



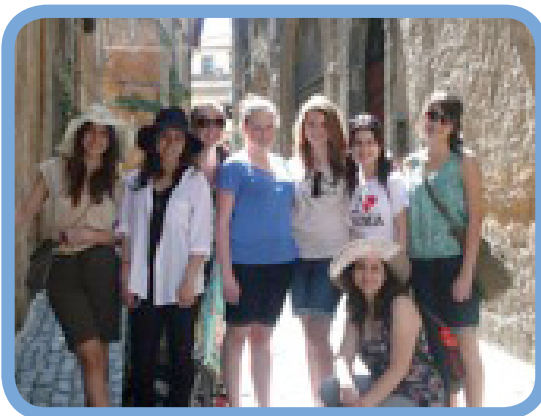
## NEWSLETTER · December 2011

# From the Coordinator

Dear Marists

Welcome to the December edition of Marist Laity Australia newsletter. Christmas is fast approaching and is, as we all know, a very a busy time - of giving, reconnecting with family and friends and cranking up the BBQ!

In August, I was lucky to lead 15 students from St Ursula's College to World Youth Day. Our pilgrimage took us through many holy places in Italy like the steps of Pontius Pilate, the church of the nativity and little church built by St Francis. However, as I look back, it is not the places or great Italian food which stay with me the most, but the people. Our girls grew a lot both in self-confidence and awareness of God in their lives. To pray with them, to have a D&M (deep & meaningful) or to simply sing songs skipping down the streets of Orvieto reminded me of how blessed we are, and that we must share this blessedness as Marists.



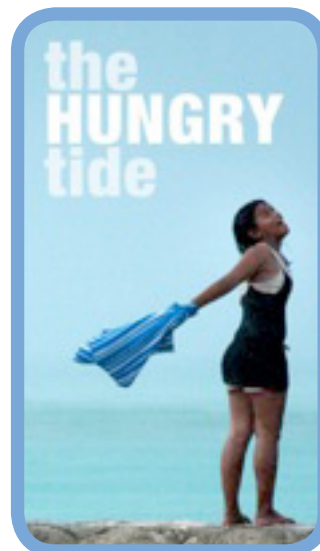
Christmas time is a time of sharing. Recently, an ex-Marist student from Trinity Catholic College Auburn rang me and asked; "Could Marist Laity visit his good friend in hospital?" As his words spoke, the story of the Visitation echoed in my heart. How easy it is just to turn up? Yet, we often don't visit because our lives are sooooo busy.

In June Brother Graham Neist facilitated our reflection day "Mary in the Midst of Chaos". Graham reminded us that chaos is a natural part of life. However, we often run away from the chaos

because our concept of holy is like a nun who lives out of town on a hill. We often do not realise that holiness is caught up with the everyday messiness of our own life. Just like a mother giving birth to a child. Without the struggle and pain, new life could not emerge.

In late July, Marist laity promoted the release of the movie "The Hungry Tide". Kiribati a nation of 112,000 people will soon have to find a new home. With raised sea levels, and a devastating drought, Kiribati is already suffering the effects of climate change. "This nation is the tip of the impending ice berg" said Phil Glendenning.

Climate change is not a thing of the future, but is happening now. Australia is well placed. Will we share our gifts so that other people can live?



My year 9 religion students asked me a few weeks ago, "What will happen in 2012? Will the world end?" My answer, "no". Why? Because God is with us. Even in the chaos. As our financial markets struggle and we are faced with many natural and man-made disasters, these cause us to question our own choices. Are we living in a healthy, sustainable and loving way? We must look back on history to see the seasonal nature of life. However, as Christmas approaches, we are reminded by one constant - "God is with us. Jesus the child is born".

**Andrew Dumas**  
MLA Coordinator



# Christmas

is a paradox!

# Christmas

is a choice!

By Margaret Woods

One of the deepest meanings of Christmas is that we are all called upon to be bearers of a new kind of wisdom. The church has often obscured this message by making Jesus the only son of God, but in fact, everyone who bears wisdom is really a son or daughter of God. Jesus represented the wisdom of God in his period, just as many others did. It is most useful to think of the season of Advent (the four weeks building to Christmas in the Christian liturgical cycle) as the birthing of Christ within us. Meister Eckhart a Dominican monk put it wonderfully:

“What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the son of God some 2000 years ago and I don’t give birth to the son of God in my person, in my time and in my culture?” Everyone, he taught, is here to be a mother of God.

We are all meant to be mothers of God. We are all here pregnant with God!!!



As the year draws to a close, we the Marist Laity Committee wish each and every one, who treasures the spirit of Mary – alive within and around us – a wonderful Christmas.

May each of you experience the love of God through family and friends this season and enjoy a time of relaxation and reflection in the coming festivities.

**Merry Christmas!**

*Margaret (On behalf of the Committee)*



# Advent wreath

## Why five candles?

By Margaret Woods

Just a little input on the Advent Wreath for those who are interested, as the Season begins and we get closer to Christmas.

A wreath is an assortment of flowers, leaves, fruits, twigs and/or various materials that is constructed to resemble a ring. They are used typically as Christmas decorations to symbolize the coming of Christ, also known as the Advent season in Christianity. They are also used as festive headdresses as attire in ceremonial events in many cultures around the globe. Wreaths have much history and symbolism associated with them. They are usually made from evergreens and symbolize strength, as evergreens last even throughout the harshest winters. Bay laurel may also be used, and these wreaths are known as laurel wreath.

Wreaths are also a traditional form of floral tribute at funerals.

The use of wreaths varies by culture, tradition and religions. In Christianity, it is used to prepare for Jesus' birth and in many cultures around the world, wreaths are used in weddings as a headdress. The history behind wreaths dates back thousands of years and much of the symbolism lies with Greek mythology, Roman tradition with the present day usage being focused on Advent and for festive décor.



### The advent wreath

The Advent wreath is a circular garland of evergreen branches representing eternity. On that wreath, five candles are typically arranged. During the Season of Advent one candle on the wreath is lit each Sunday as part of the Advent service. Each candle represents an aspect of the spiritual preparation for the coming of Christ as Christmas.



### Candles

Set on the wreath are four candles: three purple candles and one pink candle. On the first Sunday of Advent, the first purple candle is lit; this is called the prophecy candle in remembrance of the prophets, primarily Isaiah who foretold the birth of Christ. This candle represents hope or expectation in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

Each week on the Sunday an additional candle is lit. The second purple candle represents love. Some traditions call this the Bethlehem candle, symbolizing Christ's manger. The third is the rose-coloured or pink candle representing the Shepherds' joy and the fourth purple candle is often times called the angel's candle, representing peace and is lit on the fourth Sunday of Advent.

On Christmas Eve the white center candle is traditionally lit. This candle is called the Christ candle and represents the life of Christ that has come into the world.

Hope this gives some an insight to the symbolism behind the Advent Wreath.



# Reflection Day

## 5 November 2011

**By Val Norris**

On Saturday November 5th, 20 people gathered for the reflection day on "The Hidden Disciple" at St Patrick's Church Hill. The day was divided into three sessions run by Margaret Woods, Maria Baden and Andrew Dumas.

Margaret explored the meaning of the Ascension icon. Today we are surrounded by many secular icons like Coca Cola and McDonalds, yet we have forgotten the value of many of our own religious icons. Often icons contain many layers of meaning which reflect the hidden dimension of both what we believe, and the nature of who we are as people. The Ascension Icon reminded us of Mary's presence as being central to the people of God (the Church) and presented the invitation for us to do the same.

Maria explored the nature of centering meditation. A thorough discussion arose concerning the places where meditation is present in our model day life. Today primary school curriculum embeds meditation as part of their course. Maria pointed out that often when we pray either through meditation with the rosary or meditation with a centering word like "Maranatha", we often are distracted. Our minds race with a thousand ideas, whilst coming closer to God requires us to let go of our own self so that we can make that connection with God. (previously repeated "come closer to God")

Andrew explored the nature of the hidden disciple through story. The insight "hidden and unknown" was originally discovered by Marist Founder Jean-Claude Colin. Hidden and unknown is not a concept or goal to be achieved, but rather the by product of our loving relationships with those around us. Mary is largely absent from the Gospels, however, in her ordinary down to earth way she is seen as a person in personal relationship with those she is with. Andrew pointed out that Jesus is also hidden from view in the Gospels. For most of Jesus' life, for the first 30 years, we see very little. These 30 years were critical as it provided Jesus with the space to grow into the man he was becoming – "the son of God".

Finally, the day ended with a Eucharist celebration, which Father Patrick Kervin celebrated. "The Hidden Disciple" was a day of exploring the richness of our Marist tradition through the ideas of three strong lay Marist leaders.





# Men Alive

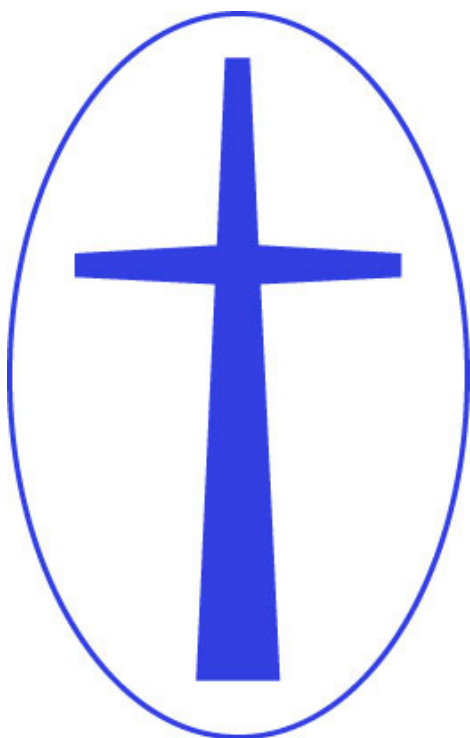
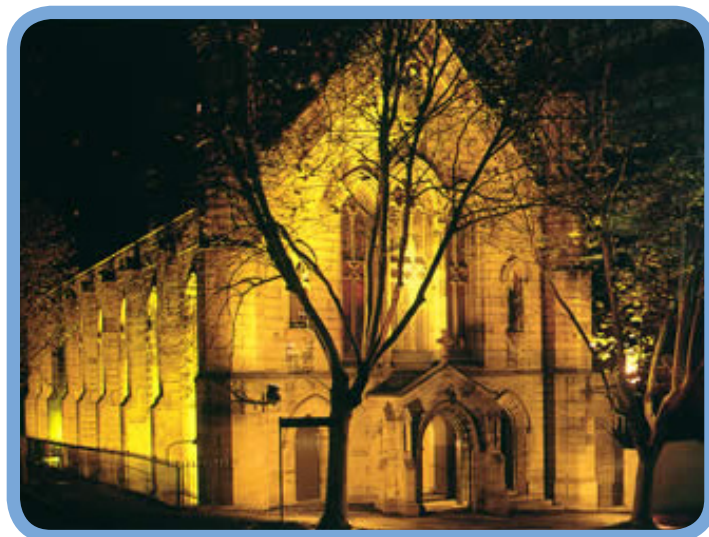
at St. Patrick's

By Andrew Dumas

On the weekend of October 8th and 9th 25 men from St Patrick's Church Hill Sydney gathered together to explore their manhood. It is hard to write about what was explored on the weekend. In a way it was secret men's business. Not that I am trying to hide something, but that what happened can only be understood by experiencing it. Yes we discussed, heard story, cooked a BBQ, drank beer, prayed, burnt fire and experienced healing, but there was something deeper which words cannot explain.

The weekend identified the fact that many boys today do not have a father figure. Either a boy's parents are divorced or their father is largely absent from the home life. Thus, the question was raised, "How do boys become men?" The answer, "through other men". The problem with this answer is we live in a highly individualised society where our community life style no longer enables the male mentoring role to take place frequently enough.

The dynamic speaker Robert Falzon spoke about the Holy Spirit as being a "wild goose". If we truly believed in God and the presence of God, we would as men, be ready to jump off the jetty with our sons and daughters. Jesus wants everything. Not just one hour on a Sunday. This was a frightening call, but one which we will no longer face alone. Men are willing to go the mile for those they love. Yes their families but also God.



*Men Alive is an initiative based in Brisbane and the organisers travel around Australia running Men Alive Weekends. I deeply recommend this initiative in your parish. For more information go to [www.menalive.org.au](http://www.menalive.org.au)*

# BARBARA TRAVELS

## With Mary throughout Europe and Croatia

By Barbara Ashwell

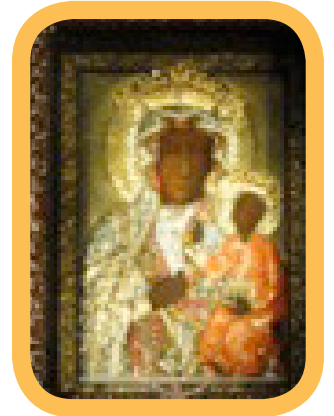
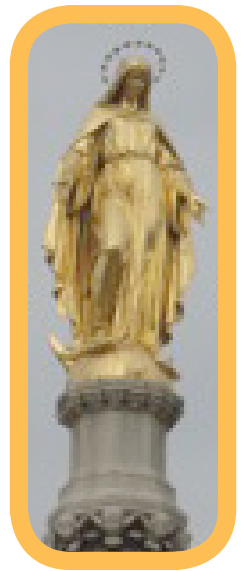
When Harvest Pilgrimages asked me to accompany 46 people on a pilgrimage through Eastern Europe and Croatia I had no idea that it was really a journey in faith with Mary. I was thrilled to be going to these beautiful European countries that have suffered so much over the centuries, more recently under Communism and in the war that ended in 1991 with the break of Yugoslavia into six countries. The faith and resilience of the people is amazing and I found that pilgrims from all corners of the earth are having their own faith rekindled in these ancient lands of Catholicism. Our Chaplain, Fr Brian Connolly from Toowoomba, celebrated Mass each day, along with Fr Eric Burton from North Rocks, in the most wonderful Churches and Shrines – almost all dedicated to Our Lady.

Some of our group flew from Sydney on 27 August to Dubai where we met up with the rest of our group who flew there from every State in Australia. We then flew on to Prague in the Czech Republic, where we were met by our Polish guide and bus driver who journeyed with us until Dubrovnik. There we left them to take the bus with our new guide to Međugorje.

Prague is beautiful – as someone described “a chocolate box city”. We walked through the ancient city which was hilly and hard going for some of our less fit pilgrims and celebrated Mass in the world renowned Shrine of the Infant of Prague. I was surprised to find that the statue is small – he is really a baby dressed up in colourful clothes and honoured for the many miracles and favours granted to so many throughout the world.

It was in Prague while cruising on the Vltava River that I checked my text messages and found that my brother had died in NZ. It was difficult to be so far from the family at this time. We only knew ten days before he died that he had terminal lung cancer. My brother had been confined to bed for about four weeks and we thought it was flu – he would not go to a doctor. His wife finally got a nurse who sent him to hospital for an x-ray which, along with a scan, gave the diagnosis. I got this news a week before I was to leave for Europe and, thinking he would still be there on my return, continued to lead the pilgrimage. The support of the pilgrims was a blessing for me, the family and my brother who would not have otherwise received prayer from these people in this part of the world. It was amazing that six of our pilgrims lost very close, dear loved ones that week. We were able to support, pray and be there for each other. Pastoral Care continued.....

We spent a day at the beautiful Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa which attracts more than five million pilgrims a year. Our chaplain concelebrated our Mass with other English speaking pilgrims before the beautiful icon of Our Lady with the Child Jesus known as the Black Madonna. We had ample free time there to



explore the centre and to return to the icon again and again to pray. I remembered all Marists in this special place.

Our visit to Auschwitz was very sobering and there was a sadness remembering the atrocities carried out on the millions of Jews there. Pope John Paul II termed this place "the Golgotha of the modern world." It was an honour to look in to the cell where St Maximillian Kolbe spent his last days. We then went to the beautiful modern Church of St Maximillian Kolbe where we celebrated Mass and honoured his relic and his rosary. He had given his rosary to a prisoner who was despondent - that man lived and gave the rosary to the church when Maximillian was made a saint.

It was a privilege also to visit Wadowice, the birthplace of Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II) or Lolek as he was known as a boy. His parish church and nearby museum depict scenes from his life. We also visited his favourite shrine in the mountains Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, where his father took the 9yr old Lolek after his mother died and before the picture of Our Lady told him "from now on Mary is your mother."

Krakow in Poland, where Fr Karol Wojtyla was ordained in 1946 in the crypt of Wawel Cathedral (away from communist eyes) and where he served as the city's Archbishop, is a beautiful city with the old city and castle on the hilltop. The Cathedral in the old city was only for the nobles so they built a lesser Church in the Market Square for the common people during the Middle Ages. They still have a bugle blower in the clock tower. The bugle blowers work 12hr shifts so the bugle is blown on the hour day and night. Crowds wait for the hour to strike to wave to him.

Another highlight was our visit to the Wieliczka Salt Mines which have been in operation over a thousand years and have 40 chapels throughout the mines. The incredible statues and displays, all carved from rock salt, depicting life in the mines, plus the huge St Kinga's Cathedral chamber which is still a Mass centre today, have to be seen to be believed. Statues (including St Barbara) and scenes from Scripture decorate the walls. Even the chandeliers are made of salt.

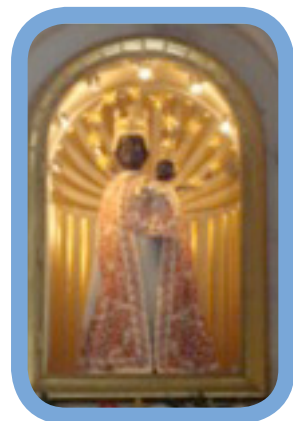
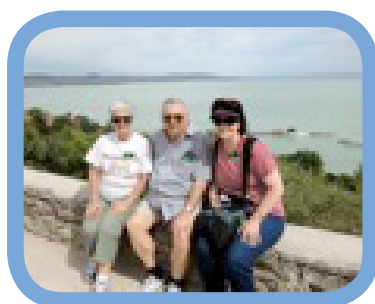
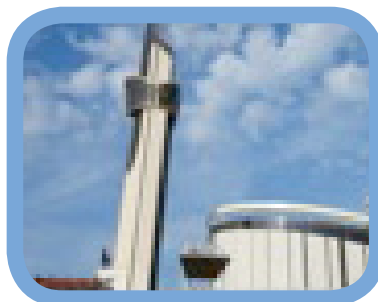
From there we went to the magnificent Shrine of Divine Mercy where we had the privilege of celebrating Mass in Sr Faustina's chapel, one of five chapels below the huge Church. On Mercy Sunday about five million pilgrims come to Adoration before the big outdoor altar. A Polish Sister of Mercy spoke to us for about an hour urging us to develop prayer of the heart and a personal relationship with Jesus. She was very easy to listen to.

We journeyed on through beautiful mountains to the winter resort village of Zakopane where we celebrated Mass in a beautiful wood lined chapel beside the Church of Our Lady of Fatima built in thanksgiving for John Paul II's narrow escape from the assassination attempt on 13 May 1981. We drove through the beautiful alpine landscape of the Slovak Republic into Hungary and the picturesque city of Budapest. The former cities of Buda, the hilly side, and Pest the flat side, are linked by beautiful bridges over the river Danube. Here we visited Heroes Square and many beautiful buildings. We celebrated Mass in the Basilica of St Stephen and also saw his mummified hand.

On route to Zagreb we drove alongside the tranquil Lake Balaton known as the "Hungarian Sea" being the largest lake in Central Europe and we stopped to admire the Abbey of Tihany. We travelled on into Croatia where we had Mass in the Church of the

Holy Trinity – the Shrine of the Eucharistic Miracle of Ludberg (since 1411) which houses the sacred relic of Precious Blood enshrined in a beautiful monstrance. (pictured Barbara with Arthur Humphries & his daughter Anne)

Zagreb is another beautiful city with an amazing history. We visited St Mark's Church (13cent) in the fortified historic Upper Town. We also visited St Catherine's Church and the Cathedral of the Assumption whose twin spires are visible to most of the city. That afternoon we travelled out to Croatia's national Sanctuary of Our Lady of Bistrice which is home to the fifteenth century miraculous statue of the smiling Madonna and the Infant Jesus. We celebrated Mass in a chapel beneath the main church. Here we shared with the person who had unknowingly been our prayer partner during our pilgrimage. The next day 33 pilgrims either returned to Australia or went on to join other pilgrimages in Italy or France. We 13 who remained were joined by a couple from Toowoomba. So 15 of us went on to do Croatian Encounters. But that is another story – our pilgrimage will be continued....





# Our Communal Prayer

Please pray for the following:

- ▶ *The cause of Father Jean-Claude Colin*
- ▶ *Vocations to the Marist Fathers in Australia*
- ▶ *For Kiribati and other countries affected by significant drought and rising sea levels.*
- ▶ *For our young people*



## Marist Laity Australia

Web [maristlaityaustralia.com](http://maristlaityaustralia.com)

**Coordinators** Margaret Woods &  
Andrew Dumas  
**Secretary** Val Norris  
**Treasurer** Margaret Walker

## Thank you

*We sincerely thank all those who have generously helped.*

*These acts of generosity help us to survive financially.*

*A special thank you to...*

- ▶ *Mark Trainor*
- ▶ *Marist Sisters*
- ▶ *Tony Warren*
- ▶ *All those who contributed at our reflection day in June.*

**Andrew Dumas**  
MLA Coordinator

