

# Family Groups

PASSIONIST  
FAMILY GROUP  
MOVEMENT



PASSIONIST FAMILY GROUP MOVEMENT

*A Ministry of the Passionists*

SPRING 2024

*To our Passionist Family Group Family ...*

The season of spring is a time of year when the weather starts to change and we have that time of transition between the winter and summer seasons. The days grow longer, while the nights shorten, the temperature is milder and flowers bloom. There is a warm wind in the air during this season.

In the past two years the Catholic Church has been actively involving community members in parishes to participate in the Synod on Synodality sessions, which are due to conclude in October 2024. The numbers of people connecting to their local parish is dropping. 'How can we address this situation?' they are asking.

This, to us, is a no-brainer. HELLO! We have a very successful model called FAMILY GROUPS which has survived 51 years of ministry. Why create something new when we already have a perfectly well-oiled option?

Spring gives us all more energy and the change in weather makes us feel more alive. Our symbol, A heart surrounding the people and encompassed by a cross, says it all. Our founder, Passionist priest, Fr Peter McGrath, explained it this way: "The significance is of people wishing to deepen their Christian love and acceptance of each other. Our efforts of kindness to each other, of mutual support, help us to carry the cross through life."

Keep the monthly functions going and where possible make a commitment to meet someone in your parish who may not be in a Family Group and, unbeknown to you, would be very grateful to join a Family Group. Thank you all for your continued support and love of your own Family Groups.

*- Tina, Trish, Roger, Russell, Celine, Mary, Frances, Fr Brian CP*

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## The Southern Team (Victoria & Tasmania) 'Weekend' by Trish Gurney

On a weekend in July, the Southern PFGM Team held a gathering of Family Group Coordinators and members at the Passionists' Holy Cross Centre in Templestowe. It was a resounding success. We began on Friday with a delightful dinner together, re-connecting and catching up with each other's news.

On Saturday, the main day of the gathering, we began at 9am with a welcome from Frances Sullivan. The welcome included remembering two very committed, long-term Southern PFGM members who had passed away in the previous year: Maree Metcalfe and Margaret Mangan.

Trish then introduced *Greg Reynolds* who presented a thought-provoking talk about our need for **courage** to make a difference and to help in re-building our Church and our world, as they have both suffered in recent years. This reminded us how we need each other for support. This initiated a very good discussion.

Following on, *Tim Horlock* gave an excellent talk using a 'Western' theme: "Are we Pioneers or Settlers?" This inspired great discussions in small groups with people then sharing from their groups.

The final session, *Safeguarding and its implications for Family Groups*, was led by PFGM National Coordinator, Tina Minichilli, who is in ongoing discussions with the Melbourne Archdiocese's Safeguarding Team. This generated much lively discussion and questions that Tina will explore further, sharing the outcomes with us.

We enjoyed a happy and delicious dinner on Saturday night with a lot of chatter and friendship. On Sunday morning the weekend was rounded off, for those who were able to attend, with 10am Mass at Holy Cross with Fr Chris Monaghan\* as the celebrant.

On reflection it was thought that holding the gathering during winter may have prevented some from attending; as retirees often travel north for warmer temperatures during the Victorian winter.

We also acknowledged that travelling from other towns may be difficult for some FG members due to age and cost.



**PFGM Southern Team gathering of Parish coordinators and members at Holy Cross, Templestowe on July 31, 2024**



**LEFT: Alfons Glatzel of Mill Park Parish is in his 80s and drove himself to attend the day's sessions. Now retired from leadership, Alfons and his wife Helen were their Parish Coordinators for many, many years.**

**Southern PFGM Team members L to R: Gail Fiddelaers, Michael & Frances Sullivan, Trish & Roger Gurney, Marina & James Ting, Laine & Terry Kenny**



*\*Special thanks to Chris Monaghan CP for his weekly Sunday Masses which he celebrated and recorded each week during Covid lockdowns. Many, many people were appreciative of this ability to 'participate' in Mass when their own churches were closed.*

Chris has continued with this generous ministry and his recorded Masses that can be found on the internet at: [vimeo.com](https://vimeo.com/chrismonaghan) and then enter/search [chrismonaghan@passionists.com](mailto:chrismonaghan@passionists.com)



**Peaking in the 80's** - Brian Traynor CP

Bernard Salt is a demographer and social commentator who uses data to interpret how society is changing. His reflections in the 'Australian' Weekend Magazine are always interesting. A few weeks ago, Salt wrote about belief (in a God of some sort) in Australia, He noted a drop from 78% in 2006 to 58% in 2021. He further noted that the initial peak period for belief is age 16. There is a nosedive to a lowest point when aged 23-27 and the true high point 'in the 80's'.

This prompted me to consider what we can expect within the PFGM, having moved from a time when the Movement was "full of young families" and supplied with many dedicated leaders. We've seen a steady decline in numbers and especially in young families, from that peak until now. A good fifteen years ago in New Zealand we began to ask how a Passionist Family Group could manage without an official leader, because the signs were there then. We also tried to address how we could attract migrant families and that has proven to be largely unsuccessful. Most of those from more devotional cultures, are not attracted to what the PFG's offer, but then that is true of more devotional members from our traditional church cultures in Australia and New Zealand.

A constant frustration has been to respond to the complaint, "But Family Groups are only social". Those who make this comment (including some priests) seem never to make the same accusation about Jesus, who's ministry is laden with the forty meals associated with his ministry in the gospels.

It seems we are largely attracting those whom Bernard Salt regards are at the peak of belief – those in their 80's. In fact they have been belonging for a long time! I think it is time to accept and rejoice in this. The Family Groups look different in most parishes from 25 years ago, but they mean just as much to those who have belonged for 30, 40 and even in Terrey Hills, 50 years! Within this age group, there is less keenness for people to take on a leadership role, and while good leadership is an asset to any group, there is less need for it in many groups.

I'd like to suggest we not wring our hands or lament that the old days are gone. Rather, let's accept that the PFG model still works as many parishes with young families attests, but we are in a different phase. Importantly, it is a Movement, so it will ebb and flow, not be stuck with the rigidity of a closed institution. Psalm 118 says "We will rejoice and be glad". Why not give that a try?

*Editor's Note: Brian is on leave for several months for some respite and relaxation. Please keep him in your prayers.*

**St Mary's Cathedral Parish, Sale - in Gippsland, Victoria**

Thirty members of our three Family Groups of the Sale Cathedral Parish and the two Gippsland representatives from the PFGM Southern Team, Gail & Hank Fiddelaers, came together in July at one of our local clubs to celebrate the 14th birthday of Passionist Family Groups in the Sale Parish.

Everyone enjoyed sharing a meal, fellowship and, especially, enjoyed the birthday cake (pictured), which was cut by our eldest member, Margaret Robinson. Margaret has been a member of a Family Group in Sale for about twelve years and is 87 years young! Margaret has lived in Sale for around 60 years. Margaret, who is widowed and her husband had three children.

**- Veronica Stewart, Sale PFGM Coordinator**



**Could this be a reflection for (and of) our Family Groups?**

Scripture illustrates that Jesus continued to serve others with food after His resurrection

- He fed the disciples after a weary night of fishing and welcomed them to dine with him.
- Encountering the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they didn't recognise the resurrected Jesus until He broke bread with them.



Holding to the scripture today, while the people look for a miracle, let us be that miracle to others. Breaking bread together which involves more than baking; it's about serving people and spending time with each other.

It's about slowing down, sharing stories. It does not need to be fancy or elaborate, rather simply pull up an extra chair at the table, open the circle a little wider.

Let's open our hearts and embrace the living bread of life as we come together in fellowship through the ministry of breaking bread.

By **Sr Karen Englebretsen CP** - blessed to be a spiritual care worker in the homeless sector, Melbourne. Karen grew up in Whanganui, New Zealand. Later, while in Palmerston North after graduating, Karen was very active in the Cathedral Parish volunteering in a wide range of ministries and activities and a regular participant in many initiatives of the Young Adults community. As a novice, Karen has been working with the Passionist Sisters in Melbourne, Victoria.

## Mt Carmel Family Groups - Reconnections - QUEENSLAND



On July 14, I was invited to a Feast Day Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Coorparoo. This coincided with the 35th Anniversary of Family Groups in the Parish and a renewal of connection on many levels. There was the happy discovery of a 3rd group still operating and unknown to the other two groups, a new awareness of the Family Groups by the parish and the reconnecting with the PFGM as a movement thanks to Paul Asnicar seeking us out via our website.\* This is an excerpt from the Parish newsletter that week:

*“1989 was a significant year in the life of Mt Carmel with the instigation of the Passionist Family Group Movement in the parish. Many parishioners may not realise that the movement is still alive in the parish. This year marks the 35th anniversary of a movement that has fostered a spirit of community, friendship and support among parishioners of all ages and backgrounds.*

*The parish of Mt Carmel has been enriched by the presence of Family Groups for the past 35 years. Many parishioners have testified to the benefits of being part of a Family Group, such as finding companionship, comfort, joy, and faith. They have shared many memorable moments and milestones, such as birthdays, anniversaries, baptisms, weddings, and funerals.”*

I was warmly welcomed to the parish celebration Mass, one at which the Family Group Movement featured heavily. Fr Martinho expressed very beautifully the importance of community and supporting each other through our relationships. Family Groups seem to slot very nicely into the Mt Carmel priorities. Following Mass there was a cuppa and sausage sizzle and an opportunity to meet some of the Family Group people. I was delighted to meet and chat to Trish & Barry Dwyer - keeping the Passionist flag flying as original Family Group members from Terrey Hills in the 70s.

Michael Roache, one of the Mt Carmel Family Group leaders, and a key instigator for the 35- year celebration summed up the experience so well:

*The Combined Family Group gathering in the photo assembled at the Mt Carmel Feast Day, are just ordinary people. But they enjoy some extraordinary connectedness that is hard to find in any other group or organisation. It's the deepening bonds and connection developed over time and the shared experiences of life's struggles and joys. Their 35 years of family group endeavour is a wonderful story.*

It is clear to me that despite the loss of connection with the wider Passionist family over the years, Family Groups at Mt Carmel have been an important aspect of community spirit within the parish and a sustaining force for those involved who have developed deep and lasting relationships within their groups. This is thanks to the continued good work of those who have taken on leadership roles and seen the value in continuing this ministry.

- Celine Bowman (PFGM Coordinator, Queensland)



## GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY - VICTORIA

**Carmel & Ted McKenzie**

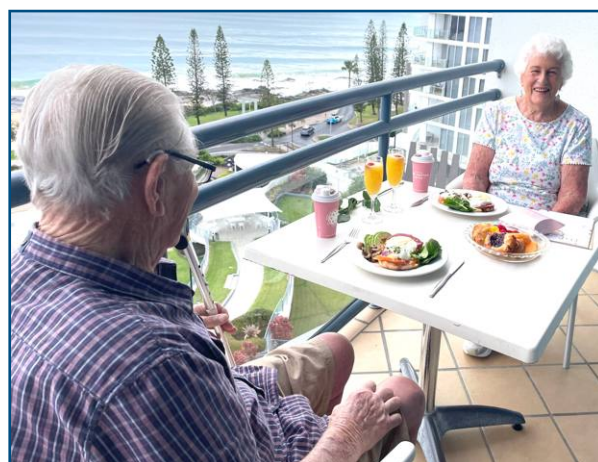
- PFGM Coordinators for many, many years - St Mary's, Echuca in Victoria

'Most people our age would be at least 60 years married... Instead, we both did lots of other things before we met and I am pleased we did those things when younger.

Ted and I had a wonderful week with most of our children in Mooloolaba. Our Broome family of five were unable to attend, unfortunately. We had our other children and grandchildren there from Melbourne, Geelong and Western Australia.

They really spoilt us, making it easy to enjoy ourselves and planning our special day on July 13th. We were surprised by a yummy breakfast provided by the girls on the balcony. We had an opportunity to have lunch by ourselves if we wished and then, at night, they hired the rooftop of the Mantra where we were staying.

When we arrived, the men were cooking a sumptuous meal of barbecue steak and seafood and champagne all around (except for children). We were shown to the warmest seats sprinkled with rose petals and then the children gave us a bunch of beautiful red roses. Jacqui's eldest daughter decorated a cake for our Anniversary. Throughout the week they looked after us and it was a joy to catch up with them all. ' - Carmel



*Another wonderful Passionist Family Gathering on 24th May in the Bendigo Club where everyone was very happy with the lunch and enjoyed our very joy filled atmosphere created around the table.*

*Also a big thank you to Leah and Gino, for organizing the venue and the surprise birthday cake so lovingly made by Leah, thank you Leah with love from us all, Liesbeth*

**Kennington Family Group  
St Therese's, Kennington (Bendigo)  
VICTORIA**

Coordinators: Margaret & Jo Van Dillen

### **From Church Bulletins:**

- The topic for next week's sermon will be "What is hell?". Come and listen to our choir practice.
- Next Thursday there will be try-outs for the choir. We know that they need all the help they can get.
- Last Sunday, Ms Charlene Mason sang, 'I will not pass this way again' giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
- The sermon this afternoon will be: 'Jesus Walks on the Water'. The sermon tonight will be: 'Searching for Jesus'.
- The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.
- We are saving aluminium cans, bottles and other recycling items. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.



# HEART OF THE NATION

## 'The last life lesson Mum ever gave me'

Photographic artist, Aletheia Casey, made this image of her mother, but she didn't realise how special it would turn out to be.



Aletheia Casey spent a decade pursuing an artistic goal: a perfect picture of her mum, Marg. "I wanted to make one truly great portrait of her," she explains. "A definitive portrait that spoke of our bond." Marg was the most influential person in her life: her guiding light, her teacher, the person who understood her best. Last August, aged 79, she passed away from cancer. This image from the Australian Life exhibition shows her with Casey's son Adelchi four months before she died. It's one of the last images Casey ever made of her.

Marg had a tough start in life: she was a toddler when her mother died, and lost her father at 16. She became a Catholic nun, and taught in schools in her twenties before meeting a priest named Paul. They fell in love, and quit the Church in order to marry. Marg and Paul raised three kids in Wagga Wagga, and home-schooled them. It was the best childhood, says Casey, who's had a 20-year career as a broadcast journalist in Australia and the UK while also pursuing her art practice in analogue photography (she uses a large format camera – the type that requires her to wear a cloth over her head, and offers only four frames per session. It's an

exercise in slow, meditative image-making, she explains.)

This image was made in her parents' garden in Callala Bay, NSW, during one of her twice-yearly visits from her base in London. "We knew Mum's illness was progressing, though we didn't realise how little time we had left," Casey says. Marg had been gardening with her young grandson, and sat down for a rest; he came and curled up in her lap, a picture of love. "Hold it right there!" Casey implored them as she raced into the house to grab her camera gear.

She wasn't ready to process the film until six months after Marg's passing. And when she finally did, there was a shock: moisture had got into the roll during storage and damaged the film, overlaying the images with speckles and a luminous haze. "I was *really* upset," says Casey, 44. But in time, she's come to view it differently: those imperfections are beautiful in their own way, and loaded with meaning. She hears Marg's voice when she looks at this image now: a voice that gently reminds her, *When you seek perfection life will always throw something different at you. Nothing is ever perfect. So lighten up, and roll with the punches.* "It was another life lesson from mum," Casey says. "The last she ever gave me."



PHOTOGRAPHY ALETHEIA CASEY BY ROSS BILTON

10 THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE

This image of our Movement's much loved, admired and now deceased, Marg Casey, was featured in **The Australian Magazine** several months ago. The intriguing story of the image is told by Aletheia, who is Marg's daughter and the photographer.

## A Reflection on Donna Ashworth's poem *You Don't Just Lose Someone Once*- Paul Casey

Brian Traynor CP, in his Letter 220, included a reflective poem on grief by Donna Ashworth entitled *You Don't Just Lose Someone Once*. For me, it is a gut-wrenching reminder of how possibly every moment, every thought, every word, and every action of every day, from the moment that we wake in the morning until the moment that we fall asleep at night, can be a series of fresh experiences of loss. A grieving hell. Then, to top it off, we may eventually struggle to remember who it is that we have lost. Is there no hope? Yes, there is.

Ashworth's poem portrays us as children of the moment, not as people who integrate loss into their lives, and so change and grow. It suggests that we perceive only what wounds and that we are not open to dimensions that may offer hope, healing, and even joy. But for the grieving, as well as for the deceased person, 'life has changed, not ended'. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus claimed: 'There is nothing permanent except change.' To live is to change and to let go. We are always a bereaved people, but we '*press on*'. (Peter McGrath cp).

Further, Donna Ashworth's poem suggests that, for me personally, the path that I walk every day is only marked by the absence of my late wife, Margaret. However, it is also marked by her presence. But critically, I must be active to find it. Here are excerpts from our children's and my eulogies at Margaret's funeral. They encourage us to live fully, for others, with joy, and with her spirit ever present. **Siobhain:** *We will miss you Mum beyond words, but you have instilled in us your resilience and strength.* **Dion:** *She embodied the words of Mother Teresa. 'Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier'.* **Aletheia:** *This quote from Maria Popova perfectly encapsulates Mum's ethos: 'Choose joy. ... .. Feel the sorrow ... .. but keep pressing the weight of joy against it'.* **Paul (Me):** *I will amend to 'you' the 'he' in the final line of Dylan Thomas's Elegy, written on the death of his father: 'Until I die you will not leave my side'.*

Next, reflect on the poem *I See His Blood Upon the Rose* by Joseph Plunkett. In this poem, Plunkett ties Christ's love to nature and the universe. *I see his blood upon the rose /And in the stars the glory of his eyes, /His body gleams amid eternal snows, /His tears fall from the skies.* The poem goes on to describe how other human aspects of Christ, such as his face and his voice, can be experienced in everyday encounters with nature. In this context, those who knew Margaret will immediately think of rainbows. I can add to that all the native flowers and shrubs that she planted around our home. Of course, these things remind me of her absence, but they are also signs of her presence, a paradox with which I can live.

Sadly, the time may come, when I may enter, as one my friends with the onset of dementia put it, 'the Cloud of Unknowing', and fail to even recognise a photo of Margaret. This would be life's unkindest cut of all. However, the phrase 'the Cloud of Unknowing' refers to a form of Christian mysticism which proposes that in surrendering our minds and selves to the 'Unknowing' we obtain a glimpse of God. It may be a final letting go that enables us to find the divine. And possibly that is where I and our family and friends will 'find' Margaret again.

One current goal for our family and me is to focus on what we have been privileged to have shared with Margaret and to honour that privilege by exhibiting her values in our lives. I am sad for what has ended, but I can rejoice in what has happened and in the legacy that continues. As the Neil Dimond song asserts, you can sing and cry at the same time.

Finally, I recommend Richard Rohr's point in the PFGM Winter Newsletter 2024: '*... grief is not a problem to be solved or a malady to be cured. It's a sacred reality to be entered.*'

*We invite and welcome contributions to our Passionist Family Group Newsletter.  
Please send your news/articles and photos to the editor at:  
[pfgm.victas@gmail.com](mailto:pfgm.victas@gmail.com)*

**A copy of this Spring 2024 Newsletter and previous PFGM Newsletters  
can be found on our website:  
[www.pfgm.org](http://www.pfgm.org)**

## *When God sends YOU help, don't ask questions!*

A woman hurried to the pharmacy to get medication, got back to her car and found that she had locked the keys inside. The woman found an old rusty coat-hanger left on the ground. She looked at it and said, "I don't know how to use this." She bowed her head and asked God to send her some help.

Within five minutes a beat up old motor cycle pulled up, driven by a bearded man who was wearing an old biker skull rag. He got off his cycle and asked if he could help.

The woman replied, "Yes, my daughter is sick. I've locked my keys in my car. I must get home. Please, can you use this hanger to unlock my car?" The biker said, "Sure." He walked over to the car, and in less than a minute, the car door was open. She hugged the man and through tears, softly said, "Thank you God for sending me such a nice man." The man heard her little prayer and replied, "Lady, I am not a nice man. I just got out of prison yesterday; I was in prison for car theft."

The woman hugged the man again, sobbing, "Oh, thank you God! You even sent me a Professional".

Is GOD great or what!?



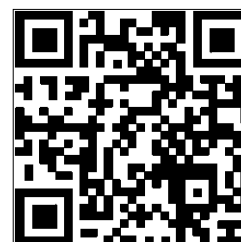
## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT US

Thank you for your support of the Passionist Family Group Movement. Your donation allows us to assist the many Family Groups throughout Australia.

Family Groups provide a nurturing environment to help people get to know other members of their parish community and to support one another. Many people within Family Groups have witnessed and received blessings from the love and acceptance that they have experienced within their Family Group.

You can donate either by using our banking details below or click [here](#) to donate with your debit/credit card. If you are reading a printed copy of the newsletter then go to our web site at [www.pfgm.org](http://www.pfgm.org) and select **Support Us** or click on the QR code.

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**Contributions can be made via direct transfer or by cheque/money order, etc. Receipts will be provided for all donations: please provide appropriate details.**

\*Please note that the account is administered by the Holy Spirit Province of the Passionists and we are ineligible for Tax Deductable status.