

Dear Parishioners of St Brendan's and Holy Rosary,

I am writing this letter having just completed my annual retreat at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney. This is a very special place for me praying at the tomb of Australia's first saint and a woman of remarkable faith, strength and holiness. I find great inspiration here and I am always deeply moved to see the countless people who come to pray at Mary MacKillop's tomb every day. Many come to seek strength and inspiration, to pray for a loved one or to find hope and courage as they face many of life's challenges. Mary MacKillop is a friend to many for she knew moments of darkness and difficulty in her life but always trusted in God's providence and love. I prayed for courage and strength and trust in God as I begin my new ministry of full-time teaching at Catholic Theological College (CTC) and move to the parish of East St Kilda. I prayed for all the parishioners of St Brendan's and Holy Rosary, for your families and for your intentions and remembered Fr Hien Vu and his parish of Ashburton in this time of transition.

It has been a privilege to be your pastor over the last four and a half years. I give thanks to God for this time and pray in thanks for the many blessings I have experienced at St Brendan's and Holy Rosary. A new challenge opens up before me and while I had never thought that I would be a full-time lecturer, I go willingly and enthusiastically to undertake this new position. I became a priest to work in a parish, to lead God's people in prayer, to sanctify their lives with the sacraments, to preach and proclaim the word of God and to build up the parish community. This is what it means to be a priest and to pastor God's people in love. While my new role is more academic and takes me away from the daily realities of parish life, it is for me an essentially pastoral role and certainly a different way of being a priest. It is a great privilege to be asked to assist in the formation of our future priests and to contribute to the education of competent lay people who study theology at CTC. My time as a priest at St Brendan's and Holy Rosary has enriched me greatly and I bring much of this experience to the new tasks that await me.

I leave with many fond memories especially your prayerful support, your generosity and cooperation especially in the many building projects undertaken and the fine sense of history and tradition in our local area. You have heard me say often that we 'stand on the shoulders of giants'. In his providence, God has called me to play a small part in the long parish story of Holy Rosary and St Brendan's. I take with me the memory of the positive comments of visitors to Holy Rosary and St Brendan's, the warm welcome they received and the number of times they said, 'What a beautiful church, what a lovely ceremony, that was an uplifting experience'. I remember with fondness the many funerals celebrated of long standing parishioners and I also take with me the sometimes sad and tragic moments of celebrating the funerals of relatively young parishioners, the touching way we celebrated the great hope of the resurrection and supported each other in the face of human grief. One memory will stay with me forever. I will never forget the wonderful strength and support I felt in August last year following the deaths of my mother Angela and my grandmother Maria Domenica in less than two weeks. My family were greatly touched by your support and this brought me great calm in being able to celebrate their lives in such a fitting and touching way. As a family, we felt greatly loved and supported at this very difficult time. This says much about the joy and strength of parish life.

My only regret is that due to my teaching commitments, I simply did not have the time to visit children at the school as much as I wanted or to visit families in their homes. On the few occasions when I could, such visits were a source of great joy. My role as parish priest has only been possible

because of the tremendous support and hard work of our wonderful parish staff. I wish to thank Fr Francis Fahim, assistant priest and Coptic Chaplain and his predecessor Fr Matta. I pay tribute to the late Fr Bill Jordan for his exceptional pastoral leadership. My thanks to our school principals, Amanda Smith and Peter Hayes and kindergarten director, Evon Tey, for their fine leadership and the generous welcome I always received from their respective staffs. Thanks to our wonderful pastoral associates, Carol Harris, Sr Pat Dimeck and Yvette Oswald for the many talents and commitment they bring to their roles. Thanks to Sharon Kane and Jo McEwan for their dedicated secretarial and administration support and to the housekeeper, Rosa Caruso. They all work with great commitment in the mission of service and witness at St Brendan's and Holy Rosary.

I am very grateful to the members of the various parish committees and those committed to the respective ministries of service at St Brendan's and Holy Rosary who serve with distinction. My thanks also to the many individuals who work behind the scenes silently and without fuss and without whom modern parishes would simply fall apart. I will remember you all very fondly and I ask that you pray for me, that in the words of Pope Francis, I will always be a faithful shepherd of God's people and loving servant of the Gospel, called to bring the light, joy and mercy of God into the lives of all those I meet.

I wish you and your families every best wish and thank you once again for your support. I know that you will support Fr Hien as you supported and encouraged me and I pray for him now that he takes up his leadership position at St Brendan's and Holy Rosary. As I go into a somewhat unknown future conscious of my call to service, I remember the prayer of St Ignatius of Loyola that I had printed on my ordination card in 1997. It is a prayer for each of us as we offer our lives to God in service:

*Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will. You have given everything to me; now I return it. All I have is yours. Dispose of it completely according to Your will. Give me only your love and your grace. With these I am rich enough; I desire nothing else.*

Fr Max Vodola