

# The Southern Star

ISSUE #23

Newsletter for the Dominican Sisters of Wanganui



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"Virtues that appear small and insignificant  
in the eyes of the world are true, solid virtues that  
hold within themselves the treasure of grace."

*Saint Catherine of Siena*



# LETTER FROM MOTHER Prioress GENERAL

Mother Mary Madeleine O.P.

**A**s I write we are looking forward to a Dominican celebration of the Christmas season. While we busily prepare for the feast we are making an effort to preserve our contemplative spirit because as Dominicans we have in our lives both the contemplative and the active dimension. As St Thomas said, this is the mode of life which is most like that of Our Lord and the Apostles. It is the first time for several years that we have all been together for this great feast and we have been attending many choir practices in preparation. We will be singing the Divine office in the Dominican Rite, Father Albert will celebrate a Sung Dominican Midnight Mass in our chapel, which will be preceded by a procession where each Sister comes forward to kiss the Baby before the Superior places Him in the manger. In the morning the Sisters have the opportunity to attend the dawn Mass at the church and then the Sisters will be singing the 11am parish Mass, the third Mass of Christmas.

This will be followed by Christmas dinner, a very jolly occasion because Christmas is one of only three days in the year when we are permitted to speak in the refectory during the meal. The Sisters have been formed into teams to prepare the different aspects of our celebration. There is a *Gaudeamus* team to prepare the supper after midnight Mass, the cooking teams for the main meal and dessert, the decorating team to set up the Christmas tree and crib and to embellish the refectory, the singing team, the gift wrapping team and the sacristy team. In the midst of these preparations we have had plumbers, a builder and an electrician in to remodel our kitchen and laundry so that we can cope with our larger numbers. We are finally able to install the equipment from Australia which arrived in the container earlier in the year. Cupboards are being re-sited to accommodate the extra appliances and open up more space for the cooking Sisters as we have moved the boarders' refectory upstairs.

Entertainment for after the Christmas dinner is also being prepared with great secrecy so that the finally professed Sisters do not know what the junior professed Sisters are doing and vice versa. Also during the holidays there are working bees each morning with a team of Sisters in either

the kitchen, laundry, garden, school or boarding school. Life therefore continues to be a hive of activity despite school being over for the year.

In his speech at our guild dinner Father Albert compared the Sisters to bees busy in the teaching apostolate gathering nectar and storing honey by our prayers and contemplation. Now we return to the hive for the summer holidays, to the contemplative aspect of our lives to gather and store nectar for the upcoming year. A particular occasion for gathering this nectar is our annual retreat starting on the 29th of December and finishing on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January with a ceremony for the renewal of vows for 6 of our Sisters. We are blessed to have Fr Albert still among us to preach this year's retreat given that the retreat master agreed upon last year cannot get into the country due to the closure of the New Zealand borders. After the retreat the Sisters will undertake preparation for their teaching assignments and duties in the house for 2021. We are eagerly looking forward to the new year and what it will bring.

However, we never forget the contemplative aspect of our life. During the retreat and other times too we ponder the wonderful mystery of our salvation, O Magnum Mysterium – *O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in a manger! Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear Christ the Lord. Alleluia!*

We wish all our family, friends and benefactors all of the blessings of Christmas and many graces for the New Year. We remain united with you all in prayer before the Crib in thanksgiving for your continued generosity and support.

Mother Mary Madeleine OP



(From L to R): Christmas Matins in our little chapel in Loreto with Fr Albert; the 3rd Mass of Christmas Day at St Anthony's Parish; the Sisters process two by two to kiss the feet of the Infant Christ before Mother places Him in the Crib.

**Motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters of Wanganui**  
 12B York Street, Gonville, Wanganui 4501, New Zealand  
 Tel: 00-64-06-344-2265  
 Email: prioressgeneral@dominicansisters.net.nz  
 www.dominicansisters.net.nz

# Saint Dominic's Convent

Wanganui, New Zealand

## St Anthony's Primary School

Some of the Sisters have been working tirelessly in the Primary School throughout this entire year, teaching Catechism, Music and Gregorian Chant, supervising the playground during breaks and also the weekly Primary School Mass. The Eucharistic Crusaders were also under the care of the Sisters, who were assisting Fr Michael Johnson together with Brother Vincent Mary. From the middle of the year, the Sisters were heavily involved with the day-to-day running of the Primary School, undertaking various administrative duties and tasks.

We rarely have space to cover news from the Primary School - so this page is specially dedicated to them!



## Crusaders Big-Day-Out

The Eucharistic Crusaders had their Big Day Out of fun and games at the Bason Botanic Gardens on Saturday, 12th December. The event began with a Scavenger Hunt for "lost pilgrims" to Jerusalem - 15 A4-sized cardboard pilgrims hidden throughout the native walks and on unsuspecting tree branches - with points given for every pilgrim rescued. Next, the children were placed in four teams of Magi searching for the "Star of Bethlehem" (Reverend Father M Johnson SSPX was our 'star' of the day) using clues hidden around the park. The Magi journeyed to Bethlehem and met various obstacles such as having to water their lazy camels (the popular event of the day), skip through jump ropes, and lead their caravan across a wooden planked bridge (penalty for touching the 'green' path!). The day ended with prizes for each team and a well-earned rest for all. Thank you to Reverend Father M Johnson SSPX and Brother Vincent Mary SSPX for all their hard work and effort throughout the year and to all our helpers and parents. May all our Crusaders stay always faithful to their motto of *Prayer, Holy Communion, Sacrifice and Apostolate!*



## End-of-Year Concert

"Ta la la la la" sang the little voices of the Junior 1 and 2 children as the curtains opened to a display of the Samoan *lavalava* featuring a *pale* (PAH - leh) of braided long leaves worn by the boys. The opening act of Saint Anthony's End-of-Year Primary School Concert was a Samoan song which featured some traditional dancing accompanied by an idiophonic drum played by our skilful Samoan sister. The next act was a vocal performance by the Standard 1 to 4 girls of Blickhan's *Weave Me a Poem* and an old favourite, *I Am a Fine Musician*. The performance was colourful, entertaining, and the *oompa oompa* tubas a real delight. The Standard 1 to 4 boys performed a unique rendition of Flanders and Swann's classic *The Gasman Cometh*, utilizing cardboard boxes, acrylic paint and high-visibility vests. Other highlights included poetry recitation, Christmas songs ("Jolly Old Saint Nicholas"), a Maori song and dance from the *Ngai Tahu Whanui* exhibition *Te Hokinga Mai* (The Return Home) and a pantomime of Dickens's *The Night Before Christmas* to round off the night's entertainment.





Plans for the future include extending the current Refectory to fit all the Sisters and housing the Convent Library to fit our collection of books.



November meant devotion to the Holy Souls. The Sisters were able to go each evening to the cemetery to offer prayers and suffrages for the souls in Purgatory with the *Libera* procession with Fr Albert. (The pioneering Marist priests to New Zealand are buried right here in Wanganui.)



# A Convent Chronicle



Several feast days fell in the latter months of the year, including the Feast of the Holy Rosary (a First Class feast for the Dominican Order) and Christ the King. The Sisters and the girls were able to have a Sung Mass and Rosary Procession with Fr Albert on the Feast of the Holy Rosary, while the annual procession with the school and parish took place after the Mass on the Feast of Christ the King. The various sodalities marched together clad in their regalia, and it was a joy to see the flags of the world fluttering alongside the banners as all with one heart and voice sang praises to the Divine Heart.



The school year ended with a Day of Reflection, with both the primary and secondary pupils encouraged to keep prayerful silence while taking the opportunity to renew their love for Our Lord and His Blessed Mother through spiritual talks, the Rosary in common, reception of the sacraments, and also the Stations of the Cross. Fr. Laisney preached the four conferences for the secondary school, while Fr Albert had the primary school children - a challenging task, since the ages of his audience ranged between the ages of four and a half and twelve!

The primary school children also had their highly-anticipated visit of St Nicholas and Black Peter. Some boys *did* get put in Black Peter's sack - but they probably thought that was a more jolly experience than simply being handed a bag of candy!

# ...or, the Last Few Months in Pictures



The Guild Dinner, held on 21st November at the Wanganui Racecourse, was well attended by ex-pupils, cherished family members, and our generous benefactors and Guild members. Handmade Rosary rings (a joint effort by the Dominican Sisters in Fanjeaux, the United States and here in Wanganui) were given to the guests. A variety of Christmas cards designed and painted by the Sisters were also available for sale.



The end of the exams meant fun and team games for the girls while the Sisters set to work marking their papers and writing reports. The senior girls also had a lesson on how to prune fruit trees - a useful skill for those who like their fruit fresh from the garden!



The summer holidays may mean no school, but there is still plenty of work to do around the Convent - whether it is cooking for the community, picking the early plums, hanging out the washing, or trimming the grass. There is also time for playing netball, reading, and extra prayers!



## “I Thought Halloween Was Over!”

End-of-Year Speech Given by Sister Mary Jacinta O.P., Head of the Girls' School

The acquirement of knowledge is a life-long activity – even as adults, we are constantly learning; and sometimes, we are re-learning. As proof of this, let me relate to you a recent occurrence, in which some important and surprising lessons were learnt. On a fine November afternoon, in the peaceful Land of the Long White Cloud, a group of Sisters were climbing out of their transit van, parked across the road from the Wanganui cemetery. As the Sister-driver prepared to hop out, she found the street she had intended to cross blocked by a large truck that had stopped right in the middle of it, and right beside the van.

An unshaven face was looking down at her in amusement mingled with amazement.

“I thought Halloween was over!”

A little startled, Sister paused for a moment. Had her face suddenly turned green? Had her nose grown even longer? No; this gentleman in the truck was implying that she and her companions in their eccentric medieval attire were trick-or-treaters, comparable to the costumed monsters that emerge on Halloween. Well, this was a charming opening to a conversation! Just how should one respond to such gallantry? She decided to overlook the man's unfortunate ignorance and impoliteness, and assured him that the figures he saw crossing the road, and the one now speaking to him, were real sisters – not a bunch of teenagers off to an untimely Halloween party.

This reply produced a strange mixture of weak apologies and rather strong curses from the truck driver – repeated several times – and as it seemed that the pleasant conversation was advancing nowhere, and as she had some important prayers to say, Sister left the gentleman in the truck to his confusion and his cursing.

Two important lessons had been learned that day. The truck driver learned that nuns were real, and drove transit vans. And Sister learned that orcs were real; they drove trucks.

But the conclusions they drew from their newly-acquired knowledge were widely different. He concluded that that Halloween was over; she concluded that it was not over – that, in fact, she was living in a Halloween-age. Such unpleasant behaviour as she had encountered reminded her of what she already knew: that she was living in a world where religious life was, at best, unknown and misunderstood, and at worst, an object of ridicule – and that religion itself was therefore held in similar contempt. She was living in a world where ugly behaviour and ugly words were a matter of daily life – where, in short, monstrous behaviour could thrive, though she knew she had seen just a mild example of it.

This coming summer holiday, the girls before us will, no doubt, be escaping reality and entering the fantasy worlds that their books and movies invite them into; from the safety of their couches they'll meet sinister characters, formidable monsters, yes – orcs and trolls, and evil in every form imaginable – all the figures that feature at Halloween. But do they realise that as they enter those fantastical lands full of creatures that excite terror, they leave behind a world much more terrifying? How convinced are you that Halloween is still taking place, that you are living in a dark world that delights in evil? You don't need to read any book or play any movie to find it.

If this sounds far-fetched, let me ask you: can you read of the high suicide rates, the abortion figures or euthanasia legislation and not think that we are living in a world that embraces a culture of death? Or can you hear rock music played to three-year olds at the Pre-school, or see the car wreck on the Gonville domain, smashed and stripped just for the fun of it, and not think that you are living in a world that loves ugly sounds and ugly actions, that seeks only to destroy all beauty and goodness?

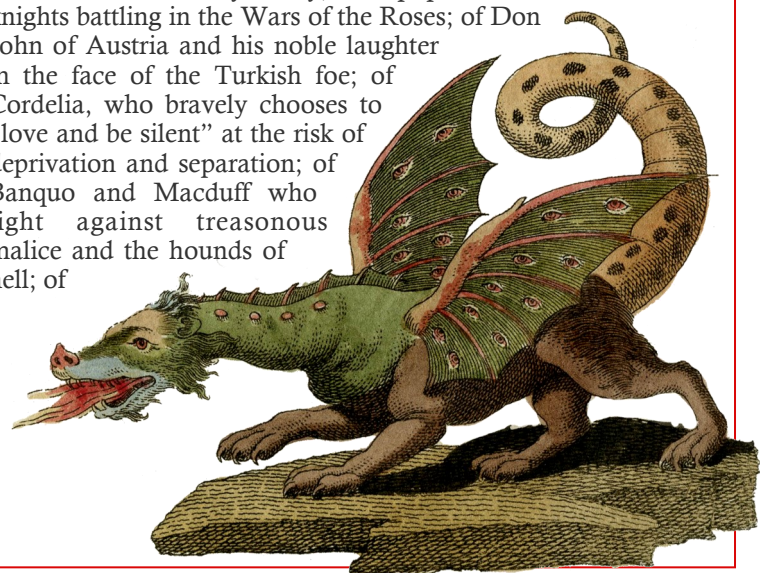
This is a world in which immorality is condoned, even celebrated with pride. It is a place where Christian values are censured – it is a world that hates you and everything you stand for; that will go so far as to call you an enemy of mankind if you dare to uphold and defend the laws of God; that is decidedly against the ideals of your home, your school, and seeks to take away from you everything you hold dear.

And it is a world that makes subtle, hidden attacks on you, smiling at you even while it plots your ruin. True, there is no danger of a vampire plunging his fangs into your neck; but there is a very real danger of the world plunging its fangs into your heart.

How many girls the same age as those before us are having wrested from their hearts their innocence and God-given instinct to devote themselves to others at the cost of self, and to nurture life? How many are being brain-washed into thinking that truth is what you make it; that obedience is weakness; that life is not precious; that pleasure is happiness; that success is all you need to be fulfilled; that women are oppressed and need to compete with and conquer the male of the species? How many are being filled with such lies that corrupt and destroy their nature? And how many are thus being led to a fate worse than being devoured by werewolves or imprisoned in a dungeon? This is the reality that the fantasy books and adventure movies only represent. The Halloween figures that parade on October 31st are but figures of a real, much more horrific evil.

But fortunately the sinister characters and monstrous creatures are not the only inhabitants of those fictional realms. As we know, they are also populated by heroes and heroines, whose fight against the forces of darkness we follow eagerly. But again, these figures are only pale images of reality – or a potential reality.

In the literature they study, our pupils read of the knights battling in the Wars of the Roses; of Don John of Austria and his noble laughter in the face of the Turkish foe; of Cordelia, who bravely chooses to “love and be silent” at the risk of deprivation and separation; of Banquo and Macduff who fight against treasonous malice and the hounds of hell; of



Portia who with her devotion and intelligence defends the helpless and outwits villainy; of Desdemona whose virtue has her hailed as a “fair warrior”; they even read of the wayward Emilia, who dies declaring the truth as liberally as the north wind. But girls, do you realise that these characters all exist, or are meant to? They are potential realities – they are potentially *you*.

In fiction, can you read of heroism in make-believe men and women and be satisfied to leave the virtue you find there lifeless and imaginary, and not transfer it into your own life? Can you read about rangers’ apprentices and not become an apprentice of the Eternal, Heavenly Ranger, the One who alone vanquishes evil? Can you read of warrior princesses and dragon-slayers and not want to be an ever more faithful warrior of She who crushes the head of the dragon with but the touch of Her heel?

Yours is an unromantic and unexciting battle, it’s true. It is the life of an ordinary school girl, doing her duty in the classroom and in the home. But school and home are your training ground for the field of battle that is the world. Your war-cry and your weapons you already have: “*Veritas*” – truth – all the truths that you have learned at home and at school – these are what you fight with; this is how you apply the knowledge you have gained in school.

But if anyone tells you anything other than this; that you don’t have to fight, or that you can’t fight, you’re too weak and insignificant: “*anathema sit*” – let him be anathema! – don’t listen! It isn’t true! You do have to fight – the only alternative is death. And you can fight; you can contribute to the battle – weakness and smallness is no excuse, since your smallest act of virtue is worth more than the most sublime thoughts of a genius.

The awards we hand out each year will be meaningless, this whole prize-giving meaningless – in fact, a joke and a travesty – unless they apply their learning to the battles that await them. We award them tonight for the hard work they have performed this year, the little battles they’ve had to fight, but only in the hope that they will go on to fight still more heroically in the battle of life, and attain eternal rewards.

If we are living in a “Halloween-age”, we do of course remember that Halloween is but “All Hallows Eve” – the day preceding All Saints Day. So, girls, daunting though the expectations are that we have of you, as we watch you receive your prizes tonight and graduate, we nevertheless are waiting to see you apply the knowledge you have acquired in school, to see you turn this Halloween age we are living through into an age of real heroism – an age of saints.



*The Sisters wish you all a grace-filled Christmas with many blessings for the New Year.*

Thank you for all you have done for us and may the Christ Child and His Holy Mother and St Joseph be with you always.



## MAKE THIS CHRISTMAS EXTRA-SPECIAL.

This Christmas Season, for love of the Christ-Child, would you help the Sisters with a little gift? It goes towards our daily expenses, healthcare bills, education and formation of the young Sisters, and maintenance of the Convent.

We thank those who have already pledged regular donations - these gifts, no matter how small, do make a difference. God will surely remember your kindness!

May Our Lady of the Rosary and St Joseph, protector of the Holy Family, reward your generosity and kindness to the Spouses of the Divine Infant. We pray specially for you during our weekly Chapter.

**May Our Lady of the Rosary, Mediatrix of all graces, obtain for you all the joys of this Holy Season of Christmastide.**

### AUSTRALIA

Westpac Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui  
Westpac Account BSB Number: 033-636  
Account Number: 334285

### NEW ZEALAND

Westpac Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui  
Westpac Account Number: 03-0791-0728558-00  
Cheques can be made out to "The Dominican Sisters of Wanganui" and sent to:  
Motherhouse and Novitiate, 12b York Street, Wanganui, 4501, New Zealand.

**All donations now qualify for a 33% TAX REBATE from the IRD.**

**Please quote our NZ Charities Services Number: CC37884**

### UNITED STATES

Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui  
Wells Fargo Bank, A/C # 2 015 569 425, Routing # 1210 42882  
Cheques can be made out to "The Dominican Sisters of Wanganui" and sent to:  
Dominican Sisters, Attn: Loren Vaccarezza, 1590 Berryessa Road, San Jose, CA 95133  
**All donations to our U.S. account qualify for a tax deductible receipt!**

### OR VIA PAYPAL

Visit our website at <https://www.dominicansisters.net.nz/fundraising>

