disruptions are affecting their communities. And it was inspiring and life-giving to think about how, as a community, the Grail can collectively respond to the reality of the times that we are living in. I left the program with renewed energy to continue working in my community and, since returning to Cincinnati, I have been working with a group of local women who are leaders in



the Hispanic community to plan a retreat at Grailville. I hope to integrate aspects of what I learned in summer school into our program. Communities

with a Heart was a wonderful reminder that I am part of a much bigger, global community of women who have dedicated themselves to the transformation of the world.

* Critical reflexivity is a process of deep self-examination that involves challenging one's own assumptions, beliefs, biases, and values and understanding how they are formed by the society and circumstances which shape each of our realities. This examination looks at how these beliefs are shaped by social, historical, political and cultural factors and what impact they have on how we engage in transforming the world. It is an action-oriented practice focused on transforming personal and systemic issues by encouraging more equitable and just practices.

Laura Hershberger - The Grail in the USA



TAIZÉ 2025

“We are All Strings in the concert of God ‘s Joy”



Photo by Tae Rim Han

In October 2025, we held two evenings of Silence and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament infused by the beauty and rhythm of Taizé music, on 3 October at Our Lady Star of the Sea in Terrigal and on 28 October at St Patrick’s Church Hill Sydney.

The Altar was beautifully lit with candles and draped in vibrant yellow and red material. The Altar was on fire, and so were the souls of many who shared their insights afterwards.

At St Patrick’s Church Hill 100 people attended according to my friend, Sister Fideles. Honestly, I was speechless, as that night I was not concentrating on numbers. I only saw the Blessed Sacrament and the Cross lit by candles. The vibe was stillness and beauty.

From the feedback I received at the supper afterwards, people loved it and were keen for more. They were left with a sense of peace and inner calm. The event was ecumenical and intergenerational, judging by who joined the supper afterwards.

Taizé offers a mode of prayer where in silence and through the repetitive simple hymns and chants, we enter into the silence of our own hearts, where we meet our creator. Taizé is a town in the south of France. The Taizé community, founded by Brother Roger, is ecumenical and mostly attracts the youth from all over Europe and the wider world.

My personal journey with Taizé started around 2003. Being part of the Young Adult group of St Patrick’s Church Hill I heard about it. I attended a Taizé retreat run by the community of brothers from France which helped me discover the power of silence and meditation. The beauty of the ambience and music stopped my racing thoughts, allowing me to be still in my heart. I was hungry for more, so in 2005 I travelled to the Taizé Community in France, where immersing myself in the community for two weeks gave me the ultimate experience of peace. I can confess I fell completely in love with this style of prayer.

So here we are today! I am hoping to ignite the Taizé spirit in Sydney and the Central Coast through sharing a similar experience with others, especially young adults. Let there be PEACE and let it begin with ME.

Nour Barcha (Sydney Grail member)

CANONISATION OF PETER TO ROT

Sunday 19 October 2025 was World Mission Sunday. This was the day Pope Leo XIV raised Blessed Peter To Rot to the honours of the altar alongside six other Blessed. Along the façade of St Peter's Basilica were the banners of the Seven Blessed.

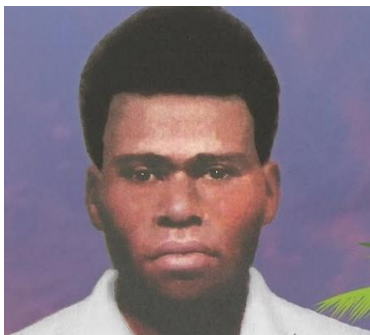
Peter To Rot (1912-1945) was a lay catechist, who was martyred during the Japanese occupation of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in World War II. So, his canonization was a great occasion for the people of PNG.



Photo by Courtney Mares / CAN

It was a beautiful sunny day, and my daughter, Joanna, and I had managed to get seats in front of the altar in St Peter's Square. An estimated 55,000 people were there from around the world to celebrate the canonization of the Seven Blessed, wearing their

traditional costumes and carrying banners and flags as they gathered in groups. I had attended the canonisation of St Mary MacKillop 15 years ago so was familiar with the ceremony. She was Australia's first saint and now PNG would have its first saint in Peter To Rot.



Bells rang to call our attention, and the Rosary was said in Latin. Then the Pope arrived greeted by loud clapping. He read out the names of the Seven Blessed to be canonised during Mass. As each name was called, the people attending from that country cheered and waved banners and flags. There was a large group of people from Venezuela near us, and they had two new saints to celebrate, including Venezuela's first female saint. When Peter To Rot's name was called those from Papua New Guinea cheered and waved their flags and held up framed photographs of him.

Later in the Mass, loud cheering accompanied each name as the Pope announced Sainthood. At the end of Mass, the names were called again and their reason for being called to Sainthood were announced. The Pope said, "Today we have before us seven witnesses, the new Saints, who, with God's grace, kept the lamp of faith burning, indeed, they themselves became lamps capable of spreading the light of Christ."

Groups of people from different countries then gathered, singing their favourite hymns in their own language. The Papua New Guinea group sang in their common language, Tok Pisin, and the familiar sound brought others to join the growing crowd before they were moved on. It was time to leave St Peter's Square and the movement of 55,000 people through a single exit became quite a squash. Joanna and I found an Italian restaurant that became a favourite down one of the many alleyways that lead from St Peter's square. We drank a glass of the local wine to celebrate the great occasion.

The next day there was a Papal audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall. The groups from PNG of course, joined people from all over the world for this. I sat next to Veronica, and she shared that she prayed to Saint Peter To Rot for help with her broken marriage. She's hoping for reconciliation as he promoted the sanctity of marriage.

The following evening, 5pm on Monday 20 October, there was a Thanksgiving Mass held at the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Church in Piazza Navona. This joyous celebration of the Sainthood of Saint Peter To Rot was led by Cardinal John Ribat, PNG's first Cardinal. He mentioned how it was Pope Leo XIII who had asked the first Sacred Heart Missionaries to go to New Guinea. It was these missionaries who ministered to the people in the village where the new saint was born and brought up. Cardinal Ribat himself is a member of the Sacred Heart and the same Tolai tribe as Saint Peter To Rot. He saw the canonisation as a highlight of his life!

Mary Mennis

Mary is currently writing, *Village to Vatican*, a biography of Cardinal John Ribat who lives and works in Port Moresby.

WALKING FROM DILI TO LETEFOHO



The combination of being a keen walker and a desire to do something for the people of Letefoho and Timor Leste generally, (and being slightly crazy), led me to discern that I would walk from Dili to Letefoho, a distance of about 72 kms, to raise funds for NOSCAR (Our Lady of Mount Carmel Senior High School) in Letefoho, and a bell tower at Eraulo where a new chapel has been constructed. The funds raised were split 80%:20%. My desire to do this also sprang from my Catholic faith and the call to social justice combined with a deep-seated belief that successive Australian governments at best neglected the people of Timor Leste and at worst were complicit in allowing the Indonesian military to inflict a terrible wrong on them, leaving aside the machinations over Timor Sea oil. The aim was to raise \$25,000. I paid all my expenses including air fares, vaccinations, insurance and accommodation.

Maxi, an alumnus from NOSCAR in Letefoho, accompanied me. I carried everything including water, being able to buy fresh water from stalls or kiosks en route. I had a supply of beef jerky (biltong) with me. A meal was provided where I stopped overnight; chicken and rice are a basic staple. The first night was spent in Fahite, our host welcoming us and cooking dinner; no gas or electric stove, everything cooked over a wooden fire. I got used to a cold shower with a bucket, which was not quite as challenging as using a toilet with no paper, but this is the reality for so many people in this country just to our north. The second and third nights were spent in more salubrious accommodation, the third being at the Santa Bakita centre at Eraulo after a tough 27 km walk, the last kilometre or so mainly in mud! After arriving at Letefoho on the morning of Sunday 22 June in time for Mass, I stayed in the Visitors' centre and ate with Fr Elio PP and others in the accommodation near the church.

The highlights included the people of Timor Leste and, in particular, the people of the parish of Letefoho. The beautiful scenery was also a highlight. To walk the distance I did in the time that I did (4 days) was also a high for me.

The low was to see the amount of plastic rubbish throughout the country. In parts it is overwhelming. It is no exaggeration to say that I could not walk two metres without passing rubbish, particularly plastic rubbish, often in the form of discarded plastic bottles. The other low was to see what I could only describe as grinding poverty. A doctor told me the main contributor to death in the country is poverty and it is exemplified by the fact tuberculosis is the single greatest cause of death in the population.



The people of Timor Leste are warm and welcoming. They are also proud and resilient and admirably persistent. They struggled against the odds to obtain independence. The obvious and profound faith of the people of Letefoho is something that I will not forget. Weekday mass at 7:00 AM saw every pew full, with many standing or kneeling behind the last pew.

Finally, I have to say that I have felt profound shame as an Australian to learn more deeply of the extent of the inaction on the part of successive Australian governments vis à vis the Indonesian government and military from 1975 until 1999. According to the UN, (and my extensive reading suggests these figures are conservative) approximately 18,600 people from Timor Leste (+/- 1,000) were either killed or disappeared, and approximately 84,000 (+/- 11,000) died from hunger or illness in excess of what would have been expected due to peacetime mortality in the period 1975 to 1999. I cannot reconcile that statistic with the assistance rendered by the people of Timor Leste to Australian soldiers during World War 2, the result of which cost the people of Timor Leste 40,000 - 60,000 lives. Can you?

If you would like to contribute to my walk, click on this link. In “Payment for” choose 9.1 LETS (Letefoho East Timor Support) and put “Geoff’s walk” in the message box.

<https://www.catholicparish.app/donate?id=0010I00000B2r0RIAR>

Geoffrey Gemmell
(Patricia Gemmell’s husband)

