

Living Hope



St AGNES'
CATHOLIC
PARISH



TABLE OF CONTENTS



03	This Lent: Fr Paul Gooley
04	Making the most of Renewal Groups this Lent
06	Week 1: What am I Looking for?
09	Week 2: Celebrating the Goodness
12	Week 3: Enriching Connections
15	Week 4: Seeing things Differently
18	Week 5: Living in Hope
21	Week 6: Scenes from Holy Week
24	Week 7: Being Hope for Others

We acknowledge the land on which St Agnes' Catholic Parish stands. We do so with a sense of the importance of country, where learning and ceremony have taken place over many thousands of years. Let us sense the land beneath our feet, acknowledge to whom it belongs - the Biripi people - acknowledge their cultural heritage, beliefs and continuing spiritual relationship with this land, and pay our respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging, committing ourselves, with them, to the ongoing journey towards reconciliation and justice, for we are one in land, one in Spirit, united in God's love.

This Lent

Whether you are a regular worshipper at our parish, or simply curious about Jesus and our faith, I warmly welcome you to consider joining a renewal group. Renewal Groups are part of our Parish's 'Season of Renewal'. It is a time to honour and build on the good work of so many faithful people both past and present. Through this time our Parish seeks to strengthen:

- ✠ Opportunities for people to encounter and experience Jesus Christ more deeply.
- ✠ Pathways to connect and belong within our pastoral community (centred in the Eucharist as a local expression of our Catholic Church).
- ✠ Outreach and support to those beyond our pastoral community, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in both word and deed.

Over the past six months you would have seen and heard the term 'intentional disciples'. These renewal groups have a particular mission to invite people to deepen their Discipleship.

What are intentional disciples?

- ✠ Disciples pray with passion.
- ✠ Disciples worship and give lavishly.
- ✠ Disciples love the Church and serve her with energy and joy.
- ✠ Disciples hunger to learn more about their faith.
- ✠ Disciples fill every formation class in a parish or diocese.
- ✠ Disciples manifest charisms and discern vocations.

- ✠ They clamour to discern God's call because they long to live it.
- ✠ Disciples evangelise because they have really good news to share.
- ✠ Disciples share their faith with their children.
- ✠ Disciples care about the poor and about issues of justice.
- ✠ Disciples take risks for the Kingdom of God.

(Sherry Weddell, Forming Intentional Disciples, 80-81).

The presence of a significant number of disciples changes everything: a parish's spiritual tone, energy level, attendance, bottom line, and what parishioners ask of their leaders.

As we journey together in our renewal groups this Lent, let us be mindful of our aim to cultivate the call to intentional discipleship. Participants are warmly invited to journal their journey. This can be through regular entries into a notebook. It can include prayers, general reflections, or quotes and images that are supportive in our call to foster intentional discipleship in our lives.

Pope Francis' opening words in his Lenten Address (2022) were..."Lent is a favourable time for personal and community renewal."

I pray that this Lent will indeed be a favourable time for renewal. God Bless.



Paul Gooley

Fr Paul Gooley,
Parish Priest

Making the most of Renewal Groups this Lent

The information in this section offers a guide for group leaders.

If using this Program for personal reflection, you may adapt it accordingly.

Thank you for spending time together to journey through Lent. During each session, you are invited into a spirit of renewal as we come to more deeply encounter Jesus, ourselves and each other.

Each session follows a similar format and takes about ninety minutes including a meal. Naturally, you can adapt the program to suit the needs of your group.

Your Environment

Every week, set up a sacred space. This may involve something as simple as lighting a candle as a focus for a prayer to mark the beginning of your session. You may also like to use a special cloth on a table or place a Bible or other religious symbol as a focus. The key is to invite participants into a more reflective atmosphere.

Welcome & Hospitality (30 mins)

There are many stories of Jesus sharing a meal with his friends. Renewal Groups are encouraged to start their gatherings with a meal. Over a meal, each person introduces themselves and might share one thing about themselves.

While sharing your meal, engage with the question: *How has God come into our lives this past week?* After the meal, you can transition smoothly from the meal into the session to keep the mood and conversation flowing.

Opening Prayer (5 mins)

You may wish to play some quiet instrumental music to help the group move from the meal to a more reflective space. If you have a candle, light the candle as you begin with a prayer and an acknowledgement of country. You are welcome to share your own prayer or offer/adapt the following:

As we gather together, let us remember we are in the presence of our loving God. Lord, bless each of us as we respond to your Spirit's invitation to know you better, to know each other, and to invite others to encounter you. Amen.

Reflection and Discussion (35 mins)

Each week will focus on an excerpt from the Sunday Gospel. A participant is invited to read the whole Gospel (the reference is given each week).



After a short pause, another participant is invited to read the reflection.

Questions are included as a guide for sharing and discussion. Sharing and discussion require a deep respect and a sense of reverence for one another. Times of silence are fine. Spirited discussion is fine, but don't get 'stuck' on issues. Behind every issue is a person's heart, a unique story and personal faith journey.

The goal is neither to solve theological problems nor to provide "solutions" to people who share life challenges, but rather to honour each person's story and experience Jesus in our midst.

In all our reflections, consider the question,

How does what I have heard and shared speak to my current life story and my desire to become a more intentional disciple of Jesus Christ?

What will I do? (10 mins)

Take a moment to reflect on the question,

What is one action I can take to be a more intentional disciple this week?

It could be a strengthening of something already being done. It could be stopping something that keeps us from being an intentional disciple. Or it could also be trying something new where we can be creative in love.

As a group, each person shares briefly in a spirit of prayer. Begin with,

This week one action I will take to become a more intentional disciple is ...

Let us Pray (10 mins)

As the time draws to a close, the group is invited to offer any prayer intentions. After each person shares briefly, respond with an *Amen*. And if someone doesn't wish to share aloud, pause, then say *Amen* and move on to the next person.

The leader will bring this time to a close with a final prayer. You can use the following prayer, the suggested prayer in the leader's guide, or your own prayer.

Loving God, may we be inspired by your Son Jesus, to be agents of living hope in our everyday lives, and may our parish community of St Agnes grow in love for you and each other. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.





“Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came...”

Matthew 4:1-3a

*Read the full Gospel
Matthew 4:1-11*

Have you ever peered into the mirror, gazed into the reflection of your own eyes, and asked, “Who are you?” If we were asked to answer *who am I?* in twenty-five words or less, what might we say? For many people, the struggle to be their real self has been swamped by their efforts to stay afloat in this big, wide world.

How hard is it to be the real you: at home, at work, with your family, with friends? When everyone has gone, what is it like to be alone, just with yourself?

We can imagine, with Jesus being fully human, that he had no less a struggle with his identity, and perhaps the story of his temptation in the wilderness reflects our own temptations on our road to authenticity, to being the best version of ourselves.

The first temptation is for Jesus to employ his power to make his problems go away through a quick fix, making bread from stone. Similarly, the hunger to be our true selves may be replaced by a quick fix of fake “bread” so we don't have to think about the hard stuff. We can be tempted by social media or the latest trend, to bingeing shows or maybe some feel good activity that has become an addiction. The temptation of the bread is to live lives of distraction, to drug our senses and to block out the tough questions.

The second temptation is to buy into a fake truth about who I am. In the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by fake messaging that God would save him if he jumped off a building. These fake beliefs can permeate our lives. For too many people the question "Who am I?" brings up self-talk such as: *I am not good enough, I am not likeable, not smart enough, too needy, too impatient, too aggressive. I will never be happy because I should have lived life differently. I should have been a better sister/parent/son/ friend/partner. So many shoulds and what ifs can define us.* Jesus dismisses these fake truths, saying "do not put the Lord to the test." In other words, God knows so much more about who we truly are.

Thirdly, Jesus is tempted to bow down to Satan, who will then enable Jesus to rule over all the nations. For Jesus and for us, the temptation here is to redefine ourselves through what we do. We are tempted to define our lives to read like a living obituary: loving husband, devoted mother, cherished daughter, beloved friend. Or to define ourselves through our job titles. Yet who are we at our core if these roles and titles are taken away?

Jesus' final rejection of the temptations is to reassert the focus on God alone. If we choose to believe it, God's answer to who we are is extraordinary.

Our answer to the question of "who am I?" will ultimately determine what we look for in life, and what our purpose will be. We have a choice to follow life's distractions, to follow the fake "truths", to follow an identity defined by what we do. The fear is that following such paths diminishes who we are at our heart and may leave us feeling we have never truly lived.

But another voice calls to us... *Follow me instead!*

Who are we?

"Everything is to be oriented towards the praise and glory of God"



The Vision of St Agnes' Catholic Parish
"Everything is to be oriented towards the praise and glory of God"

is the focus of all that is carried out in the name of St Agnes' Catholic Parish and was created by our own community.

This vision is underpinned by a parish mission, parish values, intentions and goals.

Everyone in the St Agnes' Catholic Parish community is encouraged and supported to consider how their encounters within the community bring us into closer relationship with ourselves, each other and with God as we each live this strive toward this vision in our parish community.

Living Service

Youth & Family Support

At times, fullness of life can include challenges that find us struggling with questions of self worth and meaning. St Agnes' Catholic Parish is available to assist families, children and young people who are finding the path difficult.



There are pathways for Youth and Family support that provide numerous services across the community including parenting support, increasing social networks and developing healthy lifestyles. Loving one another in this way is another pathway to fullness of life.

Find out more about Youth and Family Support Services at <https://sacal.org.au/community-services-youth-family-support/>

Following Jesus is a radical alternative, where we join a journey of adventure and discovery, seeking to believe not only in the message but in the person of Jesus, who wants us to *live life to the full*.

What does living life to the full look like? Famously, Jesus says, *love God, love neighbour and love yourself*. In brief, we are to live knowing we are made in God's own image, and that God loves us as God's own children, and seeks for our union with God and all humanity. Following Jesus means seeking to be a disciple, believing Jesus is our reason for hope and making an effort to live out our discipleship by getting to know Jesus better, connecting with other believers, and reaching out to others in God's great love, living an intentional life of discipleship.

Through these next weeks, we explore what it means to choose and live a life of intentional discipleship.

For Sharing

1. How do you go with the challenge to define who you are in twenty-five words or less? Why do you think the search for self-knowledge has been central to humanity throughout history?
2. Share, as much as you are comfortable, some of the ways you experience the temptations to either ignore the question of self, buy into a fake self-truth, or find identity through your role.
3. What attracts you to the invitation to live as an intentional disciple: someone who connects with Jesus, connects with community and seeks outreach to others? What questions do you have about living this way?



"There in their presence Jesus was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light."

Matthew 17:2

Read the full Gospel

Matthew 17:1-9

In the reality TV show, *The Block*, couples vie to renovate houses, to transform something ordinary or rundown into an extraordinary style and design. While there is a goodness in wanting to renew, will we ever be satisfied?

Some people will never stop renovating, not just their house, but their lives. The need to change becomes its own addiction, with the need to update not only possessions but our entire self-image: face, hair, body shape, personality, and so on, limited only by one's bank account. Every aspect of our identity can become subject to upgrade - to a version of ourselves that we think will be worth something to us and others. There was a joke of a lady who was visited by an angel, who informed her that she had thirty more years of life. Thrilled, she goes out to celebrate with a facelift, body enhancements, hair dye and a complete wardrobe change. Crossing the road after all this, a bus runs her down and she goes to heaven. "I had thirty more years!" she cries. "Sorry," apologises the angel, "God didn't recognise you."

While some efforts to improve stem from high self-esteem, for many the need to change can stem from a poor sense of self-worth. This can be voiced as: *There is something wrong with me, or I am not good enough.*

A Season of Renewal



The Season of Renewal is a time to honour and build on the good work of so many faithful stewards (past and present). Through this renewal the Parish seeks to strengthen:

- Opportunities for people to encounter and experience Jesus Christ more deeply
- Pathways to connect with and belong within our pastoral community (centred in the Eucharist as a local expression of our Catholic Church)
- Outreach and support to those beyond our pastoral community, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in both word and deed.

This time of renewal depends on each of us, no matter the role we take on during the process, because God is calling us on to renew our hearts.

It is as though we are watching a show called *Self Renovation* which lists all that is wrong with what we do, how we live and how we look. We frantically strive to find a way to measure up to the glossy versions of humans on our screens and in the stories repeated by society about what equates to success: education, job, lots of friends, stable relationship, own home, kids. The magic formula remains out of reach, and we continue to renovate ourselves.

When Jesus goes up the mountain, the disciples witness his transfiguration. In Jesus' case, he does not renovate himself through going on a shopping expedition or finding something to make him a better version of himself. Instead, the disciples witness his goodness, beauty and truth emanating from his own self. Jesus is fully human, fully divine, and in that moment, they glimpse something of the divine nature.

What might this moment reveal about us as humans? When God chose to become human, to become one with us, it was not putting on a human cloak over the divine. To be fully human, fully divine, means that Jesus experienced humanity in its fullness, in all things but sin. This makes him a great person to relate to, as he fully empathises when we share our anxieties, struggles, hopes and griefs. However, the transfiguration, and indeed all of God's revelation, continues to call us to appreciate that being human does not mean being unworthy or somehow innately messed up. God, through Jesus, shows us the opposite: we are to experience our own lives as full of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

God does not gaze upon the home of our inner self with disappointment. God rather chooses to dwell in our hearts, making us a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. We do not have to do anything to earn this.

Living Service

Supported Living

We are all unique and we each add our own gifts and personalities to the rich tapestry of this world.

IMAGE House and Kempsey House are our supported residential accommodation houses for adults with intellectual and physical disabilities. Care and support is provided to residents to assist them to learn, grow and achieve their goals.



We are invited to come as we are. We give thanks to those who support others so they can experience the wonder of their own self and embrace the wonder of one another.

Find out more about Supported Living at <https://sacal.org.au/community-services-image/>

Jesus desires to make his home in us, to live in us, and through Jesus, we can live extraordinary lives. The scriptures call us to be saints, to be holy ones.

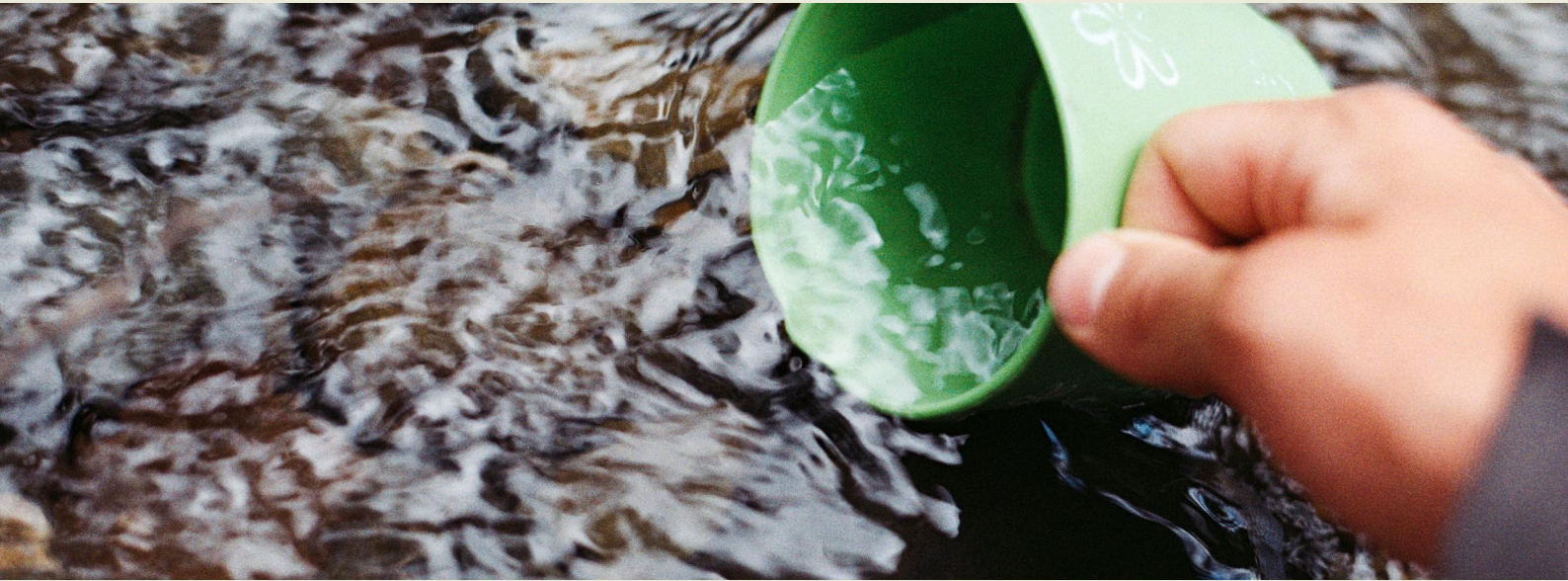
We are tempted to shake our heads at the thought of being holy. Isn't holiness reserved for saints of long ago, or hermits, or priests and religious? This is a false image. Holiness is not a role we play, but rather how we live daily in tune with the music of God, with the rhythm of God's Spirit.

We are invited to take to heart the words of the beautiful hymn by Deidre Brown, with God saying to us: *Nothing can change the love that I bear you. All will be well, just come as you are.*

Let us experience the wonder of our own self, worthy of God's love, worthy of self-love, and embrace the wonder of one another, fellow saints called to share the beauty of God's goodness with the world, called to be intentional followers of Jesus Christ: intentional disciples.

For Sharing

1. How do you experience the challenge of society to continue to self-improve? In what ways is this healthy, and when might it become unhealthy?
2. Share your response to God's message that we are worthy of God's love, regardless of who we are or what we have done.
3. How do you resonate with the call to be an intentional disciple: living daily in tune with the music of God, with the rhythm of God's Spirit?



“Anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside them, welling up to eternal life.”

John 4:14

*Read the full Gospel
John 4:5-16, 19-26,
39-42*

There is an urban legend about a mighty warship that detects another vessel on the ocean. The captain demands the vessel change its course, but the vessel requests the battleship change its course. Finally, the warship’s captain bellows that they will take appropriate action if the other vessel does not comply, to which the vessel says, “I am the keeper of the local lighthouse, mate. You do what you like!”

We sometimes believe that we are the captains of our lives and control what is happening as we sail life’s ocean. Inevitably, we come up against the obstacles: illness, job loss, separation, and death. We can spiral out of control on a stormy ocean with no shoreline in sight.

The Samaritan woman who Jesus encounters at the well is one such person. At the well alone, during the hottest part of the day, things have not worked out in her life, and she is disconnected from her own truth and from her own community.

Jesus offers her an amazing gift. The opportunity to never thirst again, to experience the eternal life God offers.

The result? A woman so excited about Jesus that she races to share her news with others, even those who hold her of no account. How does this compare with today's experience of being a Christian?

Sometimes, being Catholic can be equated to following the rules of the Church, going to Mass and doing the right thing – and can be viewed as out of date, irrelevant or contrary to current world views. For some believers, they can become like warships, calmly sailing their ocean of faith, feeling in control, because the laws never change, and the Mass is always the same. For others, they feel disconnected, and want to abandon ship!

The Samaritan woman connected with the living Jesus, and experienced living water welling up in her. How do we seek to connect with the living Jesus? How do we ensure we do not become a warship, clad with familiar routines and rituals, never changing course? Both the scriptures, and the lives of the saints, offer many stories of people who – like the Samaritan woman – change the course of their lives, sometimes repeatedly, through their life in Christ.

How do we become in touch with our own thirst? Is our attitude open to the action of God's Spirit? Are we willing to surrender and expect the unexpected - to give God control of our vessel? Where do we seek to encounter this living God, who thirsts to share living water with us? Where do we find our connection? Where are the lighthouses in our life that help us to shift our course to a deeper life in Christ?

Many lights can guide our course. Prayer is first and foremost, where like the woman at the well, we spend quality time with Jesus. If we need to refresh our prayer life, we may try journalling, and

Our Values

The way we act and how we treat others shows that Christ, our role model, is at the heart of all we do.



Living Breathing
VALUES

Nourished by **FAITH**

Uncompromising **INTEGRITY**

Empowered by **EXCELLENCE**

SERVICE before self

Courageous **STEWARDSHIP**

United as '**ONE BODY**'

Each of us is fundamentally responsible for shaping the culture of St Agnes' Catholic Parish. By living our mission and values authentically and inspiring others to do the same, we become advocates for the goodness and holiness of Christ.

As we embrace these values, we are invited to encounter Jesus Christ, the one from whom all these values stem.

Living Service

Home Care

Keeping connected in a busy world can sometimes be difficult, especially as we become less mobile in our older years. Home Care offers a person-centred service to clients to maintain the lifestyle they desire while living in their own home.



Providing a range of support for personal and pastoral care, Home Care is a way that the community of St Agnes' ensures that people in the community stay connected. Sharing these day-to-day moments of ordinary life are a shift in the course of our lives, as well as opportunities to be open to the Spirit for a new season of living.

Find out more about
Home Care at
[https://sacal.org.au/
what-is-home-care/](https://sacal.org.au/what-is-home-care/)

respond to some of the many questions Jesus asks us: Who do you say I am? What are you looking for? What do you want me to do for you? Do you love me? Or we may experience the divine through the Mass, or in other special church rituals and sacraments. Scripture also can light our way, as we take up segments of God's word and chew them over in our daily life, living them in our heart, for example: *You are fearfully and wonderfully made* (Psalm 139:14), or *Do not fear, for I am with you* (Isaiah 41:10).

Our faith community is our way of connecting with the Christ-light of others, of being nourished by others, and sharing our wisdom and life with them in turn. And through outreach we bring Christ's light to the world, being shaped by the Spirit of Christ alive in society and creation.

Being at sea with Christ, is both liberating and risky, for when we hand over our vessel, we surrender our life to God, and being an intentional disciple becomes a life of constantly shifting course, always alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our life.

For Sharing

1. What are some ways you recognise you are not in control of your life?
2. How do you relate to the Samaritan woman's thirst and enthusiastic response to Jesus' invitation?
3. What is one "light" you might seek to cultivate to help guide your intentional discipleship: prayer & sacraments, scripture, community life or service? How might you set a renewed course this year?



The man born blind said:
"I only know that I was blind and now I can see."

John 9:25

*Read the full Gospel
John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17,
34-38*

Retired Australian bishop, Eugene Hurley, tells of one dark night, when returning home, he spies a large snake coiled on his porch. He races indoors, gathers his courage, and storms out, hacking it repeatedly with an axe before retreating back inside. In the morning, he ventures outside, only to find his garden hose, now in many pieces, adorning his porch.

We all experience blind spots. Someone learning to drive is surprised to find that there are areas around your car that you cannot see when looking through your mirrors. We have memory lapses, forgetting where we put the keys or what we had for breakfast. We see what's not there, or fail to see what is there.

In the story of the man born blind, the healing of his sight, though amazing, is eclipsed by a far greater blindness which the man experiences in his own community. The goodness at the heart of encountering Jesus is choked by questions of what is right or wrong. The man born blind experiences the prejudice of his community, which in the name of God, equates blindness to sin, ascribing fault to someone's identity. Such people – lepers, tax collectors, sex workers - were excluded from table fellowship, from worship and in many cases, from their own family.

The Mission

How other people see our community is a response to how each of us bring to life the Vision and Mission of St Agnes' Catholic Parish.

At St Agnes' Catholic Parish we can bring to life the Vision - *Everything is to be oriented towards the praise and glory of God* - by living these points of our mission:

- Holiness in the image of Christ
- Proclaim the good news of salvation
- Minister within the faith community
- The service of all, particularly those in need



This will look different for every person in different settings. We are each called to engage with the mission individually, in our families, in our work and in our communities.

Blind spots endure in our society. Some examples include the struggle to respect and fully embrace First Nation people, refugees, women's equality, LGBTQIA+ equality, and those living with disability.

Our Catholic Church is not immune from prejudice. There can be an expectation that one needs to behave in certain ways to belong. If one is having sex outside of marriage, is gay, is divorced and remarried, is supporting abortion or euthanasia, are they still welcome? Parents struggling to quiet young children at Mass, may be conscious of the glares of nearby worshippers. If one dresses differently, or has tattoos or is simply a stranger, they can find themselves outside of friendship circles.

Intentional disciples can become blind to the One we are called to follow. We make up a Jesus who judges people, and only wants to welcome those whom we accept. However, Jesus is radically inclusive. He eats with so-called sinners, being one with them, embracing them as family, affirming their goodness. He engages with racial enemies, the Samaritans, and empowers women. He heals members of the occupying nation, the Romans. He shares a last meal with one who will betray him, and welcomes a criminal in his dying moments.

Whether at Mass, in our own family and friendship circles, or in our workplaces, we all can experience blind spots. Who do we exclude because they think differently, behave differently, or look different? It is those very people Jesus would have a laugh and bite to eat with in our present day, and invite us to join in. Removing our blind spots is not an easy thing. At an institutional church level, we may hear the phrase: "love the sinner, hate the sin". However, is this simply saying we love your humanity, but not the way you are living it? It doesn't sound like an overwhelming welcome!

Living Service

St Agnes' Foundation

The St Agnes' Foundation Limited has a long history of helping our society's most vulnerable people.



The demand for support has increased around the country following drought, bushfires, floods and the pandemic over recent years. The uncertainty and crisis has now reached new levels so when we are confronted with genuine human need such as poverty, homelessness or after a disaster, we are often asked by those in the community "What can I do to help?" As a parish community it is at our heart to help and provide service to all those in need.

Find out more about St Agnes' Foundation at <https://stagnesparish.org.au/st-agnes-foundation/>

Welcome and inclusion is a hallmark of the encounters of Jesus. How do we address the reality that people still share how they are made to feel unwelcome because church laws outweigh the free offer of love and acceptance to all?

A way forward is to imitate Jesus. He sat with people, shared a meal, and became friends with those whom he had no business being friends with. He asked questions and sought to understand. Through shared dialogue and discernment our church often finds new ways of expressing our life. Yes, there are times Jesus invites people to "sin no more", yet this seems to be more about living authentically in alignment with your own self, with God, and with one another. Jesus seems to reserve his strongest criticisms against those who judge others, who are hypocritical, who are selfish, and who do not forgive.

May we continue to have our blindness healed, to see people not as strangers, but as friends and family, united by the love in which God holds us all.

For Sharing

1. What are some blind spots you have experienced in your own life? How have you become aware of them?
2. The story about the rejection of the man born blind's can be the experience of some people who are marginalised by our church. Share your own awareness of where you believe we sometimes exclude rather than include as church.
3. What are some ways we can strengthen our welcome and inclusion of one another, especially those who find themselves marginalised?



Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, let him go free!"

John 11:44

*Read the full Gospel
John 11:3-7, 17,
23-27, 33-45*

In many games we play on our devices, whenever anything goes wrong we can restart allowing us to choose a different path to success. In real life, when bad things happen, we don't get to press restart. More often, our experience can be like that of Phil, the main character in the movie *Groundhog Day*, who endlessly must repeat the same day over and over again.

Suffering, particularly prolonged suffering, can make us question God, question our faith, and question our own self. We can be entombed in our pain, like Lazarus in today's Gospel.

Suffering can be physical, emotional or mental anguish. It can be something that has happened to us, to a loved one, or even a suffering we experience by living in a world where we see so much violence and injustice.

In our tortured reality it can seem like God is no longer present, or that God has somehow caused our present suffering. Both these extreme views can add to our agony. On the one hand, feeling abandoned by God leaves us even more isolated. Why would God let this happen? On the other hand, believing God planned for our suffering casts God in an abusive light, and we may struggle to justify God's plan, saying that our suffering has happened for a reason.

A clear message we can take from Jesus' agony and death on the cross is that God certainly never seeks to abandon us. God loves us so much, and this love endures despite any hatred, despair, and ridicule we may level at God. God will continue to love through it all. Even through pain and death, God will go on loving us. Jesus, as fully human, fully divine, experiences human suffering, both the physical pain and also the emotional anguish of friends betraying and deserting him, of seeing his mother's pain as she looks on helplessly. And we can imagine he also endures an ongoing agony in his adult life of seeing the oppression of his people, and the acts of hate against one another.

So in our suffering, we can firstly be assured that God is with us, bleeding at the heart of our pain, weeping as he weeps for Lazarus, never turning from us, even if we shrink away from the darkness.

But does God plan for our suffering to happen, or the suffering of the world? No definitive answer has been revealed as to why suffering must happen, especially on such a scale. What Jesus does share through his life is that God never desires suffering. So often, Jesus seeks to heal physical pain and emotional and mental anguish. Jesus seeks reconciliation of enemies, and indeed, wants to bring all creation into wholeness. This is God's plan. This can offer a very different way of understanding our suffering. Far from punishing us, testing us, or wanting us to endure our current pain for some mystical benefit, God yearns for this present suffering to cease. If we must persevere, we do so with God, and where possible, we seek relief and wholeness, for ourselves and others.

Jesus calls out to each of us by name, "Be unbound! May you go free!" He yearns to release us from the clutches of death and suffering.

Living the Vision

The St Agnes' Catholic Parish Strategic Plan details a shared future that builds upon our strengths, addresses areas for improvement and guides us to work collectively for those we serve in our Parish community.

Mission and Culture

We are authentic to our Mission and nurture a culture reflective of this Mission.

People

We are inclusive and empower our people, all of whom are fundamental to our Mission.

Stewardship

We have a long and distinguished history of serving and caring for our community. As the current stewards of this legacy, we will continue to grow our services to serve the Parish community

Communication & Collaboration

We encourage and nurture a collaborative and inclusive community.

Connectedness and Identity

We foster and promote a Parish community that is engaged and connected through its services.

Living Service

Pastoral and Spiritual Care

Pastoral and Spiritual care is about caring for others. Together, they help us live life to the fullest.

Spirituality is what gives us meaning, connection, creativity and relationship with creation, with others and with God.



Despite challenges of isolation through the pandemic and restrictions, ways of connecting always remains a focus in pastoral and spiritual care - the care of the individual and the invitation for residents of services to pray for the well-being of others.

This care - whether it be big or small gestures - goes a way to strengthen compassion, healing and justice in the world.

We all experience Lazarus seasons in our life, where death claims us in small ways or dramatic ways, or we are Mary and Martha, suffering alongside a loved one who endures agony.

As intentional disciples, we are called never to shrink away from the crosses of life. Like Jesus, there are times we must take up a cross, for ourselves or others. Yet we do so with the assurance that God is with us, and that we do not journey alone. Hopefully, our community of faith will surround us at these times. We look beyond the present suffering, seeking paths of acceptance, perseverance and, where possible, healing. As intentional disciples we also go out on mission to the world, to seek to bring healing, justice, love and compassion to all people, and to all creation.

Ultimately, the crucifixion of Jesus must always be coupled with his resurrection. To focus only on suffering is like being trapped in our own tomb, or trapped in Groundhog Day, knowing only despair. However, within that one repeated day, Phil the protagonist shifts from being victim to an agent of good, bringing richness to his own life and to the lives of others. A resurrection occurs even at the heart of his suffering. Likewise, as Christians, we believe that the present pain of our life, even if endured to our death, is not the end of the story. Through our suffering, we can be agents of the resurrection, living hope in the darkest of places.

For Sharing

1. When has suffering made you question God?
2. Share your reflection on the Christian view that God does not desire suffering, rather that God's plan is to bring healing and wholeness to all.
3. What are some ways we can strengthen our compassion, healing and justice in the world?



Holy Week humbles us as we witness the magnitude of God's love for us. At a time when it may seem that God has abandoned Jesus, God does anything but and is there with Jesus in the suffering and ultimately, in the resurrection.

How do we allow God to journey with us through all the emotion and events of life?

You are invited to select from these scenes for personal or group reflection.

A. An Authentic Welcome?

"Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted,

'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?' And the crowds said, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.'"

(From the Gospel of Palm Sunday
Matthew 21:1-11)

For Sharing

1. How do we express our joy in Jesus Christ to others?
2. The same crowds that welcome Jesus would later turn on him. How do we ensure that our welcome of others is authentic rather than superficial?
3. Who is someone that could do with a renewed welcome from you? How can we be intentional when new life can be offered to them?

B. Do unto Others

"Jesus ... got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it around his waist; he then poured water into basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing ... When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'"

(From the Gospel of Holy Thursday John 13:1-15)



For Sharing

1. Jesus reminds us that following him means to serve rather than be served. What may we have to let go of in order to serve Jesus?
2. How can we let Jesus serve us so that we are inspired to serve others?
3. Jesus shows us an intimacy in the act of washing of feet. Share a time when you have 'had your feet washed' by others on your life's journey.

C. Denying God's Hospitality

"Simon Peter, with another disciple, followed Jesus. This disciple, who was known to the high priest, went with Jesus into the high priest's palace, but Peter stayed outside the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who was keeping the door and brought Peter in. The maid on duty at the door said to Peter, "Aren't you another of that man's disciples?" He answered, "I am not." Now it was cold, and the servants and guards had lit a charcoal fire and were standing there warming themselves: so Peter stood there too, warming himself with the others ... As Simon Peter stood there warming himself, someone said to him, "Aren't you another of his disciples?" He denied it saying, "I am not." One of the high priest's servants, a relation of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again, Peter denied it; and at once a cock crew."

(From the Gospel of Good Friday, John 18:1-19:42)

For Sharing

1. Before the crucifixion, Peter pretends he doesn't know Jesus. Share a time you stood up for your beliefs, though it may have meant a loss of face.
2. Do you pretend you don't know Jesus or aren't intentional in being a disciple through choices or ways you act? How can you invite God into these hidden places?
3. Who is someone you have denied your time or attention? Could this time of Easter offer renewed care to them?

D. We are not Alone

"Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.

(From the Gospel of Good Friday John 18:1-19:42)

For Sharing

1. In this beautiful statement of love, Jesus reminds us that we are not alone. We have the love of others to accompany us on the journey of life. When is a time that you have felt alone and the gesture of a loving other guided you through?
2. Who are the people in your life that you can accompany in their journey toward Jesus?
3. In this moment, Mary was helped by Jesus. As intentional disciples, we will also need Jesus' help as we do our best to share God's love. How can you continue to seek Jesus' guidance and love in your life?

Living Service

The Pastoral Community

Our Pastoral Community is the life blood of our parish where we come together in thanksgiving and companionship to celebrate God's love in our lives and in our world. As St Paul says, *"There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. We were all baptised by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body."*



Many people share their time and gifts with others in the celebration of our faith through a myriad of ways including singing, proclaiming God's word, sharing the faith in small groups, welcome and hospitality and guiding the parish in leadership. All our gifts are for the praise and glory of God.

Find out more about our Pastoral Community at <https://stagnesparish.org.au/>



"Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples."

Matthew 28:8

*Read the full Gospel
Matthew 28:1-10*

Birthdays can be a time of great joy where we celebrate the gift of someone we love in this world. It would come as a great shock if we went to a birthday party and there was no singing of happy birthday, no cake, and the gifts remained unopened.

Easter is the greatest celebration of our Church's year, so much so, that we go on celebrating it for fifty days! It is like one long birthday. While we associate Christmas with Jesus' birthday, there is a sense where Easter is like a second birthday for each of us, because it is our celebration of the new life each of us finds in Christ. Baptism is our formal acceptance of what this new life offers, but God offers this new life to each person in our world, regardless of our response.

We have been granted a great gift in our world, the gift of our own life. And while Easter reminds us that we are destined for eternal life, it also speaks to the good news of our life in the here and now.

We can stand and marvel at the empty tomb, and slip into a passive Christianity, content to simply accept that all Jesus said is true, that Jesus indeed triumphed over death and is God and hold on to this good news for ourselves alone.

Yet the women do not stay at the tomb. As intentional disciples, they race off to share the Good News with others. And for two thousand years, Christians continue to share the message of the resurrection through our words and deeds, rejoicing that Jesus is risen, not only way back then, but daily in each person's heart in the world.

We are called to become faithful stewards of God's grace, employing whatever gift we have received to share with others, to be good news to others. Our stewardship begins with celebrating the gifts we have received from God. We have the opportunity every day to unwrap the gift of God's world. We can give thanks for the grandeur of creation, from pure droplets of water to the vastness of space, from a breaching whale to a breath-taking sunset. We give thanks for the richness and diversity of people, for their ingenuity, the wonder of science, the beauty of the arts and the striving of so many to usher in a better tomorrow.

We can be thankful for the gift of our own self, the mystery of our thoughts, emotions and body. Each breath can be an act of thanks, given by God. We can be grateful for our ability to ponder life, to connect with others, and for our presence in yet another day. And we can give thanks for our unique giftedness. People discover their giftedness as singers, dancers, artists, educators, welcomers, leaders, designers, builders, listeners, healers, athletes, and so much more. We have so many gifts to open each day and be thankful for, and a true steward, give thanks, fostering a daily attitude of gratitude for all that has been given.

How do we responsibly cultivate the gifts we have been given? How do we look after and nurture our own self? How do we cultivate our relationships with others, and care for our world?

The 50 day party!



You are encouraged to engage with St Agnes' Catholic Parish in whatever way you feel you can respond to God's invitation in your life. Connecting doesn't finish with the end of a program. It can be ongoing in a way to which you have been called.

Throughout these weeks of Lent, we have shared our thoughts, our feelings, and experiences.

How do we offer this opportunity to others, to connect more deeply with Jesus, with one another, and to outreach to the broader community?

After Lent, you will see information about the re-establishment of our Parish Pastoral Council and an opportunity to contribute to planning for our community.

Let's be living hope for one another!

Living Service

Volunteers

Volunteers support the Parish in achieving its Mission in so many areas.

St Agnes' Catholic Parish values the important contribution of volunteers within the community.

Services could not be provided in the way they are without generous volunteers being living hope for others.



Being hope for others, being Christ's light in our world, means being intentional disciples and faithful stewards of God's grace. God graces us with so much. Let us be thankful, cultivate our gifts, share them generously, and give the best of ourselves to the praise and glory of God.

Find out more about volunteering with St Agnes' Catholic Parish at <https://stagnesparish.org.au/volunteers/>

Some people simply say they have nothing much to offer. Yet in God's eyes they are masterpieces! Our task can become a treasure hunt, where we discover the gifts within and nurture them.

If we have a good singing voice, how might we strengthen it? If we have been affirmed for our technical skills, how might we explore this passion?

It can take time to identify and affirm all we have been gifted with, and to seek to responsibly cultivate our gifts. Yet the journey does not end there. As intentional disciples, being good stewards of our gifts, we are called to share them with generosity. How do we offer our gift of music, art, leadership, welcoming, energising others, prayerfulness and so on?

Finally, a faithful steward gives the best of themselves. Sometimes people say that they will share their gifts once they have worked out the rest of their life. It is sad when we hear of someone who still isn't cultivating a gift or passion because they are so busy with everything else. The women at the tomb went racing to share the good news! They didn't first spend their days doing everything else that occupied their time. May we be filled with the same Easter joy, racing to offer the good news, and to share the gift of our life.

For Sharing

1. Who or what are you particularly grateful for in all God has gifted us with?
2. Share some of the ways you have cultivated and shared your gifts with others.
3. How might we further encourage people to come to know and share their gifts with our broader community?



Copyright (c) 2023 St Agnes' Catholic Parish and Synodal Consulting
PO Box 1736 Port Macquarie

"Living Hope" is published by St Agnes' Catholic Parish and Synodal Consulting.
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic or mechanical, without written permission from the publisher.

Concept and Writing: Richard McMahon
Design and Editing: Lisa Bright
Reviewers and Proofing: Tony Worner, Tess Koning, Megan Barber, Steve Bryant, Fr Paul Gooley

Acknowledgements

© The scriptural quotations are taken from the Jerusalem Bible, published and copyright 1966, 1967 and 1968 by
Darton Longman and Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Co Inc, and used by permission of the publishers.

All images used with permission from St Agnes' Catholic Parish and canva.com



St AGNES' CATHOLIC PARISH

CONTACT US

St Agnes' Catholic Parish Administration Centre

49 Hay Street (PO Box 1736)

Port Macquarie NSW 2444

T: (02) 6588 7444

F: (02) 6588 7440

E: pac@stagnesparish.org.au

W: www.stagnesparish.org.au