

National Newsletter

Schoenstatt Australia



December 18 2025 | Volume 6, Number 12

1. Covenant Day Message

United in the Covenant - Pilgrims of Hope

Dear Schoenstatt Family and Friends,

I wish you all many graces and blessings from our Shrines on this 18th December as we continue our journey through Advent and approach the season of Christmas. I am sure you are looking forward to being able to gather with family and friends to celebrate this holy and blessed season.

However, could I ask you to take a few minutes to "listen" to a Christmas meditation by Fr. Kentenich that you might like to reflect upon as we approach the Christmas season:

(A Christmas meditation by Father Joseph Kentenich)

During the season of Advent, we have frequently heard that the degree of our longing is the degree of fulfilment. Abundant graces are in store for us.

Degree of Longing Equals the Degree of Fulfilment

The degree of our longing! Did not our longing grow, Sunday after Sunday, week after week – the longing for the Redeemer, the longing for redemption? Redemption from guilt and failure, redemption from half-heartedness and superficiality, from inordinate pleasure and enslavement to material things.

Yes, could we not say that the hunger for God has grown stronger day after day?

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Once again, since the degree of longing determines the degree of fulfilment, how much will we open our hearts during this time?

Therefore, we gladly follow the call and the encouragement of the shepherds, as we have heard in the gospel. The exhortation to hurry to Bethlehem to absorb all that had occurred there, to see and to listen to all that Our Lord has told us.

And what did Our Lord say? What did He proclaim to the shepherds through the angels? They were to go to Bethlehem, where they would find a little child lying in the manger, and this small child is GOD!



God in Swaddling Clothes

The great God – God in swaddling clothes. After we have used the Advent season to strengthen and deepen our longing, we are immediately confronted with a strange, weighty word: God in swaddling clothes! What an awesome, striking, incomprehensible mystery: God in swaddling clothes! The eternal, the infinite God, Light from Light – God, who is the centre of the entire history of salvation and the history of the world! Of him John the Baptist speaks: “One more powerful than I is to come after me. I am not fit to stoop and untie His sandal straps.” (Mk 1:7)

- Why does the statement, ‘God in swaddling clothes’ sound strange?
- Why did God, the centre of all history, choose to be a child in swaddling clothes?

**Blessed Mother,
in Bethlehem in a poor
and little stable
you give birth
to the Lord of the world
for us all.
Just as you showed him
to the shepherds
and the magi
and humbly bowed
before him in adoration,
let us always be
his loving instruments
and carry him
deeply into human hearts.**

(Heavenwards, P.94 Third Joyful Mystery)

On behalf of all those involved in preparing the monthly newsletters, we pray that Our Blessed Mother and her Son will be with each of you and your families, as we continue our journey through Advent to the Holy Season of Christmas.

May our Blessed Mother and her Son, send you and your family, rich blessings and graces from the shrine and continue to be with you in the coming year.

United in our covenant,

Shirley Hall



2. Meeting with Pope Leo XIV – a Moment of Grace in Rome

By Bernard Toutounji – NSW Family Branch

On 11 October 2025, I had the privilege of joining my fellow national directors of **Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)** from around the world for a private audience with Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican.

It was an extraordinary day — full of history, warmth, and the quiet joy of standing before the successor of St Peter.

Inside the Apostolic Palace

The setting itself carried a sense of history: frescoed ceilings, polished marble floors, and the presence of the **Gentlemen of His Holiness**, lay attendants in black tails and white waistcoats who have assisted popes for centuries.

When Pope Leo XIV entered the room, there was no fanfare — just a warm smile and a blessing. He spoke about the importance of **religious freedom**, describing it as “the cornerstone of any just society,” and thanked ACN for supporting vulnerable Christian communities worldwide. His encouragement was simple and powerful: “**Do not grow weary of doing good.**”

A Gift from Home

Knowing I would meet the Holy Father, I wanted to bring something that represented our part of the world.



The Pope needs no gifts, of course, but I felt it important that something from Australia and New Zealand — from our benefactors and families — be placed into his hands.

I chose a **painting of the Three Sisters** in the Blue Mountains, not far from our ACN national office in Penrith.

The artist, a Western Sydney local, was delighted his work would travel to Rome. I added a **box of Haigh's Chocolates**, and a **handmade card from our children**, filled with their drawings and prayers.

I was also carrying a **large wooden crucifix** that I hoped to have blessed for our home shrine.



When my turn came, I presented the gifts one by one. The Pope recognised the Blue Mountains immediately, smiled broadly at the chocolates, and took genuine interest in the children’s card.

Then I turned to receive the crucifix. “Holy Father, would you bless this for our family chapel?” I asked. He looked at its size with a gentle laugh, placed his hand upon it, prayed silently, and blessed it. That crucifix now hangs in our **home shrine, The Ark**, where it has become a central focus of our family’s daily prayer.

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A Schoenstatt Reflection

Although I was there for ACN, the Pope's words resonated deeply with our Schoenstatt mission consciousness — the call to live our covenant apostolically and to contribute, in small and faithful ways, to the renewal of Church and world.



I carried his Apostolic Blessing home with gratitude: for our benefactors, for our Schoenstatt Family, and for all who labour quietly to keep the faith alive.

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3. A Great Day for a Feast Day Celebration and a Jubilee Pilgrimage from St Michael's Parish Meadowbank to Mt Schoenstatt

On the 26th of September at 9.00am a bus carrying approximately 57 parishioners, left from St Michael's Parish Church, Meadowbank as 'Pilgrims of Hope'. It was on its way to Mount Schoenstatt, Mulgoa, to join some other pilgrims from the parish who had made their way privately to the pilgrimage site.

In his message for the launch of the Jubilee Year, a "Year of Hope", the late Pope Francis encouraged Christians to seek a time of spiritual renewal, to recover lost hope, to renew the hope that is in their hearts and to sow seeds of hope in the bleakness of our time and in our world. Pondering these words of the late Pope Francis, the parishioners of St Michael's Parish, Meadowbank organised to go on pilgrimage to Mt Schoenstatt, Mulgoa which is one of the officially designated places of pilgrimage in the Diocese of Parramatta during this Jubilee Year 2025.

Father Emmanuel Seo, our Parish Priest chose the date 27th September 2025, as not only the day of the pilgrimage but also a Retreat Day as a pre-Feast Day Celebration honouring St Michael the Archangel, the Patron Saint of the Parish. How good was that! A dual celebration, a 'pre-Feast Day Celebration and a Jubilee Pilgrimage' for those seeking a Plenary Indulgence.

Upon arrival at Mt. Schoenstatt, a total of about 90 pilgrims, men, women, children, the young and the older, great and small, were welcomed by Sr. M Elizabeth in the Pilgrim Centre, where she spoke about Schoenstatt, what it is all about, it's history, the present and the future and some of Schoenstatt's "special messages", such as Practical Faith in Divine Providence and the Covenant of Love and what these mean for us in our lives.



Afterwards, Holy Mass was celebrated in the Schoenstatt Shrine, by Father Seo, in his customary reverent way.

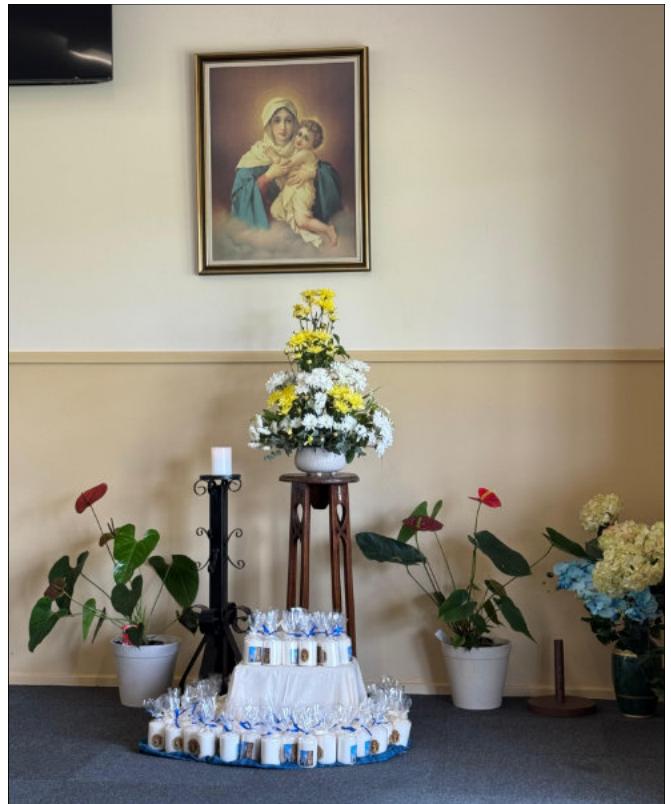


Honouring the Feast Day of St Vincent de Paul on that day, Fr Seo said in his homily that if we are open to the grace of conversion, even sinners may turn into saints like St. Vincent de Paul who changed from a lover of mammon to a true friend of Jesus, a hope therefore that we too may turn into the saints that God sees in us.

The Holy Mass was accompanied by the pilgrims jubilantly singing, accompanied by Sr. M Elizabeth on the organ. Awesome! What a tremendous experience this was for the pilgrims, a jubilant, reverent Holy Mass celebrated in the Shrine!

Yes, the Holy Mass Celebration in the Shrine was one of the highlights of the pilgrimage.

Following Holy Mass there was time for lunch in the Pilgrim Centre where there was an abundance of food, reminding us of the multiplication of food at the time of our Lord Jesus. In their free time, the pilgrims were free to wander around and relax, enjoying the tranquillity of the whole environment, while others were in affable conversations sharing their thoughts on the experience of this day so far. Next was a Reflection given by Father Seo on 'Hope- in Christ,



'our heavenly defender' the theme of the Parish Jubilee Pilgrimage.

Father Seo spoke of how in hope we ourselves must take action to be with God; that hope is what people need today.



This talk was well received and appreciated by all the pilgrims and they had much food for thought and reflection.

Next came a time for Adoration and Benediction in the Family Hall, as this could accommodate the larger number of pilgrims. During this time of silent adoration, Father Seo heard Confessions in the garden of the holy ground of Mt. Schoenstatt so that some pilgrims could fulfill the requirements of the Plenary Indulgence.

What a heavenly atmosphere it was to witness some of the pilgrims seeking what is beyond man's self-preserved nature.

Speaking to one of the parishioners later, Father Seo expressed how pleased he was with the whole celebration, so much so that he was emotionally moved with the atmosphere and devotion shown by all present.

Indeed, God had blessed the pilgrims in the holy ground of Mt Schoenstatt and included the extra gift of perfect gentle weather on a perfect day.

At 3pm the bus carrying the pilgrims left Mt Schoenstatt after a group photo was taken with the image of St Michael the Archangel, our Patron Saint, in the garden of Mt. Schoenstatt.



We came home blessed with the graces from the Shrine, together with a candle that each pilgrim had been given, and the burning flame of Hope of the Jubilee Pilgrimage to share and proclaim to all.

Agnes Aldana

P.S. It was members of the Schoenstatt groups in the parish who had inspired and organised this pilgrimage from their parish



4. Pilgrim Mother Retreat Day

The Pilgrim Mother annual reflection day was held at Mount Schoenstatt, Mulgoa on Saturday 1st November 2025. This day was also an invitation to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the beginnings of the Schoenstatt Pilgrim Mother Apostolate. The main theme of the day was gratitude for all the blessings and graces received from the blessed Mother through this now worldwide apostolate. It truly was a joyful and faith-filled day. Many of the Pilgrim Mother coordinators who were in attendance have been part of the initiative for several years but there were also many newer coordinators and members present to enjoy this beautiful gathering.

Firstly Sr. M. Rita gave a brief welcome and introduction to the day. This was then followed by a wonderful and inspiring talk about Mary given by Fr. Pawel OP. He mentioned that we can look to Mary as being the best disciple of Christ who always faithfully trusted in God's promises. He highlighted the blessed Mother's role in our lives and said that we should take Mary as our model and our educator. He emphasised that each one of us ought to be an example to others within our family and community and especially to the members of our Pilgrim Mother circles. Fr Pawel encouraged all those present to frequently and regularly turn to Mary in prayer reminding them that "no one who turns to Mary will be left unaided." At the conclusion of the talk, there was a time for small discussion groups. Within these small groups the participants were able to discuss the content of the talk and make it more applicable by linking it to their own personal experiences.

After morning tea everyone was then invited for a time of silent adoration. During this time Fr Pawel made himself available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation which was very much appreciated and taken advantage of. We then celebrated Holy Mass together which was very beautiful. In the homily Fr Pawel again provided us with many beautiful inspirations and insights stressing that we are all called to become saints by imitating and



surrender to God's will particularly in difficult circumstances and to continue to trust even when all hope seems gone.

Part of a good celebration includes a delicious meal! So, it was only right and fitting that this celebration also did not lack this. Everyone was invited to bring a plate and this led to a delicious buffet that was filled with various dishes and cuisines. For dessert there was cake for everyone as Fr. Pawel cut his birthday cake and Sr. M. Rita cut the cake for the 75 years of the PMA.

Following this Sr. M. Rita then gave the second input for the day. She reflected upon the simple small beginnings of the Schoenstatt Pilgrim Mother Apostolate. She mentioned that the



initiative began with now Venerable Deacon John Pozzobon in Brazil in 1950 and now has grown to a worldwide apostolate connecting and transforming the lives of millions of people from all walks of life. Sr. M. Rita encouraged those present to reflect upon their own beginnings and personal encounters with the Pilgrim Mother and asked that some people share their testimonies and experiences.

Finally, the climax of the day was the procession to the Shrine followed by devotion and benediction. It is a great gift to be able to adore the Lord in the blessed Sacrament and to lay before him all that was discussed and taken in during this day. We brought our gratitude for all that the blessed Mother has achieved in us and throughout the world in the last 75 years. Together we asked her to continue to be fruitful bringing more people closer to her son Jesus. We also prayed especially for the intentions of all those who participate in the Pilgrim Mother Apostolate and for the beatification process of Venerable Pozzobon and Fr Joseph Kentenich.

At the end of the day everyone was gifted with a glass tea light candle holder which was blessed by Fr. Pawel. The final act of the day was of course a group photo in front of the Shrine to mark and remember this very beautiful and blessed day. This was truly a memorable and joyful day that had a wonderful mix of prayer, celebration, formation and exchange.

Zenny Custodio & Sr. M. Rita Baysari



5. Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary at the Australian Catholic Youth Festival

Sr. M. Rita and Sr. M. Olivia represented the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary at the Australian Catholic Youth Festival (ACYF) in Melbourne from Sunday 30th November to Tuesday 2nd December. Through the generous support and assistance of some Schoenstatt members in Melbourne, Florida Nugara and the Simon family, they were able to also participate in some pre-program events that had been planned in the days prior to the festival.

On Friday 30th November the sisters were invited to join the national Jesus Youth gathering at Holy Family Parish in Doveton entitled "The Upper Room". The day was filled with praise and worship, talks, adoration and holy mass with approximately 140 youth from across Australia present. Sr. M. Rita was asked to give a talk about Mary as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit and Sr. M. Olivia led the time of reflection at the end of the day. It was great to interact with so many young beautiful people and have some deep and meaningful conversations.

The following day the sisters were then invited to participate in the Syro Malabar Youth pre-program. This day was held in the recently blessed St Thomas Church in Melbourne Southeast. The day began with adoration and then Qurbana which is Holy Mass in the Syro Malabar rite. This was an impressive and very beautiful liturgy. This day was also filled with great inputs, praise and worship as well as discussions. Sr. M. Olivia was able to give her vocation testimony and provide the young people with some tips for discernment. The day concluded at St Johns College with the concert "Syro-Symphonies" where the different States and groups could present their talents on the stage which ranged from song to dance and much more in between. Prodigyl, a young man from the USA who is a rising celebrity was the star of the evening.

Sunday morning the sisters along with Florida visited our dear MTA in the side chapel at St Luke's Wantirna and attend holy Mass there as well. The parish priest welcomed the sisters very warmly and kindly allowed them to introduce themselves and say a few words about Schoenstatt which was very well received by the parishioners who were present.

Next on the itinerary was to go to Saint Kevin's Parish in Hampton Park to attend the commissioning mass for the ACYF pilgrims and to meet the youth group there. The sisters were very grateful that they could join this parish group together with a few young people from Holy Family Parish, Doveton and travel with them on the bus to and from the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition centre for the next few days. Including the leaders, adult accompaniment and the two priests we were about 45 people on the bus which created a beautiful atmosphere and relationship which developed over the next few blessed days.

First up on the ACYF program was the welcoming at St Patrick Cathedral. The sisters were unable to enter the cathedral as it was completely full, with 6000 young people in and around the cathedral. The procession into the Cathedral began with the World Youth Day Cross and Icon leading the way. Many bishops, clergy and religious then accompanied the young people on the amazing pilgrimage walk from the Cathedral to Melbourne's Convention and Exhibition Centre. Many commented that we had experienced all four seasons during this pilgrimage walk: at times the sun was shining brightly and a short time after it poured rain and after a while it cleared up once again. The dramatic weather changes were not enough to diminish the joyful atmosphere and the great conversations that took place during this time.

The next days were filled with major plenary gatherings in the morning and evenings with many keynote speakers along with praise and worship and testimonies from various young people from throughout Australia. In addition to the plenaries, throughout the days there were so many activities on offer such as workshops and talks, many different prayer experiences,

opportunities for holy Masses, adoration, forums, live concerts, engagement with bishops, games, a justice activity centre and an interactive expo. The young people could pick and choose what they would like to attend and create their own ACYF adventure.

During most of this time Sr. M. Rita and Sr. M. Olivia were often stopped and had many beautiful encounters with the young people with the most common question being: "How did you know this was God's calling for you?" This question along with many interactions that took place during these days really gives rise to the hope that the Holy Spirit is truly at work in the hearts of young people and that many are truly seeking and desiring an encounter with God.

A couple of the highlights from ACYF Melbourne 2025:

- The pilgrimage walk to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
- The procession of the WYD cross and icon followed by the powerful and prayerful silence
- The procession of the blessed Eucharist followed by the Adoration in the arena
- Holy Mass with Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP and his amazing homily
- The final Mass and sending out.

The next ACYF will be in Sydney in 2028, the same year as the International Eucharistic Congress.



6. Novena as a Gift for the Centenary of the Sisters

For all your gifts, accept our thanks dear Mother

A Novena in thanksgiving for all the Sisters who have contributed to the mission of Schoenstatt in Australia and the Philippines and for many vocations to the Sisters community internationally.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last

(John 15:16)

This Novena has been prepared for the centennial celebration of the foundation of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary and 75 years of the Sisters' presence in Australia.

As a gift of gratitude for all that the Sisters have given and suffered during these long years of service in the hands of our Mother Thrice Admirable, Queen and Victress of Schoenstatt, we want to pray for vocations to their Institute so that the great work they have accomplished in these 75 years in Australia will continue to bear fruit for the Schoenstatt Work and the Church in Australia, the Philippines and beyond.

We also remember with thanks the work that our Sisters have done and continue to do and pray for them.

Each month a particular characteristic of the Sisters will be highlighted for prayer and reflection.

In addition, for those who wish to learn a little of the history of the Sisters and their work with the Movement in Australia an historical glance at the end of each month's prayer is intended to provide some knowledge of the history of Schoenstatt in Australia. You are invited to pray the novena in whichever form you choose and as often as you wish to during the month.



7. INFORMATION AND LINKS

Shrine Opening Hours

Please check the websites for updated opening times of the Shrines.

Mulgoa Shrine, NSW. Open daily: 7am – 7.30pm

Mt Richon / Armadale Shrine, WA. Open daily 7am – 7pm

Melbourne: St. Luke's, Wantirna, Divine Mercy Chapel

Opening hours: <http://www.stlukeswantirna.net/>



Events

- Covenant Sundays – Third Sunday of each month
11am Mulgoa, NSW; 3pm Wantirna, VIC; 3pm Mount Richon, WA
- Men at the Shrine – Second Wednesday each month 8–9pm Shrine, Mulgoa
- Shrine Time – for young adults – Fourth Sunday each month 7–8pm Shrine, Mulgoa

Links

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| Official Schoenstatt Website | https://www.schoenstatt.com |
| Schoenstatt Australian Website | https://www.schoenstatt.org.au |
| Our YouTube Channel | https://www.youtube.com/schoenstattaustralia |
| Western Australia Website | https://schoenstattwa.org.au |
| Schoenstatt Men Website | https://schoenstatt-men-australia.mailchimpsites.com |

Videos for Covenant Days - 18th of the Month 7 - 8pm AEDT

Video for December 2025 Consors Patris – Helpmate of the Father

<https://www.youtube.com/schoenstattaustralia>

Video for November 2025 An outline of the Sisters' history in Australia

https://youtu.be/_qTvhUsu9uA

Video for October 2025 Anchored in Hope

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvvFrFbYUjl>

DON'T FORGET We are all Schoenstatt" – A Challenge Shared by All

The International Schoenstatt Movement continues to need our support to finance these three projects:

Three Projects, One Aim

1. **Maintenance of the Original Shrine:** An emblematic and sacred place for the entire Schoenstatt Family
2. **Support for the International Coordination of the Movement**
3. **Funding of an independent study on the cause of our Father and Founder**

How to Donate

Donations can be made through various channels, mainly through the [Donorbox](#) platform.

We are all Schoenstatt! It is time to unite, embrace our origin and spread together our Covenant for the future.

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome.

Please send to movtoffice@schoenstatt.org.au before the beginning of each month