



## Message of Gratitude and Farewell



As you are aware this is my last weekend with you as Parish Priest of Our Lady of the Valleys Parish. I leave later this week to take up my new appointment, not that far away, as the Parish Priest of St Joseph's Parish in Upper Hutt.

I remember arriving in February 2016 and being warmly welcomed into this parish family and looking forward to spending years exploring and celebrating together the shared journey we were on.

Preparing to leave is a time to reflect; to reflect on the ones we love and who love us, reflect on times shared over the past nine years, the ups and downs, the joys and hopes, the griefs and anguishes that are ours as human beings. In the midst of this it is also a time to reflect how we have been blessed by the one whose entry into human history we are proclaim – Christ himself.

As I think back over the years, I recall the myriad times that I have met Christ here– to be found in the gurgling smile of a young child brought for entry into the family of God, the bright eyes of Confirmation and First Eucharist candidates, and the sad eyes of Christ as he grieves with us over family and friends we have said farewell to.

It has been years of events for us – slowly moving to an understanding of being one parish with two churches; celebrating and coping with the changing way of being 'parish' and 'church' during COVID times when opportunities to gather together were severely restricted and we had to find new ways to remain connected.

We celebrated 70- and 60-year milestones in our Parish, marking the first Parish Priest appointed to Heretaunga, and the opening of Our Lady of Grace Church, and St Brendan's school. These events were marked on 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021 due to a COVID lockdown partway through the weekend celebration on Saturday February 27<sup>th</sup>.

It is sometimes easier to see the face of the Christ-child in these 'large' events of the past years, but other memories come as well – the delight of a child yelling a 'hello Father Tony' in the supermarket aisle, the deep sense of faith felt as I have been welcomed into so many of your homes and hearts while out visiting, the helping hand of Jesus the worker as tasks both small and great are undertaken by people who see a need and quietly work away to share of their time and talents.

These for me have been a real sign of the significance of Emmanuel (God-with-us) taking root in our parish family. May each of you experience anew the blessings of the God who walks with each of us on our Emmaus journey of faith.

I know that I will always be grateful for the years that I was here in Our Lady of the Valleys and I will endeavour in my ministry ahead to share something of the love that you have demonstrated to me in our time together.

God's richest blessings to each one of you today and in the future.

May **Christ Yesterday** go behind

protecting, nurturing and empowering you

May **Christ Today** go beside you -

supporting, befriending and loving you

May **Christ Forever** go before you -

inspiring, guiding and calling you

each day as you walk with him along the pathways of your life.



9<sup>th</sup> February 2025