



The Escarpment
Newsletter of the Wollongong Cursillo Movement

Friends,

As you all know, this years' World Youth Day has just concluded in Portugal, and its theme was taken from the Gospel of Luke: "...Mary arose and went with haste" (Lk 1:39). These words are found within the greater context of Luke's account of the Visitation of the Blessed Mother to her cousin Elisabeth in the hill country of Judea. This verse precedes Mary's beautiful prayer the *Magnificat*, which is the one of the most ancient Marian prayers and which is frequently recited in the Liturgy of the Hours. It is also sung at Evensong in Anglo-Catholic parishes.

This haste with which Mary set out, Pope Francis says, "is a sign of her desire to serve, to proclaim her joy, to respond without hesitation¹" to the urgings of the Holy Spirit. Father James Spencer Northcote reflects on the fact that in praying the Rosary, we are called to mediate upon the Visitation in the Second Joyful Mystery. Having previously been an Anglican minister, Fr Northcote was in a peculiar position to understand the Protestant conception of the Visitation, examining the "distinct Divine sanction to which [Catholics] honour her²" and the fact that "few Protestants are in the habit of seeing any mystery at all³".

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco_20220815_messaggio-giovani_2022.html

² <https://www.salvemariaregina.info/SalveMariaRegina/SMR-174/LifeMary06.htm>

³ Ibid.



Pope Francis tells the Catholic youth that, following the Annunciation, Mary “could have focused on herself and her own worries and fears” concerning her new condition, but instead she focused on God, and entrusted herself completely to His care. The Holy Father comments that we should be led by the Holy Spirit and follow the Blessed Mother’s example of having “a healthy haste”. However, he contrasts this with the unhealthy haste which “can drive us to live superficially and to take everything lightly”, for “when things are done in [an unhealthy] haste, they tend not to be fruitful”.

Some of the youth of today seem to live in an unhealthy haste most of the time – as Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said of this type of youth in the 1950’s “they don’t know where they’re going, but they are certainly on their way” – they are in need of good counsel, of reflection, and the modern world moves along far too quickly for that. We need time for reflection, for deep thought, for prayer. I recently read some research papers on the effects of prayer and meditation on our neural networks and upon our general well-being, and the results were immediately apparent. I was writing an essay on aesthetics, and I dealt mainly with the effects of liturgy on neuropsychology (the other parts gave a background on Gestalt theory and on the background of aesthetics and the arguments of ancient Greek philosophers concerning the subject). One interesting essay I found concerned the effect of poetry on the neural networks of the brain – the paper explored Dante’s *Divina Commedia* and measured skin electrical conductivity and cognitive processing. The researchers found that the electrical conductivity of the skin of the participants who had studied the poem increased and that there was also increased cognitive processing among

these participants. The effect on “non literature students” was similar. The “non literature students” were still moved by the poem.



Members of the youth group Juventutem setting off for WYD in Lisbon (FSSP England)

All this is very interesting, physiologically, but still has a deep effect on the soul, moving it further towards the contemplation and love of God. When I first heard *Paradiso*, I was fascinated by the character of Beatrice. She was Dante’s guide through Heaven.



Dante and Beatrice, by Henry Holiday, 1883.

Dante wrote that he had only met Beatrice di Folco Portinari twice in the span of 9 years, but in *Paradiso* and the conclusion of *Purgatorio*, she symbolises divine Grace and Theology. In Holiday's painting, above, the artist depicts the incident which Dante recalls in his 1294 autobiography, *Vita Nuova*, where he describes her refusal to speak to him after having heard gossip about his attraction to other women. Beatrice is depicted wearing a white dress, while her friend, Monna Vanna, walks beside her. Beatrice's maidservant stands slightly behind the two women. Holliday was anxious that the painting be historically accurate and travelled to Florence in 1881. In his research he discovered that in the 13th century, the street on the north side of the River Arno between the Ponte Vecchio (seen in the background) and the Ponte Santa Trinita, was paved with bricks and that there were shops in the area; these are shown in the painting. He also learned that the Ponte Vecchio had been destroyed in a flood in 1235. It was being rebuilt between 1285 and 1290 and in the painting, it is shown covered in scaffolding. It is this scene that Dante described in *Vita Nuova*. In this work, Dante gives an overwhelmingly positive portrayal of Beatrice, in contradistinction to the sharply defined personality for which she is famous in the *Commedia*.

They first met when they were 9, and Dante was instantly taken with her, even though she married another man, a banker, in 1287, and remained so throughout his life. Despite marrying another woman, Gemma Donati, in 1285, he still retained some feelings towards Beatrice, even after her death in 1290.

It was, perhaps, his feelings towards her that provided the inspiration to make her his literary guide through Paradise.

It is through literary and artistic works as these that we raise our minds and hearts to God. They serve as pointers along the way to steer us in the right direction towards our goal. Art, music, and literature may be beautiful, but they are more so if they are produced in the service of God. The Gospel of Luke is a Social Gospel and one of service to the community, and it was through Mary's initial *fiat* that God enacted His salvific plan for mankind. So let us go – with haste – with the psalmist, unto the altar of God, unto God who giveth joy to our youth.

De Colores!

- Matthew Nicholson

This is a reminder to Cursillistas to support the team on the Weekend by attending the Mananita – Contact Marie Rutledge on 0414327941

A report on the Reflection Day – By Denise Sciberras

I was very blessed to have stayed and travelled with Debbie to the Reflection Day.

We both shared anticipation and excitement at the opportunity of being with our fellow Cursillistas. It was wonderful to see everyone, warm hugs and smiles, and a generous table of yummy fare, no mistaking where we were. Yes, this was a Cursillo gathering.

The day was well planned, the discussion topics were well presented and interesting.

The first talk was Search, followed by Hope and Gratitude, each talk building on the next. The third talk, gratitude, was a little different in that it gave us a specific scripture passage to discuss i.e. healing.... the 10 Lepers and a Parable i.e.....The workers in the vineyard.

Following each talk, we were given a list of discussion points. Table members took turns to listen and share their individual thoughts and points of view, it's in the sharing that we learn so much. We had four new people who attended, seeking information about Cursillo, following a notice in their parish bulletin. They had the opportunity to enjoy the talks and discussions and would have benefited from the presentations of the day.

As a group we were able to reflect on the topics, Search, Hope and Gratitude.

The afternoon program included Mass celebrated by Fr. Chris and commissioning the new team led by Geraldine. After that, we were offered the choice of doing an art/craft activity or going on an Emmaus Walk. The day was one of reflection, designed to make us think/query. How are you traveling in life? Where are you on your faith journey?

For me, it is always good to stop and reflect, this day gave us that opportunity, and for that, I was very grateful.

Thanks, Denise, for an excellent reflection. Denise has also asked anyone interested in being part of the Palanca on the Women's Weekend this year to register their interest with her either via 'phone: 0411700801 or via email: dee.muir53@gmail.com.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ excerpted from *Hearts on Fire*

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

Witness Talk of Shirley Parker.

I was born into the faith! Dad was a non-practicing Catholic; Mum was a convert and took us to mass every Sunday.

I attended Catholic schools as Catholics did in those days, I thought there were only 2 religions, protestant and Catholic. On the way home from school the so-called Protestants were on one side of the road and us Catholics on the other, we used to recite unsavoury little ditties which they readily slung back at us. Catholic schools were run by nuns and brothers, and they instilled the fear of God in us.

I knew the catechism off by heart and prided myself in being one of the last standing at question time. I made all of my sacraments though not fully aware of their graces. I recited my first confession for some months until I became aware it was no longer my first confession. I was dressed in white for my first communion a little bride of Christ. When I made my confirmation, I remember the slap on the face and making a pledge not to drink alcohol until I was 21 which I didn't quite make.

Mass was said in Latin. The altar was placed so you could only see the priest's back, and you received communion at the alter rails. You had to fast for 3 hours before communion, so a lot of people were fainting in the isles. It was very mysterious, and I loved it! I did all the catholic things growing up regular confession, novenas, missions, Mass, the Rosary; you name it I did it. I grew up to become a bigoted catholic thinking I knew it all and I was right, making judgements on people I didn't really know.

Be careful who you judge as you may become that person, which is exactly what happened to me. I used to see a woman at church, and I thought she wore a wig and now I think I am that woman, a small example but you get my meaning. God has tested me and said no to me and I have turned away from Him thinking I knew better and could do it on my own, things did not work out too well. My faith became lukewarm, I would put God off. I have been told I have a catholic conscience; I did the right thing more out of a sense of duty than out of a sense of God.

Life was busy with work and the kids always needing something, I always seemed to be on the move visiting family so there wasn't much time left for

God. Though I did talk to Him at times and was always asking for things but no real quality time. Then I retired! Everything I had achieved amounted to nothing; I think then I started to search for something real in my life a sense of belonging something worthwhile. I saw a leaflet advertising Cursillo, thinking it was a retreat, just what I needed. Cursillo is a challenge and sometimes a burden, but I have met inspirational women who inspire me to strive to be a better person and I hope I can count them as my friends. I feel supported in my faith with likeminded people.

Cursillo keeps me on track making me aware of those special moments when I am close to God. My prayer life isn't great, I find I get distracted, so I have started reading spiritual books and I am awe struck and blown away by God's great love His forgiveness and grace which He gives freely. I know I have a long way to go and I never would have survived without God in my life, He has carried me on many occasions. I have to keep reminding myself it is not who I am but whose I am. God has given me many blessings; I sometimes feel guilty when there is so much suffering around me. Thank you, God, for loving me.

Thanks, Shirley Parker, for providing the text of this wonderful Witness Talk.

A Reflection on Hope – Shirley Parker.

I have taken inspiration and quotes from David McDonald's book *Hope Beyond Cure* and scripture readings from the Holy Bible New International Version. What is Hope? An expectation – something we expect and desire, something to cling to, a possibility. Is it an emotion or a feeling or is hope a way of thinking? Is hope simply a reaction to our circumstances? Or can we develop hope and train our minds to be hopeful?

Hope is a function of both thinking and feeling, hopeful thoughts arise from hopeful thoughts, and if we're feeling hopeful, we're more disposed to searching and finding reasons to hope when we can't think of any reason for hope we become prone to despair, which clouds our thoughts. Real hope requires solid reasons for thinking and feeling positive for a better outcome. All our lifestyle choices make a difference, but they can never deliver real hope. We can hope in the things of this life, we need hope to continue from day-to-day. There are many obstacles that threaten to destroy hope and there are many that can strengthen and renew it. God offers this hope, a hope that stands on the evidence of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead to each one of us.

What gives you hope? We all have hope and dreams, for our families, for a better world, to win Lotto... Organisations claim that working for them will offer security and satisfaction, superannuation companies claim that the secret to hope and happiness is a strong retirement plan. All of these claims tend to promise more than they can deliver, and those who seek hope in them are inevitably disappointed. If I put my hope in things that will one day be destroyed or taken from me then – regardless of how good they may be for a time – I will miss out on the greatest hope available.

This hope is firmly anchored in history, it is based on faith, it involves placing our life and death in the hands of God. Hope matters – without hope there is nothing to live for. It's been said that "where there is life there is hope". It is equally important to say where there is hope there is life. False hope can cause us to miss the real thing.

There are many examples in the Bible where God has promised us hope.

Peter 1: 3-4

In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

In Revelation we get a glimpse of this world and a clear message of God's plan to correct everything that's wrong in our world. Hope is not mentioned in Revelation because it reveals what was previously hoped for.

Revelation 21: 3-4.

They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Through God's gift of faith we can trust in the hope – even though we fail repeatedly – that God is willing to accept and forgive us because of Jesus.

Mark 2: 1-12.

Some men came, bringing him a paralysed man carried by 4 of them. Since they could not get his to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said "Son, your sins are forgiven". Now some teachers of the Law were sitting there thinking to themselves: *Why is this fellow talking like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?*

Did they miss the meaning of real hope? Did the paralysed man's life change because his sins were forgiven or because he was cured? While Jesus often cured people physically, he also addressed their deeper problem. He was offering hope beyond cure.

Imagine the disappointment of the paralysed man's 4 friends who were hoping for a cure. It was not until Jesus said, "take up your mat and walk", that the people were amazed and praised God. We marvel at the creation, but we often ignore the Creator.

Sometimes things go wrong, and we lose hope. We all suffer from the terminal disease called 'Life'. What is our hope beyond cure? God promises to never leave or forsake those who trust in Him. God offers us hope beyond our circumstances. He offers us hope that is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He has given us the Holy Spirit, He has given us eternal life, what more do we need? Jesus said: "I am with you always, to the very end of age". Take hold of God's promises. Reach out and find Him. I thank God for His blessings of good and faith-filled people who have enriched and nourished my faith, for our monthly Cursillo meetings where we pray and share our faith journey with continual prayers and support, our slogan reads "Make a friend, Be a friend, bring a friend to Christ". I recently attended a talk by The Catholic Guy - a true evangelist, he travels the world preaching the Good News. He has handed over his life to God and has complete trust in him. This gives me hope that there is still good in the world, and it is not who we are, but what we do.

Earthly possessions will never satisfy us. Remember the poor widow – she gave all she had – she obviously had a higher plan. How do we satisfy that need? How do we find peace?

Hebrews 13: 5-6:

Be content with what you have, because God has said "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, the Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid, what can mere mortals do to me.

Both faith and hope are gifts from God to give us our bearings in life. They point us backwards towards the death and resurrection of Jesus and forwards to spending eternity with God. They set us free to live and love – Faith is the exercise of trust or dependence in something or someone else. What's important is the object of that faith, God, also gave us the power to love.

1 John 4: 9-10:

This is how God showed His love among us; He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Real love isn't a matter of convenience but of deep compassion. God loves the unlovely, the self-obsessed, those who reject and oppose Him. This love is a generous, undeserved gift, and it's this love that God calls us to offer to others.

Faith, Hope, and Love are essential elements of our Christian life all founded in Christ. We cannot live without Hope. Don't settle for false hope, lasting hope is found in Jesus Christ, a hope beyond cure for Eternal life.

I would like to finish with a prayer:

Lord Jesus, I pray this day for strength, because there are times when things get tough and I feel like quitting.

Lord Jesus, I ask this day for the comforting reassurance of Your love, because there are times when people fail me, and I am tempted to lose hope.

Lord Jesus, I seek this day for Your light to guide my steps, because there are times when life is confusing and difficult, and I lose my way.

Help me, O Lord, to pick up the pieces, wipe my tears, face them sun, and start over again, for all is possible when I place my faith and trust in You, my Saving God.

Amen.

- Thank you, Shirley, for providing this reflection.

Prayer Vigils:

The Prayer Vigils for both the team and candidates for upcoming Cursillo Weekend are being held at:

St. John the Evangelist, 24 Jerematta St Dapto **9.30am** for one hour after morning Mass on Friday **September 8th**.

Our Lady Help of Christians, 80 Demetrius Rd. Rosemeadow at **4pm till 6pm** on Tuesday **19th September**. Mass follows at 6.30pm if you wish to stay.

The following appeared in *Sharing*, the Cursillo newsletter of the Maitland Diocese. In the next issue I will include introductions to the other new members of the Asia Pacific Group.

Introducing our new APG President: Conrado P. Dizon

I am Conrado, for others they simply called me “Kuya Boy”, as an adult people sees me as a guy with no problem, but growing up in my childhood, I had struggles in my life. Once we lived in the creek. After the death of my father, my 3 siblings immediately were sent to the orphanage. Out of the 7 children, I was the only one left with my mother, a vendor of any kind in the market. During that time, we were not thinking about the education, my mother’s concern was what we will eat. That time I knew Jesus as abstract, a provider.

I got married in 1971 to Jeornita, pre-occupied with earning a living and raising a family with 3 children, I still knew Jesus Christ as a provider not till in 1980 when I attended the Cursillo, my knowledge of Christ improved. In 1994, when I was chosen as Cursillo team president, I pushed our group to improve our spirituality because I observed misconception even in small things among our brothers and sisters in the Cursillo, that time I saw a good picture of Christ.

In 1997, a new Cursillista asked us, “what is Cursillo?” our group was stuck and was surprised on the question we heard and later asked ourselves the same question: “What is Cursillo?” as the leader, we started to search for any literature on the Cursillo and where the Cursillo Secretariat was. We conducted a survey for 8 months and later decided to conduct the 1st Convention of Cursillo Teams in the Northern part of the Archdiocese of Manila. God gave us new friends as gift on the survey and convention and fostered the creation of core groups of Christians. With this experience, we saw a partial situation of the Cursillo Movement in Manila.

After that convention our role was to coordinate workshops; the National Secretariat were the speakers and the Cursillo Leaders are the participants. We also conducted re-fishing (Repesca) this time as part of the Core Group we are the speakers and facilitators based on our experience in the survey, convention, workshops and in what we learned from the National Secretariat.

As a family man I needed to be close to those I love. As a house painter in the beginning, I had 47 years of contracting business that support my way of life. The relatives, friends, employees, workers and the CM and the secular world

that God gave me, is a grace that the clear picture for being a Christian is not abstract anymore. Being in the APG family is another challenge that God is giving me. Hoping to be an instrument in friendship and renewal. I got married in 1971 to Jeornita, pre-occupied with earning a living and raising a family with 3 children, I still knew Jesus Christ as a provider not till in 1980 when I attended the Cursillo, my knowledge of Christ improved. In 1994, when I was chosen as Cursillo team president, I pushed our group to improve our spirituality because I observed misconception even in small things among our brothers and sisters in the Cursillo, that time I saw a good picture of Christ.

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As a family man I needed to be close to those I love. As a house painter in the beginning, I had 47 years of contracting business that support my way of life. The relatives, friends, employees, workers and the CM and the secular world that God gave me, is a grace that the clear picture for being a Christian is not abstract anymore.

Being in the APG family is another challenge that God is giving me. Hoping to be an instrument in friendship and renewal.

From the new APG Representative to OMCC 2023 – 2026

Alfred Bongi (Australia)

Hello. I am pleased to be a part of the APG and to represent the APG on the OMCC. I have been involved with Cursillo for nearly 40 years and have been on numerous Cursillo Teams as either a team member (rollista) or as the lay director (rector).

I have at times served on our Secretariat and am the current president of the Australian Catholic Cursillo Movement in the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn in Australia. I have been in the same group reunion with a small group of men, meeting weekly, for almost 30 years. This is a long-winded way for me to say that I love the Cursillo Movement, for what it has brought to my life and into the lives of others.

I was born in Canberra, Australia, my current location, and have lived here for almost my entire life. I was born to Italian parents and have a strong affinity with that culture. I am married to Angela and have five adult children. Four live in Canberra and one in the UK. My first Cursillo Weekend was only four months after we had married. It was on the completion of my second Cursillo that we discovered we were expecting our first child. Thus, it can be said, Cursillo and my family have always journeyed together.

I am retired now but my career had been in the Australian Public Service. This had been my 'square metre'. I worked in the fields of audit, administration, employment, and in workplace relations. I am qualified in accountancy and in economics.

Through Cursillo, I have enjoyed many deep and sustaining friendships. We help each other to grow ever closer to God and to each other. I look forward to even more friends! I particularly look forward to assisting in the spread of Cursillo to those who are 'far away' from God.

School of Leaders

This is a reminder that School of Leaders is held half-an-hour before each Ultreya, and all are welcome.

Ultreyas

Wollongong Ultreyas are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month from 2pm. The next 2 Ultreyas will be held on the 16th of September, and the 21st of October (refer to the table below).

Upcoming Ultreyas:

16 th September	Bossley Park Ladies	St Clare's, Narellan
21 st Oct	Camden	Narellan
18 th Nov	Secretariat	Instructional, Kiama
9 th Dec	Secretariat	Camden or Narellan

REUNION GROUPS

LOCATION	CONTACT	MEETING
<i>Eagle Vale Ladies - Day</i>	Contact Pauline Ranger 0416497541	Time and place TBA
<i>Campbelltown Ladies – Night</i>	Contact Margaret French 0417041721	1 st Tuesday of the month 5.30pm in Campbelltown
<i>Camden Ladies - Day</i>	Contact Dianne Garland: 0418 640 373	2 nd and 4 th Thursday of month 10am in Camden/Raby
<i>Tahmoor Ladies - Day</i>	Contact Lesley Wyatt: 0488 666 326	1 st Mon of the Month 1.30pm in Tahmoor / Buxton
<i>Rosemeadow Men – Night</i>	Contact Lester Smith: 0415 562 808	Every 2 weeks at 6.30pm. Tuesday or Wednesday

		Rotating houses.
Wollongong Ladies - Day	Contact Elizabeth Gill 0403238602	4 th Friday of the month 10am
Bossley Park ladies - Night	Contact Denise D'Amore 0438254139	1 st Wednesday of each Month 7pm. Rotating houses
Panania Ladies Group – Day	Contact Trish Benn 0403897849	1 st Tuesday of each Month 11.30am at Panania