



# Catholic Women's League Hong Kong Newsletter

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## Zoom Mass

There will be **zoom masses** on **December 24** and **31** at 10:30 am celebrated by Fr Tommy Murphy. The mass will be followed by Holy Hour.

## From Fr Russell's Desk...

### The Christmas Message

During these last few weeks before Christmas our city has been temporarily transformed. No matter where you go there are reminders of the feast we are celebrating soon: lights, decorations, Christmas trees, Jingle Bells alternating with Joy to the World in the shopping malls. There is also a new warmth in our lives. People of all faiths or none are reaching out to one another and renewing friendships, bonding with families, exchanging gifts and good wishes, and contributing to ensure that the poor and disadvantaged have a little share of Christmas joy.



This is not peculiar to Hong Kong. This is a world-wide celebration, this is a birthday party to which the whole world is invited. We are celebrating the birth of a little child two thousand years ago in Bethlehem: a very special child, a unique child: for this is God made man. Through our celebration of Christmas we are reminding ourselves that in a moment of history God visited his people, that he became one of us, that he walked our world, experiencing with us the joys and sorrows, the tears and laughter that make up human life.

We are above all reminding ourselves that our religion is a love story, that it was because God so loved the world that he sent his Son to us, so that each of us can say with truth, no matter what our past failures have been or our present weaknesses, that we are the apple of our heavenly Father's eye. It was because he loved us that he sent his Son into the world to save us. To save us from what? To save us from ourselves. Our newspapers speak to us each day of violence and of war, of hatred and of wrongdoing - granted this is only part of the story, the media are after all in the bad-news business - but we are rarely surprised when we read of the things human beings do to one another, for we recognize there is a dark side to our own hearts and we want the light the Christ-child brought into the world to dispel that darkness. **(Continued on Page 2)**

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You see Christmas is a feast of hope. Our world is being constantly renewed by the birth of children. And we hope that as we recall the birth of the Christ-child we may be reborn, that the divine life he came on earth to bring, may find a ready acceptance within us.

Now supposing you had been sent ahead to prepare for the coming of the divine saviour into the world, what kind of arrangements would you have made? Is it likely you would have chosen tiny Bethlehem instead of Jerusalem, the capital city and centre of Jewish religious life, or that you would have chosen a stable for Mary to have her child in place of a palace?

Who would you have invited as the first visitors to greet the Christ-child: rough Shepherd or the leaders of religious and civil life? Surely when God through his instrument Caesar Augustus directed Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem where the only available accommodation that night was a stable, is telling us something.

Playwrights in fashioning their drama often tell us something important about the central figure through the circumstances of his first appearance on stage. I suggest that God, the great dramatist, was doing precisely that through the circumstances of his Son's birth. He is telling us surely that we are greatly mistaken when we imagine power, wealth and status are the most important things in life. Through the circumstances of the birth of his beloved Son — a new-born babe attended by his adoring parents -- God is calling our attention to a different set of values: love, simplicity, humility, the service of others.

When the shepherds made their way to Bethlehem and contemplated the child lying in the manger, they learned an important lesson, namely that our God is an object of love, never an object of fear: for who could possibly fear an infant child?

The angels gave the shepherds a sign to enable them to recognize the child who is the good news of great joy: he will be found wrapped in swaddling clothes, they announced and lying in a manger.

Three times in his brief account of Christ's birth, St Luke mentions the manger in which Mary laid her child. In so doing, was he looking to the past, reminding us of Jahve's complaint voiced long before by the prophet Isaiah: *the ox knows its owner and the donkey knows the manger of its Lord, but Israel has not known and my people have not understood me.*

Is Luke telling us here that when shepherds go to Bethlehem and, finding the child in the manger, start to praise God, Jahve's complaint no longer holds? Or was he perhaps looking to the future and hinting that this child lying where the animals find their food, will be the nourishment of God's people, nourishment for their minds through his teaching, nourishment for their souls through his Eucharist?

Bethlehem is where God, in the person of Christ, broke into our world. We should aim to make of ourselves a Bethlehem, so that Christ is born within us, transforming us, in such a way that those who encounter us, encounter not us, but the loving, serving, humble Christ. May his love be yours abundantly this Christmas and may the peace the angels sang of, dwell in your hearts and in the hearts of your loved ones throughout the coming year.

*(Fr Russell has been spiritual director of the Catholic Women's League since 1991.)*

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## Churches of Jerusalem rejoice in God's gift at Christmas

The celebrations of the birth of Jesus "constantly remind us that God is with us and always will be". "This transcendent and most holy gift to the world is our salvation and our hope that we are not alone" in the difficult time that the world is passing through. This is what the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem say in their Christmas message released last Friday (Dec 18).

Sharing their reflections on the Nativity, they say that God continues to be Emmanuel—"God is with us." "God's presence with us in all circumstances," they say, "is a source of encouragement and sustenance, especially at these exceptional times of the Covid-19 pandemic, economic crisis, injustices and increasing violence against the vulnerable and weak."

The Church leaders express their "solidarity with all people around the world who have been affected by the pandemic and its multi-layered implications, particularly the people of Bethlehem and the surrounding area." They hope and pray that the "forthcoming vaccination against Covid-19 may bring an end to the pandemic and a return to normalcy". **Vatican News**

# Revamping to achieve new goals

The first thought that came to mind when I was trying to set objectives for CWL for 2021 was, “Plans are made in human hearts but from the Lord comes the tongue’s response” (Proverbs 16:1).

Plans made for this year that required physical interactions and attendance have all been cancelled because of the sudden onset of the Covid-19 pandemic early this year. Though it doesn’t seem the eradication will happen in a foreseeable future, we hope to see light at the end of the tunnel in 2021 when the vaccines become available.

If we were to take the circumstance under consideration, what should we do differently in 2021? It is said that something good always comes out of a bad situation. We have become accustomed to use online tools more proficiently to attend mass, search for forums, videos and programmes to enhance our knowledge of faith and things of interest. It has definitely changed our daily routine. In the coming year, we will most likely be using the same mechanism to devise our efforts to conduct our activities.

Besides what we have been doing every year, one of our major objectives would be to increase our membership, we could use one or two of the mediums below to achieve this goal.

First and foremost, the project at hand is to update our website. Our website looked antiquated as it has not been updated for a while. It is our face to the world. We are working to revitalize the site. It should be easy to navigate, beautiful as well as informative. Anyone interested in joining an organization will first check out its website.

Secondly, we are looking at engaging speakers for talks on zoom at different intervals. The talks that we sponsor may be open to include other groups or individuals of the same faith thereby increasing our exposure to a wider population.

Thirdly, we should formulate new and different ways of raising funds. Besides Christmas Sale, Chinese New Year Party and the annual Raffle, we may need to have smaller fund-raising events in between such as Charity Walks or Bake Sales, as we become more creative.

In order to attract younger generation of women to join us, we will need to redirect our focus and hold fellowship gatherings with more emphasis on feeding our souls on spiritual food in addition to the basic physical needs. Perhaps, we could start a Reading Club to keep up with knowledge on our faith and build bonds.

Again, I am always open to listen to new ideas. There is no obstacle we cannot overcome as long as it is the will of God. I look forward to your continued support in the coming year and would like to see you actively participate in all activities of CWL. Let me take this opportunity to wish you and your loved ones a Safe, Healthy, Joyous and Peaceful New Year!

**Irene Chen**



**Our first zoom mass on Dec 17  
celebrated by Fr Tommy Murphy**

## Pope reflects on Mary’s ‘yes’ at Sunday Angelus prayer

**Rome:** Pope Francis led the prayer of the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square on the fourth and final Sunday of Advent.

Reflecting on the day’s Gospel of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38), the Pope said the invitation to become the Mother of the Messiah carried with it both pure joy and great trial. According to the Gospel, Mary was betrothed to Joseph, and faced the death penalty if found to be pregnant.

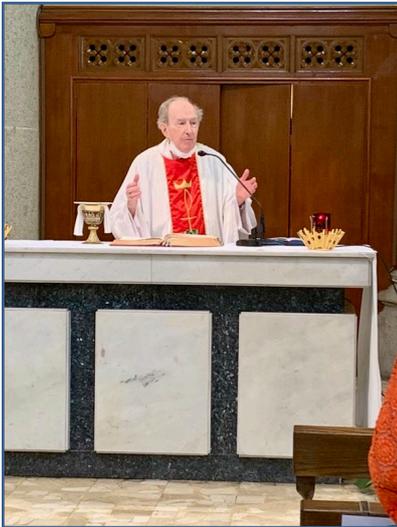
“Certainly, the divine message would have filled Mary’s heart with light and strength,” said the Pope. “Nevertheless, she found herself faced with a crucial decision: to say ‘yes’ to God, risking everything, even her life, or to decline the invitation and to continue her ordinary life.”

Pope Francis noted how Mary offered her assent to God’s invitation with a wholehearted *fiat*: “Let it be done to me according to your word.” Hers was no simple, submissive “yes”, said the Pope. Mary actively bound herself to God. “She is a woman in love prepared to serve her Lord completely and immediately.”

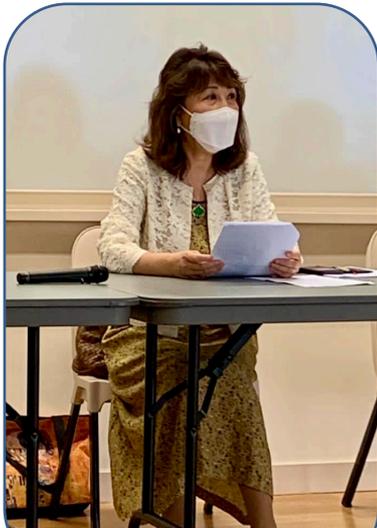
The Pope reflected on how we procrastinate in life, even in our spiritual life. He said we know it would be good to pray, but we say we don’t have time. Yet, as we cross the threshold into the Christmas Season, Mary invites us to offer our quick and courageous “yes”, no matter the cost. **Vatican News**

# Coasting along through Covid times

*Our Annual General Meeting held on 15 October was attended by 22 members. The day began with mass at the Cathedral celebrated by Fr Joe Houston. This was followed by lunch at the Caritas Restaurant. The AGM was held in the afternoon at the Diocese Centre. Our Executive officers for this year are Irene Chen (President), Joyce Chang (vice President), Judy Pang (secretary) and Maria Chu (treasurer). Daphne da Rosa joins our committee replacing Rosemary Ho who has stepped down as she cannot return to Hong Kong because of the pandemic. We thank Rosemary for her contributions to CWL over the years.*



The committee 2020-21



The President's address



Our treasurer reports



An AGM with masks: Sign of the times



## CWL Diary...

CWL members have been very fortunate to have Fr Tommy Murphy say mass for them every Thursday, ever since Fr Russell had a fall on October 13, 2020 and has been hospitalized. Fr Tommy is from Castlebar in Co. Mayo, Ireland. He was formerly the Superior General of the Columban priests. He is conversant in Mandarin and travels often to Wuhan and Beijing. He is the spiritual director of the HK Chapter of the World Community for Christian Meditation. Father has been in Hong Kong for a few months as travel restrictions have prevented him from going to Beijing. In the interim he has been willingly serving as acting spiritual director for CWL.

On **19 November**, Fr Tommy gave members a talk on **Does Prayer Have to be Difficult?** It was a two-hour interactive session in which members broke into groups to discuss pertinent issues relating to why we pray, how we pray, what time do we pray, do we find praying difficult? It was really nice to hear individual viewpoints. This was a face-to-face event held at the Diocese Centre.



On **15 December**, Fr Tommy gave us another talk on “the Seven O Antiphons of Advent.” This was attended by CWL members, the Mother’s Evening Prayer group and members of St Joseph’s Ladies’ Guild. This was a zoom session with about 44 participants and was a very timely talk.



The Roman Catholic Church has been singing the “O Antiphons” since at least the eighth century. They are the antiphons that accompany the *Magnificat* canticle of Evening Prayer from December 17-23. They are a magnificent theology that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming of Christ as the fulfilment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well. Their repeated use of the imperative “Come!” embodies the longing of all, for the Divine Messiah.

CWL had its first zoom mass on Thursday, **17 December** celebrated by Fr Tommy Murphy.

## Our Christmas fund-raiser...

CWL launched a new fund-raising initiative on **12 November 2020**. This was the sale of high-quality stoles in a variety of colour combinations at very reasonable prices. We had 14 different styles priced between \$300 to \$500 a piece, made of cashmere, merino wool, pure silk and viscose.

And modeling for these stoles is none other than our very own Fernanda da Rosa (*See pic alongside*). When you purchase these stoles, every dollar spent will be helping a family in need.

To date we have sold 107 stoles totalling \$41,500. The money collected will be used for our outreach programmes.

