

Our Lady of Dolours

**A CHRISTMAS LETTER
TO OUR PARISH OF CHATSWOOD
INTRODUCING THE YEAR OF JUBILEE 2025**



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Dear Friends

The joy of Christmas be with you all!

When we reflect on the many opportunities, events, and occasions in our parish community over this last year, our hearts are filled with joyful gratitude. The Spirit has clearly breathed life and possibility through so many happenings and, even more importantly, through the generosity of so many people. To everyone through whom the Spirit has made this possible, I extend the deepest and most humble, Thank you! In particular, we express our gratitude to Fr Joey Frez and to Deacon Richard Houwing who, sadly, will soon leave us to take up new responsibilities in our Diocese.

And yet, when we look further afield, it may be thought that events across our world currently render the wish for joy facile or sentimental, perhaps as pious idealism. We are confronted with many reasons for a less than joyful end to our year. Our society presents as fractious as ever; we are deeply troubled by the challenges in national aboriginal reconciliation and the rise of a new antisemitism; war brings dire suffering to so many across the world; international political discourse intimates uncharted possibilities; the climate manifests as unpredictable as ever. Where is the joy, we might be tempted to ask?

And yet, Christmas and joy cannot be thought of apart from each other. For Christmas is the proclamation that “God is with us.” The Word has become flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). God has become one of us, and one with us, in our struggles. And in so doing, we are drawn into the recognition that no matter the darkness and anxiety, we are held in a Love which is the source of our dignity and destiny.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Rom 8: 35-39)

In turn, this means that the future is given to us as a gift. In other words, because “God is with us” there is always a new beginning. We are not those afraid of the future, but rather those who have an expectancy about the future. We are those to whom a Promise has been given, and we live in the knowledge, the faith, that this Promise has been, and will be, fulfilled – even in the face of everything that might suggest its frustration. Therefore, we are those who live with Hope.

Fr Paulus Budi Kleden, the General Superior of the Divine Word Missionaries, preached several years ago, “Hope is open spaces; hope opens up prospects, hope dares the uncertain, and the unknown. Those who hope, have the courage to leave and take risks. Love makes love possible.” If we live from this sense, then as people of hope, we are they who live a life in constant watchfulness and expectation. In the apparent absence of Christ from our midst, we live our life in watchfulness. This means that we are those, in the words of the 20th century theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, in his book, *In the End—The Beginning*, who can no longer “pray with closed eyes, but [now rather], messianically, with eyes wide open for God’s future in the world. Christian faith is not blind trust. It is the wakeful expectation of God which draws us in all our senses.”

Moltmann goes on to illustrate that indeed this was how the first Christians prayed “standing, looking up, with arms outstretched, and eyes wide open, ready to walk or to leap forward. We can see this from the pictures in the catacombs in Rome. Their posture reflects tense expectation, not quiet heart searching. It says . . . We are on the watch, in expectation of the One who is coming . . . And, therefore, our watchfulness leads us, as Moltmann suggests, to “expect the presence of God in everyone I meet and everything I do. . . What does God have in mind for me? What does God expect of me? What is he saying to me through the things that are happening in my world, and what is my response?” Being those who are awake we are those who keep stretching out into new horizons, “stretching out to what is ahead, [always with] a readiness for a fresh start.” As people of Resurrection faith, the future is given us as pure gift. The future is given to us a relentless invitation. This is what makes Christian hope something quite different from mere wishful thinking.

It is this theme of Hope into which Pope Francis invites us through the Year of Jubilee that commenced on 24 December 2024 with the opening of the Holy Door in St Peter's Rome. As he wrote when announcing the Jubilee,

The Holy Year of 2025 is itself in continuity with preceding celebrations of grace. In the last Ordinary Jubilee, we crossed the threshold of two millennia from the birth of Jesus Christ. Then, on 13 March 2015, I proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee for the sake of making known and encouraging an encounter with the "merciful face of God", the core message of the Gospel for every man and woman of every time and place.

Now the time has come for a new Jubilee, when once more the Holy Door will be flung open to invite everyone to an intense experience of the love of God that awakens in hearts the sure hope of salvation in Christ. The Holy Year will also guide our steps towards yet another fundamental celebration for all Christians: 2033 will mark the two thousandth anniversary of the redemption won by the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are about to make a pilgrimage marked by great events, in which the grace of God precedes and accompanies his people as they press forward firm in faith, active in charity and steadfast in hope (cf. 1 Thess 1:3). (*Spes non confundit* n. 6)

As a parish community, we enter the Year of Jubilee with much opportunity. Bishop Randazzo has designated our church of Our Lady of Dolours as one of three Shrines of Hope, confident that our reception of the relic of young Carlo Acutis in October 2024 will make our church a special place of pilgrimage for young people, especially during 2025.

To realise our designation, we have proposed a number of special initiatives in the coming year.

- ◆ The word, HOPE, will feature prominently on our Forecourt throughout the Year of Jubilee
- ◆ A special week of celebration for young people commencing on Sunday 27 April 2025, coinciding with the canonisation in Rome of Carlo Acutis, and concluding with a PraiseFest for young people on Friday 2 May 2025. We have invited Cardinal Souane Mafi from Tonga to join us for this celebration;
- ◆ A second week of celebration for young adults, commencing on Sunday 27 July 2025, coinciding with the canonisation Rome of Giorgio Frassati, and concluding with a PraiseFest for young people on Friday 1 August 2025; We are hoping that Cardinal Pablo David from the Philippines will join us for this occasion.
- ◆ The inauguration of a Festival of Beauty, 19-20 September 2025, to bring together musicians of sacred music and parish choirs across Sydney in workshops and performances;
- ◆ The opportunity of a Parish Pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi, and Medjugorje in November 2025;
- ◆ The commissioning of a bronze outdoor sculpture of Our Lady of Sorrows as part of the development of an external grotto for prayer and reflection;
- ◆ Initiating a more comprehensive strategy for the renewal of our church building

In addition to these special occasions:

- ◆ On the evenings of the First Friday of each month during the Jubilee, the team from the Divine Retreat Centre, Somersby will join us for Prayer and a Healing Mass;
- ◆ On the last Friday of each month, we will highlight Eucharistic Adoration through the day and night, with the availability for the Sacrament of Reconciliation throughout the day and night;
- ◆ On the last Sunday of the month, we will develop a Community Lunch focused on our new Community Garden so that our parish might continue to be a beacon of hope especially to those struggling with loneliness.

2025 Jubilee Year
Pilgrims of Hope



Throughout the year, we will maintain the momentum of the many initiatives that are now an ordinary part of our parish life:

- ◆ Sessions of being a Parish-in-Council on Saturday 5 April, Sunday 29 June, and Saturday 25 October;
- ◆ Further developing our areas of mission focus - Creating a sense of belonging for all; Participating in the life of our parish; Igniting young hearts; Reaching out with love; Serving our community; and Creating, nurturing and sustaining a culture of joyful, generous stewardship.
- ◆ Many opportunities for personal formation and renewal through our programs of Alpha, Exploring the Faith, I am Jesus, and our regular seminars on Scripture and Tradition by Bishop David Walker, together with our many opportunities in children's ministry, including our Atirum, SRE program and youth groups.
- ◆ Bringing the Light of Christ to the City through our Good Friday Stations of the Cross and now, our Carols on the Concourse at Christmas, as well as our participation in the Chatswood Spring Fair;
- ◆ We think, too, of such wonderful events as our celebration of Lunar New Year, Season of Creation, Red Wednesday Mass for persecuted Christians, to name just a few.

Thus, the Year of Jubilee will be great opportunity of personal and community renewal, enlivened by the Hope to which we are especially called to witness in this special time.

Faith, Hope and Love: these are three faculties by which we live as Christians. Hope, in the way that I have outlined here, is not possible without Faith. And the freedom to Love truly is possible only with Faith and Hope. But the outcome of a life lived with Faith, Hope and Love is Joy – the Joy that we always carry as those who believe “God is with us.”

And so, indeed, may the Joy of this Christmas be with us all!

**And may the Year of Jubilee that has now opened be for us a doorway into ever new beginnings
and the rekindling of our Hope in a world too often trapped in despair.**

