



2025 OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

MARFAM THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY for DECEMBER, ADVENT and CHRISTMAS

THEME: FAMILY IN CREATION, HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.



with A CHILDREN'S PEACE PILGRIMAGE, a parable for our time by Toni Rowland

THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY downloadable from www.marfam.org.za, posted on facebook and whatsapp info@marfam.org.za for email

Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. LD – Laudate Deum AL = Amoris Laetitia. FT = Fratelli Tutti. DN= Dilexit Nos. Pope Leo: DT= Dilexi Te. Available also in booklet form from MARFAM 0825521275 toni@marfam.org.za

DECEMBER Overview. Family, Hope for the Future. What does it mean to be a family of families and hope for the future? How has our journey as Pilgrims of Hope in 2025 enriched our lives as families as well as individuals? Each family is unique with our own special relationships, our love, joys and anxieties. We thank our Creator for the inbuilt sense of family, of belonging to one another and to our God. This in-built family-mindedness can be a reason for our hope because of the love experienced there. St Francis and Pope Francis speak of all creatures paying homage to their Creator but we also acknowledge that we humans alone can address the challenges to fulfill the hope for a future filled with peace and joy.

Pope Francis: *A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH. from Laudato Si. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Blessed Trinity, community of infinite love. You are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love that we may protect all life and beauty. Fill us with humility, hope, peace and joy that we may live as brothers and sisters harming no one. Encourage us in our struggle for justice, love and peace. Praise be to you! Amen*

Pope Leo: at LAUDATO SI RAISING HOPE CONFERENCE. *"I would like to conclude with a question that concerns each of us. God will ask us if we have cultivated and cared for the world that he created (cf. Gen 2:15), for the benefit of all and for future generations, and if we have taken care of our brothers and sisters (cf. Gen 4:9; Jn 13:34). What will be our answer?*

Setting the scene. December is our summer holiday season in the southern hemisphere and no doubt we all need and deserve some special time, however we choose to use it, for rest, relaxation, catching up and sharing with family and friends and being conscious of the poor among us. There are many important issues to consider also in our own lives while we pray for an end to the wars that continue in the world and affect everyone in some way. As we keep in mind "Put Christ back into Christmas" and "Arrive Alive" and not "shop till we drop" may we also keep in mind the awareness of the 16 Days of Activism against GBV which continues during the holiday season too.

MARFAM ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS RESOURCES. In addition to special Advent symbols used in the parish, families are encouraged to practice their own ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS activities. For a range of things, making, baking, cooking and cleaning, praying and sharing visit and search www.marfam.org.za. Leaflets available for Advent wreath, Jesse Tree, A Family Reconciliation, Prayer meal, Fast day. The stories of the Old Testament persons, the ancestors of Jesus, mentioned in the Thoughts, with their names or pictures added, can be used as symbols on a Jesse Tree of your own. The CHILDREN'S PEACE PILGRIMAGE in this programme, is an activity, with a story spread over a number of days from 16-25 December.



MARFAM PUBLICATIONS. Contact us on 0825521275 or toni@marfam.org.za for details.

- A variety of booklets with stories, activities and reflections for this time from previous years.
- Booklets: Families Caring for God's Creation, Becoming Eco-friendly Families, Families and Climate Change.

THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY beginning with 1st Sunday of Advent.

30. November. 1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT A. Bryan, having recently lost his wife and decided to explore the subject of loss in various ways, looked back on the last month and admitted to himself that it had been a healing experience for him at times. "I know Christmas will still be difficult, but I have grown so much closer to Jesus and hope I will be able to share some of that with my children and grandchildren when we are together these holidays. I have much more to be grateful for than I had before, but I still have the very real sadness, that I will not be able to share it all with my beloved wife, Joan, in the flesh and only in spirit. But we have a month to prepare. What I can do over this next month is pray more earnestly for peace, in Jerusalem and every city and home in the world that awaits the coming of the Messiah, borne in such great love by Mary his Mother and cared for by Joseph, his patient and supportive father.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: For the peace of Jerusalem pray. "May they prosper, those who love you. May peace abide in your walls and security be in your towers. For the sake of my family and friends, let me say, Peace upon you. For the sake of the house of the Lord, our God, I will seek good things for you." Psalm 122. **Pope Francis:** The Church is a home with open doors, because she is a mother. And in imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its place of worship. Goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain, to be the sign of unity ... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation. FT 276. **Jubilee.** I am confident that everyone, especially the suffering and those most in need, will come to know the closeness of Mary, the most affectionate of mothers, who never abandons her children and who, for the holy people of God, is "a sign of certain hope and comfort". SNC24. **Act and Pray** for compassionate concern for those suffering loss in their families.

1 December. World AIDS Day. Shame and guilt. Adam and Eve. Johnson sat thinking back over the last 25 years or so. Although the incidence and infection rate has declined since the greater use of anti-retroviral drugs HIV/AIDS is still a major health issue. All sectors of the population, men, women and children continue to be affected and have to remain on treatment. "When AIDS was first diagnosed there was so much fear, shame and stigma. Few people would say, 'My son is infected,' or 'My daughter died of AIDS' Families closed ranks and AIDS was the reason why we ended up looking after 6 grandchildren at one time and our daughter and son came home very sick. She died in those early days but he is well and two of the grandchildren are on ARV treatment." Johnson turned to Josephine and asked, "Should there still be shame attached? We say it is a disease and not a sin and it can be, but so often there was a sinful act committed somewhere that caused the infection and had such an impact on many others in families. It is wrong that the rate is still too high, maybe that should make us feel guilt and shame. Right from the time of Adam and Eve there has been sin and shame. They were created to live in harmony with God and one another. After their sin of disobedience, when God came looking for them, he found them wearing fig leaves because they had become ashamed of their nakedness. Do we no also feel shame and guilt about the way we have sinned by abusing God's creation?" Josephine responded. "There is hope. AIDS is hardly the curse it was before. Please God the world will take note that action is urgently required."



Reflect, share, Scripture: Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they come out in leaf know the summer is near. So also when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Luke 21:29-33 **Pope Francis:** Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth. These three have been broken, outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. LS 66. Attacks on nature have consequences for people's lives. The African bishops state that climate change makes manifest a tragic and striking example of structural sin. LD 3. **JUBILEE.** Signs of hope should be shown to the sick, at home or in hospital. Their sufferings can be allayed by the closeness and affection of those who visit them. Works of mercy are also works of hope that give rise to immense gratitude. Inclusive attention should also be given to all those in particularly difficult situations, who experience their own weaknesses and limitations, especially those affected by illnesses or disabilities that severely restrict their personal independence and freedom. Care given to them is a hymn to human dignity, a song of hope that calls for the choral participation of society as a whole. SNC11. **Act and pray:** People are very sensitive to being blamed and shamed. In times of corruption, other wrongdoing and damaging the environment, could blaming and shaming be a deterrent? We can examine our lives and pray for conversion.

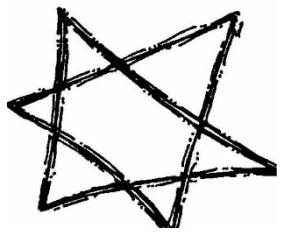
2 December. Noah and his Family. A well-known and loved story is that of Noah, the ark, the Flood and his family. At some time God was so disappointed in the behaviour and actions of his creatures that he decided to destroy them all. The exception was Noah, described as the only righteous man of his day. We are not told what made it so. Was he a good father or husband? Did they have a relationship with God to keep them on track? The Bible tells us how God did save pairs of creatures from total destruction. What are the warning signs God has given us in our day when humankind is again disappointing God? His covenant was that he would be with them for all time. The rainbow was its sign, a sign of hope, a reminder to us still today, each time a rainbow appears. But as humanity so often continues to do, we rebel and need God's warnings, each year at this time.



Reflect, share, Scripture: At that time Jesus said, "Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life. Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things and to stand before the Son of man. Luke 21:34-35. **Pope Francis:** No one can ignore that in recent years we have witnessed extreme weather phenomena, frequent periods of unusual heat, drought, floods and other cries of protest on the part of the earth that are only a few expressions of a silent disease that affects everyone. LD 5 **Act and pray:** How would we rate our family as a righteous one? Would God use us as he used Noah? Are we heeding the warnings, even taking note of the rainbow as a sign?

3 December. St Francis Xavier. Abraham. St Francis Xavier was a Spaniard who lived in the 16th century. He was from a wealthy background and received a call from God to be a missionary, to leave his home and go out to spread the gospel to new, strange and faraway places. He went to the Far East, India and Japan as one of the first Jesuit missionaries there.

Abraham was also called by God to leave his home and go to a new place. God told him he would be the father of a great nation and his descendants would be as many as the stars. There are still missionaries today leaving their home countries, no doubt hoping and praying that their mission would also bear fruit. Pope Leo XIV left his home country the US and went to Peru to minister to the poor, who had already heard the gospel many years ago. Would Pope Leo still be considered a missionary, or are we not all called to be missionary disciples?



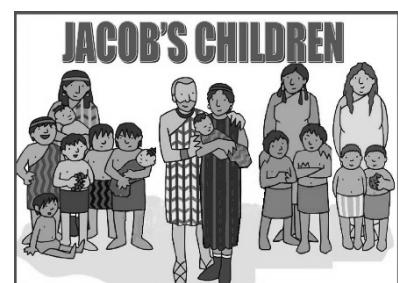
Reflect and share. Scripture: Jesus said to the Eleven. “Go out into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. In my name they will cast out demons, speak in new tongues, they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover. Mk 16: 15-20. The Lord said to Abraham, “go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you. Gen 12: 1-2. **Pope Francis:** “Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me.” **Jubilee:** May the Christian community always be prepared to defend the rights of those who are most vulnerable, opening wide its doors to welcome them, lest anyone ever be robbed of the hope of a better future. May the Lord’s words in the great parable of the Last Judgement find an echo in our hearts: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” for “just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me” **Pope Leo:** Jesus said, “God is near, God loves you. (cf. Lk 7:22). This explains why he proclaims: ‘Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God’ (Lk 6:20). God shows a preference for the poor: the Lord’s words of hope and liberation are addressed first of all to them. Therefore, even in their poverty or weakness, no one should feel abandoned. And the Church, if she wants to be Christ’s Church, must be a Church of the Beatitudes, one that makes room for the little ones and walks poor with the poor, a place where the poor have a privileged place. DT 21. **Act and pray:** At this time of Advent, may we be particularly conscious of the needs of strangers and those who are poor.

4 December. A strong House. Isaac. Father had always said, “a strong family needs a strong house.” Mom would laugh and reply “A strong house needs a strong family.” They hadn’t always had a decent house and at one stage had lived in a shack and it had taken their strong relationship, their faith and commitment to hard work that had been the resource they needed to progress in life practically and spiritually. Mom wondered, “I don’t know why so many people still build their shacks on the edge of a river. With the weather we’re having these days, heavy rains, big storms and flash floods, they are likely to lose their house and everything in it. They do get warned, but do they listen?” There is a little known story, in Genesis 26, about water and Isaac, Abraham’s son who inherited his fathers property. He became wealthy himself with may flocks and herds. There were battles over water and wells that were dug and sabotaged by enemies, but God blessed Isaac and renewed the covenant he had made with Isaac’s father.

Reflect, share, Scripture: Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell, and great was its fall. Matt 7:24-27. **Pope Francis:** The Judeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvelous concert of all God’s creatures., but today we are forced to realize that it is only possible to recognize that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. Together we form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion that fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. LD 67, **Act and pray:** Pray for wisdom to use this time to build strong and sustainable families and homes.

5 December. Jacob’s Family. Granny Toni sat in her little house and meditated. We often hear of Jacob and his sons, but he also had a number of daughters. His family is kind of regarded as a model for God’s way for creation. Large families are no longer as popular as they were in previous times, when not all babies survived and when children were loved and welcomed as gifts, but also as extra hands to help as a form of labour in and beyond the home. So much has changed in the last century, much of it for financial reasons, which have also influenced our attitudes towards life in general and our values. Yes, education is expensive. Yes, parents have to work, but yes, consumerism and so many things to want to spend money on are the norm and the expectation of modern day families. Individualism, secularism, women’s liberation are factors too and family cohesion is not what it was, to the detriment of relationships and also personal happiness. Single mothers are becoming the most common and kids are ever more self-sufficient. Childless families exist too. Equality is an acceptable social goal but how does it benefit society in the long run when families are so fragmented? Where is God and where is love in this heavily populated world of His?

Reflect, share, Scripture: Thus says the Lord who redeemed Abraham. ‘Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands in his midst, they will sanctify my name, they will sanctify the Holy One of “Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. Is 29: 17-24. **Pope Francis:** Love always gives life. It does not end with the couple. They, in giving themselves to one another give also the reality of children, who are a living



reflection of their love, and a permanent sign of their being a father and a mother. AL165. **Jubilee:** Openness to life and responsible parenthood is the design that the Creator has implanted in the hearts and bodies of men and women, a mission that the Lord has entrusted to spouses and to their love. the desire of young people to give birth to new sons and daughters as a sign of the fruitfulness of their love ensures a future for every society. This is a matter of hope: the Christian community should be at the forefront in pointing out the need for a social covenant to support and foster hope, working for a future filled with the laughter of babies and children, in order to fill the empty cradles in so many parts of our world. SNC 9 **Act and pray.** For a greater appreciation of the value of family life and love for the world.

6 December. St Nicholas. On the last day of school at their assembly young Nick had been given a task to speak about St Nicholas, the original Santa Claus, who had been a bishop in the very early days of the church. He said, "The story is told that he was particularly generous, especially with the poor, giving them food and clothing. How this all became commercialised into giving expensive presents to one another is not clear, but our class decided to collect food and clothes for the homeless people who live in the veldt near our school. The principal arranged for us to meet with some of them and they told us a lot about their life and how they were separated from their families because of poverty. We felt pleased to help a little. And I told my folks I really don't want an expensive present this year."



Reflect, share, Scripture: Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?" I answered, "here I am, send me." Isaiah 6:1-8. **Pope Francis:** "The prayer of the poor rises up to God. As a father, he takes care of those who are most in need: the poor, the marginalised, the suffering and the forgotten. No one is excluded from His heart, for in His eyes, we are all poor and needy. God sees and cares for each one of us, whereas those who seek wealth, to the detriment of the most needy, are poor in His eyes. Message for World Day of the Poor. **JUBILEE:** We must not close our eyes to the dramatic situations that we now encounter all around us, not only in certain parts of the world. Each day we meet people who are poor or impoverished; they may even be our next-door neighbours. Often they are homeless or lack sufficient food for the day. They suffer from exclusion and indifference on the part of many. It is scandalous that in a world possessed of immense resources, destined largely to producing weapons, the poor continue to be "the majority of the planet's population, billions of people. SNC 15. **Act and pray:** This Christmas season what can we do as individuals and as a family to help the poor in some way, whether we are well-off or not?

7 December. Advent 2A. Isaiah and the prophets. Fr Pius shared, "The Greek word metanoia literally means turning and going in another direction. That is what repentance really is. How do we know what true peace and repentance are? At the recent COP 30 Climate conference one bishop, in a truly prophetic way, reminded the gathering of world leaders and others. 'The way to deal with problem of climate change, is the same as we do for sin and confession. We need to admit and express our guilt and experience remorse for our actions. God will always forgive, but we should decide to change our behaviour that contributes to the negative effects of climate change. We talk about it all the time, how to save and not waste, plant trees and care for animals, but do we take responsibility for our actions. That is the call of integral conversion."

Reflect, share, Scripture: There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse. With righteousness he shall judge the poor and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them. from Is 11: 1-10
Catechism Conversion after baptism is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church, which is at once holy and always in need of purification. The endeavour of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a contrite heart drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first. CCC 1428. **Jubilee:** The judgement of God, who is love will surely be based on love, and in particular on all that we have done or failed to do with regard to those in need, in whose midst Christ, the Judge himself, is present. In the words of Benedict XVI: "At the moment of judgement we experience and we absorb the overwhelming power of his love over all the evil in the world and in ourselves. The pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy". SNC22. **Act and pray:** This holiday time is a good opportunity to practice repentance, evaluate how eco-friendly we are and what changes we can make. Our Christmas confession or a Family Reconciliation service can focus on this

8 December. Immaculate conception. The women of the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception obviously had a great devotion to Mary, conceived without sin, by the special grace of God as she was to be the mother of God's Son. They aimed to model their lives on Mary's perfect relationship with God. "That is my prayer for each of my girls," Dawn shared with her sister-in-law. "and I've told them too, when they are tempted to sin, they should pray to Mary for strength." Doris responded, "as we're in the time of 16 days of Activism against Women and Child Abuse, we need to speak about the topic of temptation and sin with the whole family, men too as well as the women and girls."



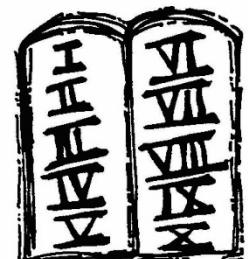
Reflect, share, Scripture: At that time the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came to her and said "Hail full of grace. The Lord is with you." Luke 1: 26-38. **Pope Francis:** In imitation of Mary the mother of Jesus, we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity. FT 276. **Act and pray:** Discuss and consider what is our family relationship with Mary, even if not all members are Catholic? Do we want to make any changes, e. g pray the Rosary or the Magnificat more often?

9 December. The Power of Forgiveness. Joseph. Michael shared with Sharon, "You know that when we did the training for marriage preparation I was quite challenged by the idea that couples, through their Sacrament of Matrimony, have the grace of forgiveness. This is not exactly the same as God's taking away our sins, but after I had that affair and you found out and challenged me, I felt terrible, so guilty I just wanted to crawl into a hole. When after some time and some counselling you said, "I forgive you and would like to start over, it felt like being healed and reborn. I was over the moon to be able to figuratively pick up my bed and come back home to you. I can't say thank you often enough for that." Their intimate smile to each other spoke volumes. She added, "I believe that forgiveness is truly a family gift, for couples and siblings too. That Old Testament "saint" Joseph forgave his brothers for their evil plan to get rid of him out of jealousy."



Reflect, share, Scripture: Jesus said, "Why do you question? What is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Rise and walk?" But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he said to the man who was paralysed, "Rise up, take up your bed and go home." Luke 5:17-26. **Read the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis.** **Pope Francis:** Couples should be helped to realise that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union. AL 232. In resolving to forgive the other, each has to ask quietly and humbly if he or she has not somehow created the conditions that led to the other's mistakes. AL 236. **Jubilee.** The experience of full forgiveness by God, cannot fail to open our hearts and minds to the need to forgive others in turn. Forgiveness does not change the past; it cannot change what happened in the past, yet it can allow us to change the future and to live different lives, free of anger, animosity and vindictiveness. Forgiveness makes possible a brighter future, which enables us to look at the past with different eyes, now more serene, albeit still bearing the trace of past tears. SNC 23. **and pray:** Pray for openness to growth and willingness to be forgiving and forgiven.

10 December. Ethics. Moses. "Grandad do you really have a hundred sheep here on the farm?" George asked "and would you go searching for one that is missing?" "My child, I have much more than a hundred sheep and we do count them. But things are different these days. We know that stock theft is a very big problem. Some farmers have even given up because thieves steal all the time. I don't know why people have become so dishonest and greedy and don't respect other peoples' property. It makes it hard to value anything. Will it ever change again? Will we go back to obeying the commandments that God gave to Moses." Over dinner they had a serious discussion about COP 30, the recent climate conference and ethical decay in general. Will there ever be genuine concern for the common good or only for self-interest, in every country and family too? Does poverty have a part in wanting to hold on to things on the one hand, or rejecting the right to ownership of others?



Reflect, share, Scripture: If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety nine on the hills and go in search of the one that went astray? Mat 18:12-13. The Lord said to Moses, "come up to me on the mountain and wait there, and I will give you the tables of stone with the law and the commandments which I have written for their instruction." Ex 24:12. **Pope Francis:** Ethically speaking, in conscience, and with an eye to the children who will pay for the harm done by the actions of those who don't care, the question of meaning inevitably arises, "What is the meaning of my life and my time on earth? What is the meaning of all my work and effort? **Jubilee:** More than a question of generosity, the issue of debt is a matter of justice. It is made all the more serious today by a new form of injustice which we increasingly recognize, namely, that "a true 'ecological debt' exists, particularly between the global North and South, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time". As sacred Scripture teaches, the earth is the Lord's and all of us dwell in it as "aliens and tenants" (Lev 25:23). If we really wish to prepare a path to peace in our world, let us commit ourselves to remedying the remote causes of injustice, settling unjust and unpayable debts, and feeding the hungry. **Act and pray.** Crime and corruption of all kinds are rife everywhere today. How strong are our ethical standards for ourselves and our children?

11 December. God provides through his mercy. Samuel. Granny Mabel was getting ready to welcome all the family visitors to the farm, while the children and grandchildren back home were packing up and leaving their normal lives behind. Jessica stopped to think. "When we go away on holiday we easily forget about our ordinary daily lives. But everything in the world and of nature needs to continue to function. If it doesn't rain we complain of the heat and

drought. If it rains too much we complain too. Ideally according to the natural law of creation there should be a balance but our exploitation of nature in the last 200 years has upset the balance. Although many climate-related disasters like drought and floods, and extreme heat and cold do happen more frequently God still continues to sustain his world because of his concern and his mercy." Granny Mabel explained that in the Old Testament there were many prophets sent by God to remind people to follow His way, act with concern for others and for creation. Samuel and Elijah and later Isaiah and Jeremiah were such prophets.



Reflect, share Scripture: *You shall rejoice in the Lord. When the poor and needy seek water and there is none and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them." Is 41:13-20.* **Pope Francis:** *Praise God for all his creatures." That was the message of St Francis of Assisi of his life, and his actions. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." How can we not admire this tenderness of Jesus for all the beings that accompany us along the way. LD.* **Jubilee:** *In his Canticle of the Creatures, written exactly eight hundred years ago, Francis saw all creation as a great family and could call the sun his "brother" and the moon his "sister". A renewed appreciation of the value of patience could only prove beneficial for ourselves and for others. SNC 4.* **Act and pray:** Let us take God on holiday, thank him daily and pray for good weather but do our bit too, drive safely, spend wisely and be kind to one another.

12 December. Arrive alive. Saul and David. In an end-of-the-year project the children had made a poster of the 10 Commandments. "Which ones should we be aware of at this time, I wonder," Mom had asked. "Probably all of them" was the answer. "But let us pray around the 5th commandment "Do not kill." Cornelius had spent two years studying to become a paramedic. "It isn't just doing a bit of first aid, you know," he boasted, "We do a lot of serious life-saving, but sometimes road accidents, road rage, drowning, reckless driving, drinking and driving are so often so unnecessary, that it even makes us cross. I know we do a lot of good, but a whole lot of that "snot and trane" stuff (Afrikaans for tears) could be avoided. Of course violence and killing should end too, as well as the never-ending wars that are waged today. There were times in the Old Testament and even more recently that wars were glorified and being a soldier was an honour. I can't help wondering why?"

Reflect, share. Scripture: *"O that you had listened to my commandments. Then your peace would have been like a river your offspring would have been like the sand and your descendants like its grains. Is 48:17-19.*



Pope Francis: *Pope Benedict asked us to recognize that the natural environment and the social environment have been gravely damaged by our irresponsible behaviour. Both are due to the same evil: the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives, and hence human freedom is limitless. LS 6.* **Jubilee:** *I renew my appeal that "with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory situations, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life". SNC 16.* **Act and pray:** How many people will die on the roads these holidays? Will it be more or less than last year? Let us pray to St Christopher for protection and that all drivers will act responsibly for the safety of their passengers and other families on the road."

13 December. St Lucy. Ruth and Old Testament women. Lucy is revered as a young virgin martyr. According to tradition at the time when Christians were marginalized and persecuted, her parents wanted her to marry a pagan man and she refused. He was angry and denounced her as being a Christian. She was tortured for her faith and her eyes were gouged out, while she was later executed. The Church made her a patron saint for the blind. The name Lucy means light. Her feastday is during the time of the Hannukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights that commemorates an important time of liberation from oppression for them.

The history of the Jewish people in the Old Testament is full of stories, mostly of the deeds of men, but women played important roles in their families and society and even as Judges – political leaders of the time. Ruth was a widow and a very loving and caring woman, who left her own country and accompanied her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Israel. Ruth became the grandmother of David, the most famous king of Israel.

Reflect, share, Scripture: *No one who lights a lamp hides it away or places it under a bushel basket, but on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. Luke 11:33.* **Prayer to St Lucy.** *Saint Lucy, you did not hide your light under a basket, but let it shine for the whole world, for all the centuries to see. We may not suffer torture in our lives the way you did, but we are also called to let the light of our Christianity light up our daily lives. Please help us to have the courage to bring the light of our faith into our work, our recreation, our relationships, our conversation -- every corner of our day.*

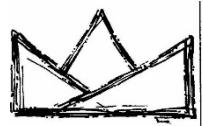
Amen. **Pope Francis** writes of the communion of saints. *The holiness of the saints in the communion of saints comes to the aid of our weakness in a way that enables the Church to fortify the weakness of some with the strength of others..* **Pope Leo:** *On the wounded faces of the poor, we see the suffering of the innocent and, therefore, the suffering of Christ himself. Poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon. There are many forms of poverty: the poverty of those who lack material means of*



subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalized and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom. DT 9. **Act and pray:** During the holiday season remember those people who are suffering from various disabilities, the blind, the deaf, those with dementia and many others. Offer any need you can.

14 December. 3rd Sunday of Advent. Fr Pius began his homily. "This 3rd Sunday of Advent is usually an occasion for joy, which does come in a variety of forms. We have just celebrated the feast of St Lucy, maybe not a very great or important saint, but surely healing the blind and the broken-hearted, as described by the prophet Isaiah, are Good News and an occasion for rejoicing. Do people with disabilities and their families who are responsible to care for them look for healing and change, or for better things, for strength to cope with the reality, and acceptance with compassionate love? At this time of good will can we be more conscious and supportive of the needs of such families and so bring joy to them and to ourselves too. Remember that far too many accidents happen around this time, leaving many people permanently disabled. God forbid that any of us should be the cause of that.

Reflect, share, scripture: Jesus said, "go back and tell John what you see, the blind see again and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me. Matt 11:3-4 **Pope Francis:** The larger family should provide love and support to teenage mothers, children without parents, persons with disabilities needing particular affection and closeness, young people struggling with addiction, the unmarried, separated or widowed who are alone and the elders and infirm who lack the support of their children. This wider family can help to make up for the shortcomings of parents and provide wholesome love and family stability to cases where parents prove to be incapable of this. AL 197. **Jubilee:** The Christian community should be at the forefront in pointing out the need for a social covenant to support and foster hope, working for a future filled with the laughter of babies and children, in order to fill the empty cradles in so many parts of our world. All of us, however, need to recover the joy of living, since men and women, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26), cannot rest content with getting along one day at a time, settling for the here and now and seeking fulfilment in material realities alone. SNC 9. **Act and Pray** for action on each one's part to search for the joy of living in our day to day lives.



15 December. Good Governance. King David. How do people regard kings and other leaders in our day? There are far less "royal families" and far more elected leaders. Which is the best model is a topic often debated. Are the kings and queens in royal families more moral, more committed and more concerned for the welfare of their subjects? This can be so, but is not always the case. Similarly, many elected leaders today operate from self-interest and do not appear to have the welfare of all their people as their priority. Elections are manipulated and some hold on to power beyond their term of office. Power struggles have been a feature of leadership from time immemorial and leaders have been more or less just. At present there are increasing examples of autocratic rulers and a decrease in democracy which has been championed for some time. Should people not have learned from the history as portrayed in the bible, after King David, who ruled for 30 years, and in spite of some faults was still regarded as Israel's greatest king. The Messiah who would liberate and save the people was expected to come from his descendants. However after David, even his son Solomon and many others became corrupt and the country and its people suffered many disasters. Jesus' mission was to speak out against injustice and bring about another type of kingdom, his Father's kingdom of love, justice, truth, peace and freedom. Where are we in the 21st century on those qualities of God's kingdom? What action is being taken across the world for just and honest government and who should take responsibility?

Reflect, share, scripture: The chief priests tested Jesus and asked, "by whose authority do you teach." Jesus answered them, "I will ask you a question?" They replied, "we do not know." Jesus told them, "Neither will I tell you by whose authority I do these things." Mat 21:23-27. **Pope Francis:** We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations. LS 53. **Jubilee:** The Jubilee can serve as an important occasion for giving concrete expression to the form of synodality, which the Christian community today considers increasingly necessary for responding to the urgent need for evangelization. All the baptized, with their respective charisms and ministries, are co-responsible for ensuring that manifold signs of hope bear witness to God's presence in the world. SNC 17. **Act and Pray** for a changing world leadership, a servant leadership following in the way of Jesus.

A CHILDREN'S PEACE PILGRIMAGE. A Christmas parable for our time for families.



Introduction. An activity to prepare for and discuss the story. Read: This is a family story for reading, sharing and discussing and telling in simpler form to young children. rather than a story to be read to them. Like Pope Francis, Pope Leo has shown a great concern for children and their wellbeing.

Activity for families: To make a poster begin with a large image of a map of the world. Mark Israel and Bethlehem on the map, (amazingly they are not far from the centre of the world.) With the help of google find and mark all the places where there is war going on, or places where peace has just been made. Find out something about the history of the places, what happened and how the children there were hurt, injured and kidnapped or orphaned. Draw a line from each place to Bethlehem in Israel and see if you can make a big star on the world map, like the silver star in the cave in Bethlehem over the place where Jesus is presumed to have been born. Think also about the little wars that we fight in our own homes and communities. Is there something you can do as a family to help to bring peace into your world?



THE PEACE PILGRIMAGE STORY begins in our own country.

16 December. Day of Reconciliation. Read. Reflect. Share. Pray. This is a special South African day, a public holiday, celebrated by all of our people to remind us of the divisions of the past and the need for reconciliation and for peace, striving for unity while recognizing and valuing our diversity. Racism, still present, underlies the historical internal wars, won and lost by the different sides. Sexism and male domination are cultural, but have roots too in the Bible. In our day these evils are now being rejected as the equal dignity of gender, of male and female, is recognized. There are religious, economic and political differences, some have historical roots, other differences are changing through greater ingenuity, industriousness, or good fortune and solidarity, while still other differences are being left behind maybe for lack of trying or resources. Peace is not based on the absence of conflict but on good will and compassionate management. Differences and divisions are also experienced in our families and between different groups of families. Beginning with our own we can reflect on the divisions and conflicts, on the hurt and harm they have caused in the past and still do today and on our own need for reconciliation and peace. Then reach out to others too. Forgiveness is a decision to be merciful, not to forget but to choose to let go.

Scripture: *O God, bring us back, let your face shine on us, and we shall be saved. May your hand be on the man at your right hand as your own, and we shall never forsake you again; give us life that we may call upon your name. Ps 80. Pope Francis:* *Forgiving does not mean forgetting. In the face of an action that can never be tolerated, justified or excused we can still forgive. Free and heartfelt forgiveness is a noble act, a reflection of God's own infinite ability to forgive. If forgiveness is gratuitous it can be shown even to someone who resists repentance and is unable to beg pardon. FT250. Act and pray.* for an increased willingness to work for peace through forgiving and accepting forgiveness.

17 December. Pilgrimage. Read, reflect, share, pray. To prepare for their family Christmas weekend Grandad Joseph and Granny Mabel decided to retell a story that they had put together with Granny Toni. Some of it came from their own history, some from local history, some from their lives, praying and sharing over the years and some also from very recent world events, especially the Israel-Hamas war in the Holy Land, which had begun on October 7, 2023, with a surprise attack and which was still carrying on after more than two years, in spite of partial ceasefires.

The story was about pilgrimages. Pope Francis, in the Jubilee Year and after the important synod meeting in Rome in October 2024, had spoken about the way forward in life as a pilgrimage, a journey, walking together. That made Granny Toni decide to include some thoughts from her own pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2005. Granny Toni started by saying, "Do children go on pilgrimages? And if so where do they go? Most likely they would go with their parents if the family was going to Ngome, Fatima or maybe to Rome or the Holy Land. Do those names bring to your mind pictures of holy people and holy places? When we see pictures of Jesus and Mary and other saints we often see them in churches or deserts or quiet places, but remember that Jesus lived 2000 years ago in a normal family in a normal little market town called Nazareth. There were probably goats and sheep in the streets, dirt roads or tracks running up the hill, a well where the women went to fetch water and have a gossip about the affairs of the town, and where the children played with the kind of toys they had 2000 years ago. When I was there in 2005 I saw that Nazareth doesn't look like that any more, nor does Jerusalem or Bethlehem or any of the places we read about in the Bible.

Going on a pilgrimage is a journey to a place that is special for you. It can be a journey of discovery into the past or to a place that is special and sacred to your own family, like the grave of your great-grandfather. For Catholics pilgrimages are often to places where Mary, Jesus' mother, appeared. She has appeared to children, like at Fatima more than 100 years ago, or Medjugorje until quite recently, to give them messages from Jesus. These messages are always about love, making peace, about mercy, accepting one another and caring for one another."

Scripture: We shall go rejoicing to the house of the Lord. For the sake of my family and friends let me say, "Peace upon you." For the sake of the house of the Lord, our God, I will seek good things for you. Ps 122 Pope Francis. I ask everyone to go with me on this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful. LD 69.

18 December. War. Read, reflect, share, pray.. Grandpa Joseph had been a catechist and had studied some of the history of Israel, the Holy Land, where Jesus lived and died 2000 years ago. He explained how many times before and after Jesus it has been invaded, wars were fought and villages were destroyed, people were captured and taken to foreign countries. According to the Bible God was always on their side, even if he was punishing them for not following his laws. The Holy Land has been ruled by different nations for 3000 years, already long before the time of Jesus. Seldom has there been peace in the land for long, also not in the other nearby countries. In our day Israelis, mainly Jews, and Palestinians, who are mostly Muslims, live there and at present there is no peace. A brutal surprise attack happened on October 7, 2023. Hamas, a militant group in Gaza, a part of the country, wanting to overthrow the Israeli government invaded villages, killed many family members and captured others, taking them away as hostages. Israel's army retaliated and the war that followed almost immediately, using all kinds of the most modern weapons, is one of the most horrific and brutal wars imaginable. The whole world could watch on TV and social media as the tragedy unfolded of more than 60,000 deaths including up to 20 000 children. Massive destruction and thousands more injuries of innocent Palestinian people, who found themselves in the way of the warring parties, has continued for months.

"Who is ultimately responsible?" "How and when will the air strikes, bombing, and killing end?" "Is the end of the world about to happen?" people were asking. "But what can we ordinary people and our families do?" "Pope Francis prayed every day for peace and an end to war, all wars, which as he keeps on saying, is a defeat where no one ever wins. Pope Leo continues the search for a lasting peace. Many world leaders have tried to stop the war, and to mediate but Israel demanded the return of their hostages, before they would stop. Israel's army carried on their attacks against Hamas, but other groups became involved as well, as they send rockets and missiles into one another's countries. The Cardinal Archbishop of Jerusalem even offered himself in exchange for the release of captured children. People are asking, "Was it a war between different religions, or was it political and ethnic, between groups of people, and about land?"

Scripture: The Lord turns his face against the wicked to destroy their remembrance from the earth. Where the just cry out the Lord hears and rescues them in all their distress. Ps 34. Pope Francis: War is a defeat. Always. Fratelli Tutti 258.

19 December. Children and war. Read, reflect, share, pray. Grandad Joseph and Granny Mabel knew about war, as they had experienced political fighting in their own part of the country, just as they knew was happening elsewhere, with children so often the innocent sufferers. How could the children be compensated?

Granny Toni shared a story. "Imagine what it would be like for children to travel from all over the world, from near and far, meeting up with others and finally ending up altogether from different countries in Jesus' birthplace, in time for his birthday. That is what happened to Busi a young boy from Shoboshobane, a small village in the old kingdom of KwaZulu-Natal, where one Christmas, when he was just a baby, a very sad thing happened. Different clans had been fighting amongst themselves for a long time. Things came to a head that December. On Christmas eve, no one would have expected it, but when many of the local people had gathered in one of the bigger houses to pray together there was a sudden loud noise and a crowd of men with spears and assegais rushed into the village and began attacking, beating people and stabbing them. The local men were not prepared for this and could not defend their people. Quickly the battle was over, the attackers fled and many villagers were left dead or seriously wounded. Busi, whose full name is Sibusiso, meaning blessing, was one of the few children who survived with his mother. The survivors of the massacre fled into the hills and later moved on to different places, leaving their village abandoned, as if there was a curse on it. Years later it still lay, overgrown with grass and weeds, roofless, empty shells of homes. "It's a bit like what is happening in Gaza in the Holy Land, in a much bigger way of course, with thousands of children losing their families," she sighed.

Scripture: I will hear what the Lord God speaks, he speaks of peace for his people and his faithful. PS 85. Pope Francis together with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in 2019 in Abu Dhabi: In the name of victims of wars, persecution and injustice we declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue. FT 285. Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely. FT 258

20 December. Conversion. Read, reflect, share, pray. Granny continued with the story. "When Busi was old enough he was sent to the local mission school. That was where he heard more about Jesus, the greatest king of all, a strong king who did not make war but believed in peace. Busi often listened to stories told by Brother Francis, who had come from far away across the sea and still remembered the great war in Europe and other parts of the world more than 80 years ago.

Many millions of people had been killed as opposing sides fought fierce battles. Many Jewish people too were killed especially because of their faith. Brother Francis believed only in peace, like Jesus did and the first Franciscan brother, St Francis himself, and of course our own Pope Francis and Pope Leo, who so often say how sad it is about the many wars today and how he prays for the many children who suffer.

It was Brother Francis who thought up the idea of a pilgrimage for children, bringing them together from many countries where they have suffered because of war. He wanted to bring them to the place where Jesus, the real king of peace was born. He knew that nowadays even young children can surf the net and soon they can find out, on their parents' or their own tablets and computers, about the conflicts that happened in all kinds of countries, all over the world. He thought how children know so much with their heads and at times with their bodies too, but sometimes they have not felt these painful things yet in their hearts.

Scripture: Jesus said, "suffer little children to come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." **Pope Francis:** The symbol of the heart has often been used to express the love of Jesus Christ. Some have questioned whether this symbol is still meaningful today. Yet living as we do in an age of superficiality, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart.

[Dilexit Nos 2] Children need help in the process of inner healing and in this way grow in the ability to understand and live in peace with others.

21 December. 4th Sunday of Advent. Sharing stories. Read, reflect, share, pray. First Brother Francis had sent messages to other Franciscan brothers all over the world. They found many boys and girls who had suffered when there had been war in their countries and they began to connect them with one another. They also found some generous people who were willing to donate money, and so the plan began to come together. Eventually 50 children from all over the world would make their pilgrimage for peace together near the end of the Pilgrimage Year of Hope.

Busi started writing letters and sending messages via one of Brother Francis' friends. He wrote to Balekwa from Somalia. Christo from Colombia sent emails to his namesake Christo from Indonesia. Moses from Israel wrote to Mohamed from Palestine, Adam from Turkey to Adam from Iraq and many more. Girls named Mary, Miriam, Mara or Maria from Rwanda, Ukraine, Vietnam and Ireland were put in touch with one another. All these children had stories of pain, sadness and loss caused by a lack of peace in the places where they lived. Some of the children had even been child soldiers. Some

of the boys had carried guns and killed people. Some of the girls had been attacked and raped. Some children had suffered because of the serious poverty that comes with war and other children had been refugees, or been separated from their families or even abused in their homes. Some were AIDS orphans, some war orphans. Some too were orphans or abandoned children because of violence and crime. For more than a year this network of children was built up using whatsapp, emails, sometimes letters or telephones and radio. One of Brother Francis' brothers set up a chatgroup where the children in the different countries could chat as he guided them to learn about St Francis, his love for nature, for the poor and how he had worked for peace 800 years ago, in Damietta, in the same part of the world as Israel today. Isn't it strange but wonderful that even though there is poverty in the world and so many

abandoned children, technology could bring them healing, hope and comfort from other children like themselves, as they told their stories and listened to the tales of the other children. On this last Sunday before Christmas each of them was invited to go to their local community church, mosque or temple, light a candle and pray for the success of the pilgrimage.

Scripture: Come Lord, visit us in peace, that we may rejoice in your presence with hearts made new. **Pope Francis:** sharing stories and listening is the new way forward for the Church, especially in the Jubilee year which will end soon.

22 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. As the time for the pilgrimage grew closer other people began to take an interest, especially as war in Israel had again been so much in the news and everyone had their opinions. Some politicians and business people and those from TV stations wanted to know what this pilgrimage was all about. But this wasn't meant to be a media circus for TV, but a children's pilgrimage and Brother Francis and his team did all they could to control the media and to protect the children and keep the simplicity and the personal human closeness alive.

By the 20th December everything was ready and the children had been prepared. Busi and his mom were so excited they could hardly wait. They were leaving on 22nd December, but some of the children with parents or other companions had left earlier or would travel later, depending on where in the world they were coming from and how they had to travel, by car, bus, train, plane, or ship.

Scripture: In those days Hannah took Samuel up with her and she brought him to the house of the Lord. She brought the child to Eli and said, "As you live my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence praying for this child and the Lord granted me my petition. I have lent him to the Lord. **Pope Francis:** We should not think of the mission of sharing Christ as something only between Jesus and me. Mission is experienced in fellowship with our communities and with the whole church.



23 December. The Meeting of children. Read, reflect, share, pray. Just before Christmas eve they all began to arrive in Israel. Jerusalem and Bethlehem are very close to each other but there is a big wall intended to divide the Israeli people in Jerusalem from the Palestinians in Bethlehem. For this special occasion the government had even agreed to a pause in the internal conflict and to open the road to them all. The mayors had put their differences aside and the two mayors had come to welcome the Peace Children from all over the world. The 50 boys and girls of all ages, shapes and sizes, all races and colours, first looked one another over, but soon found the friends they had been writing to. It was as if a vast network, a big web, was coming together. They held hands, they danced and sang, they played and laughed and cried too at times. Of course there were a few fights, after all children will be children.

Scripture: *O Lord have mercy on me, be my helper. You have changed my mourning into dancing. I will thank you forever.*
Pope Francis: *Jesus is our faithful friend. He is with us on our journey.*

24 December. Christmas Eve. Read, reflect, share, pray. The Peace Children's message from Jesus. Granny Toni shared how she remembered her pilgrimage in 2005 and what she had seen and experienced in the cave below the old Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. As she stood at the place where it is believed that Jesus was born a very strong sense of motherly tenderness had come over her, bringing tears of compassion to her eyes, just thinking of the vulnerable little baby Jesus born in such poverty.

The 2025 Jubilee Year with the theme "Pilgrims of Hope" will end soon, but for the Peace Children the time came that everyone had all been waiting for. As the evening grew dark on that peaceful night a little army of children and their families filled Manger Square outside the ancient church in Bethlehem, dating back to the early days of Christianity. In a way, just like for Mary and Joseph 2000 years ago, there was no room for them in the inn either, as the place of the birth of Jesus, believed to be in the cave now under the church, was too small for the 50 young ones to stand around. So they made their own circle, a tight circle, made up of 50 bodies and hands intertwined, holding one another close. The crib was in the centre, with specially chosen parents in the role of Mary and Joseph and farm animals brought in from the countryside. The baby's crib was surrounded by lights and connected by ribbons from the different countries making like a great big star on a great big world map. As the bells of the world rang out at midnight, Brother Francis brought the baby Jesus, as St Francis had done 800 years ago in Italy, and tenderly laid it in the manger. Who could say that it wasn't an angel choir that sang so sweetly, "*Gloria in excelsis deo, et in terra pax hominibus.*" Yes, it is possible to say, to believe and to live that message that the Peace Children were bringing and had to take back home with them to countries where peace was still a dream. "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all people of goodwill.*"

Scripture & Pope Francis: *Put on Jesus, and go, the world needs you. Love, peace and joy to every child, every family and every home. From Dilexit Nos 5: The heart is the place of sincerity, where deceit and disguise have no place. It usually indicates our true intentions, what we really think, believe and desire, the "secrets" that we tell no one: in a word, the naked truth about ourselves. It is the part of us that is neither appearance or illusion, but is instead authentic, real, It is entirely "who we are."*

25 December. Christmas Day. Love, peace, joy. Read, reflect, share, pray. Grandad Joseph continued the story, "While the adults and family members looked on, the children did praise God, sing and dance through the night, as the well-known story was acted out. They were the angels, messengers from God, who had come with a message of goodwill and peace on earth. They were the shepherds, work-men and women and soldiers, workers who had put down their weapons and tools to join in a moment of hope and joyful celebration. Children had come from Christian countries and from Africa and the East, from Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist families who all shared their gift, a dream of peace and unity. The gift the Peace Pilgrims of the world brought was the gift of their simplicity, their need for love, harmony, for peace and joy in their homes and in the world, their common home.

Scripture & Pope Francis: *"A little child will lead them." All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout to the Lord, all the earth, sing out your praise. From Dilexit Nos 218: Christ's love can give a heart to our world and revive love wherever we think that the ability to love has been lost forever.* Pope Leo's new message in *Dilexi Te* brings us the words of Jesus "*I have loved you*" with a special focus on all those who are poor, unloved and hurting.



26 December. Day of Goodwill Read, reflect, share, pray. . The United Nations Secretary General, a sad and hurting man, awoke on Christmas morning to a new hope, a new dream. "You worldly wise men, so-called leaders of the world, who debate and discuss, argue to convince and then veto every possibility of peace, should take a lesson from the children of the world. You, in your climate debates, at COP 30, and you political bargaining in the G20 summits always claim you are concerned about them and their future. Listen to the hope expressed by the children. And listen to another sad and

hurting old man, the late Pope Francis. In his messages, he repeated the constant refrain of his model and patron St Francis, "Praise God, for all his creatures." St Francis, who lived and loved Jesus totally, ended his life in full communion with him, in poverty and through his sharing in his bodily suffering bearing the wounds of Jesus on his own body. St Francis died as he had lived, proclaiming reconciliation, peace, praise and joy. Pope Francis too, died just months ago, having lived his dream, experienced suffering and died with love and joy in his heart. May that be their gift to us Christmas 2025.

Scripture: *Praise him, sun and moon, praise him all you shining stars. Praise him you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded and they were created. Ps 148. Pope Francis: The Lord does not faint or grow weary. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. (Isaiah 40) LS 73* **Pray the prayer of St Francis** together and think about what you each can do to bring peace into the home and the world.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow love,

where there is injury let me sow pardon,

Where there is discord, harmony.

Where there is doubt faith and where there is despair hope,

Where there is darkness light and where there is sadness joy.

Divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love, to receive sympathy as to give it.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

27 December. St John. Apostle and evangelist. Read, reflect, share, pray. The apostle John is often described in the gospels as 'the one whom Jesus loved.' He was also chosen to remain with the early Christian community for a long time after the death of Jesus and the other apostles, as a witness of God's love. The writings of the gospel of John, the three letters and the book of Revelation are all attributed to him directly or indirectly. He writes much about love and becoming one, becoming united. He presents the contrasting images of light and darkness with reference to Jesus. These natural qualities are always called for but can be seen as being particularly important for our world and our time. Countries' victory in the Rugby World Cup or other sporting competitions is sometimes celebrated with the song "The world in union." But apart from a few brief moments union is not the reality in all of creation.

Scripture: *That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete. 1 John 1:1-4.* **Pope Francis:** *Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day. For there to be solid and lasting advance in addressing climate change I would insist that preferences should be given to multilateral agreements between states. We are speaking above all of more effective world organisations, equipped with the power to provide for the global common good, the elimination of hunger and poverty and the sure defence of fundamental human rights. LD 34-35*



28 December. Holy Family Sunday. Read, reflect, share, pray. This special day, the 1st Sunday after Christmas, that commemorates the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, calls on every human family to be a holy family. Holy most simply means whole or complete, not only just having our lives in order in a practical way, but living with awareness of God. God's love and mercy for each of God's creatures, human and more, must be a reality in and beyond our immediate circle. It means aiming at peace, beginning in the home and experiencing the "joy of love" that Pope Francis speaks of in *Amoris Laetiti* his letter to Families. Everyone, in every family too is invited to participate with the Synod on Synodality's continuing process of "Conversations in the Spirit." We can call it family faith sharing, and it consists of reflection, sharing, listening and walking together into our future and that of the Church and all of its families.

Scripture: *When the time came the parents of Jesus brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. Simeon took him in his arms, blessed God and said, "My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." They returned to Nazareth and the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and favour of God was upon him. Luke 2:22-40*

BLESSING: *May the Lord bless our home and all who live here. May our home be always filled with the presence of God, in the love, peace and joy shared amongst us. When there is conflict make us willing to be reconciled. May we always care for one another as a true family of God. We ask this in the name of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

29 December. Holy innocents. (transferred from 28th December) Lifegiving and life-destroying. **Read, reflect, share, pray.** Matthew's gospel tells the story of the three foreign Wise Men bringing gifts. It also tells how King Herod out of jealousy and fear about a possible new king of the Jews ordered the murder of all baby boys in Bethlehem. Joseph was warned in a dream to take Mary and baby Jesus and escape into exile. There are many lessons to be learned here. We have been outraged daily at news reports of the injustice of killing innocent Palestinians in the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza and there is particular emphasis on the children. However, should we not feel greater outrage at the killing of so many unborn babies through abortion. All over the world there are over 70 million abortions every year and in South Africa over 100 000 per year. At the same time should we not also feel concern for the situations that lead to such a drastic choice? The task of families is to serve life in the widest sense. Would that not also include violence at home, drinking and driving and destroying our health through substance abuse? How genuinely lifegiving are we being, starting at home?



Scripture: *Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the Wise Men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem who were two years old or under. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, a voice was heard in Ramah, Rachel weeping for children; she refused to be consoled because they were no more.” Matt 2.* **Pope Francis:** *in the name of peoples who have lost their security, peace and the possibility of living together, becoming victims of destruction, calamity and war; in the name of justice and mercy, the foundations of prosperity and the cornerstone of faith; in the name of all persons of goodwill present in every part of the world; in the name of God we declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path, mutual cooperation as the code of conduct, reciprocal understanding as the method and standard. From Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi 2019. Fratelli Tutti 285*

30 December. Ancestors for today. Read, reflect, share, pray. What role do ancestors play in the Church and society today? Many families do continue to have a relationship with their own ancestors, honouring and communicating with them at particular family moments, but what expectations do ancestors have of them and their lifestyle and behaviour? What kind of role models were they to us?

As families, remembering the Peace Pilgrimage children, during these holidays and with the New Year just around the corner make it a project to consider who our positive role models are, that can continue to inspire us to love one another as God loves us. They may be family members, present or past, godparents or friends. They may be living or have lived good saintly lives or may even be martyrs of our time, caring for people or for an aspect of creation, as “the world our family of families.” Young people in particular need positive role models to imitate and emulate. A good and simple yardstick to measure with is the quotation from the prophet Micah. *“What the Lord asks of you simply is this, “Act justly. Love tenderly and walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8* The Church is exploring this more since the time of the 2nd Vatican Council, but with even stronger emphasis today, since the Synod on Synodality. There is a growing emphasis on the role of the laity, and now the Church is looking into its own possible candidates for sainthood amongst lay people, couples and individuals. These could be considered in a similar light as our personal ancestors, but their lifestyle is closely scrutinized. In 2015 Benedict Daswa, a school teacher and family man from Venda, who was murdered for his rejection of witchcraft, was beatified as the 1st important step in the process to formal sainthood. At present a very devout lay couple from Johannesburg has been proposed for investigation. Domitilla Hyams, with her husband Danny. She founded Little Eden, which has grown to two centres catering for severely disabled children and adults, providing a home and loving care. **Scripture:** *“May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children’s children!” Ps 128:5-6.* **Pope Francis:** *There are no lasting changes without cultural changes and there are no cultural changes without personal changes. LD 70.*

31 December. New Year’s Eve. JESUS. Read, reflect, share, pray. The name Jesus means Saviour, meaning something active, but it should also maybe be understood as gift. God's merciful gift of love that he gave to us at Christmas in the Incarnation, is not only an abstract idea but a person, God's Son who is also our brother and friend. He came as a poor, humble helpless baby. He lived a simple life in a small country mixing with ordinary people, the land and the creatures, but showed us the way of unconditional love and complete self-giving by his life and finally his death. His Resurrection completed God's plan of salvation and paved the way for us. How can we show our love and thank him for this saving gift? **Scripture:** *The greatest gift a person can give is to give his life for his friends. John 15:13.* **Pope Francis.** *The Holy Father lamented when we Christians do not reflect the joy and hope offered by Christ’s closeness to us. “These unhappy Christians forget: an encounter with Jesus always brings you joy and if this does not happen to you it is not a true encounter with Jesus. Each of us today should take a little time and think: ‘Jesus, You are within me: I want to meet You every day. You are a Person, not an idea; You are a companion, not a programme. You are Love that solves so many problems. You are the beginning of evangelisation. You, Jesus, are the source of joy. November 2024.* The year 2025, ends today. It is a time to thank God for the gifts of life during the year and ask his blessing on the year ahead. The Jubilee year, with the theme “Pilgrims of Hope” ends on the feast of the Epiphany early in the New Year. We hope and trust that MARFAM's eco-family-focused vision and theme **FAMILY IN CREATION, HOPE FOR THE WORLD** will contribute to renew hope and discover a vision to restore access to the earth's resources for everyone.





We pray with Pope Francis, "Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division; may all who have been hurt or scandalised find ready comfort and healing. Make us once more mindful of the sacredness of the family and its beauty in God's plan. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer. Amen. From *Amoris Laetitia* 325.

The encyclicals and other writings of Pope Francis are helpful ways on the journey to holiness; *Amoris Laetitia* – on the family, the care of creation in *Laudato Si* and the renewed effort required as noted in *Laudate Deum. Fratelli Tutti* addresses social friendship on a wider scale and addresses war and violence of any kind. A new 2024 document *DILEXIT NOS – HE LOVED US* specifically addressed the love of Jesus through his Sacred Heart. These important documents from Pope Francis could well be studied and adopted by every human family for the future of our families and the whole family of creation.

Pope Leo has also published a powerful document which continues on from *DILEXIT NOS*, named *DILEXI TE – I HAVE LOVED YOU*. Its main focus is on the love of the Father and of Jesus for the poor and an invitation to us to love. That will be a valuable resource as we go into 2026. His final call at the Laudato Si Raising Hope Conference on 1 October was **"I would like to conclude with a question that concerns each of us. God will ask us if we have cultivated and cared for the world that he created (cf. Gen 2:15), for the benefit of all and for future generations, and if we have taken care of our brothers and sisters (cf. Gen 4:9; Jn 13:34). What will be our answer?"**

The Laudato Si Movement and LS Action Platform can also be companions on our journey to become a holy family. MARFAM's *Families caring for God's Creation* booklet serves as an introduction to the Laudato Si Action Platform goals and *Becoming Eco-Friendly Families* offers many suggestions to combat climate change, with *FAMILIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE*.