



Keeping in Touch

A quarterly newsletter for Catholic homeschooling families

AMDG

Term 1, 2008

JMJ

Contents

The call to follow	1
Marium Regnum Familiae	3
Homeschoolers are only human	4
World Youth Day 2008	5
In the Southern Highlands	5
Home Education Association	6
Fratpack: a traditional Catholic social youth group	7
FSSP do Holy Week at Campion College	7
Australian Catholic Students Association	7
New Boys in the Bush	8
Shall We Bring Him Home?	9
Puzzle	11
The Call to Follow, Part 2	12
Puzzle Solution	14

The call to follow

1 Jenny Reynolds

3 The last four years have seen me gather up my heart, my beliefs, my prejudices, and offer them all to Christ in order that He could take me on a deeper journey of trust.
4 My heart was His already...or so I thought. Now I know different.

5 I was raised between an atheist father and a Baptist grandmother, though my grandmother never once took me inside a church...she held on to the teachings of her youth more by habit than belief. Her dreams in life were always punctuated with a quiet "God willing",
6 but I wonder if she ever believed He was.

7 As a lonely child I would wander the streets looking for somewhere to be, somewhere I would not be in the way. Quietly beckoning me as I walked by, the local Catholic Church was always open. Every time I walked inside that church I was instantly soothed by the exquisitely calming atmosphere. I just knew that God was there with me and would not cast me aside. Inside those ornate walls

I was no longer alone. I never told anyone I went there...it was my secret place where I could be me.

Oddly, for atheists, my father and stepmother hit upon a way to fill my time outside the home without their having to join in — they sent me to the local Brethren church just five doors down from our house. By the age of nine I was enrolled in the Friday night Girls Rally, Saturday sports teams, school holiday camps, as well as attending church every Sunday morning before spending the afternoon with the Sunday School teacher and his wife who lived around the corner.

By the time I was a teenager I was no longer sent to the church. My family were happy to have me do whatever I wanted during my free time as long as I was home by curfew and did not cause them any trouble.

When I was 13 a new family moved in across the road and I made friends with the second daughter. She was my age but attended a Catholic High School whilst I attended a selective state school in town. Sometimes I would catch a different bus home and meet



her at her school so we could ride home together. . . I would peer into the grounds of her school in awe of the beautiful church towering over the classroom buildings. The statues were white marble and I would think I could almost speak to the serene and loving faces on them.

Ten years later I was in a new town with two toddlers and looking for church based playgroups that I could join. That was the beginning of fourteen years of searching for God once again.

Eventually I had my son attending a Catholic school but still I did not attend Mass. I assumed that he would find God his own way. . . it did not occur to me that I could participate in his religious life. My memories of attending the Catholic Church as a teenager left me feeling out of place at Mass so I attended Protestant churches on Sundays with the kids because they were all so different and unstructured — it was never obvious to anyone that I did not understand the service. I was too shy to ask one of the nuns at the school (and especially the Priest) to explain the faith to me.

More children arrived, the older ones left home, and I became a grandmother for the first time. After the death of a precious little grandson at nine weeks of age, family became even more important a focus to us than we could have imagined.

At God's instruction we turned our hearts and lives over to homeschooling the two cherubs still under our roof. That was when I met some women who, unknown to them at the time, gave me an insight into a 'way of being' that changed

my life and started me on a different, more intense journey.

Becoming a part of the Coffs Harbour/Grafton homeschooling community very quickly opened doors to a large number of new relationships — relationships which, over time, I came to realise were an integral part of staying sane in my new vocation as a full time stay at home mother/teacher.

Over the next few years our spiritual life was one of ups and downs, we were to move a number of times from one congregation to another — usually due to a change of home address, but sometimes because we just could not gel with the varied messages each Protestant church had on offer.

There was no 'one' church amidst them all, they were a cacophony of different voices and opinions on how Scripture should be translated and lived out, a choir of discordant melodies drumming us on to a hope that one day something would make sense. We even tried home church for a while, but in our hearts we knew this was not right either. Yet, in the back of my mind I just could not shake a feeling that I needed to drop my prejudices and look into the Catholic Church.

Two of the homeschooling families I had come to know in my early homeschooling years stood out from the others. Both had large families (though this was not unusual in our group as homeschoolers in general tend to run towards larger families than what society considers the 'norm'), but it was something about their demeanour that always left me wanting more time with them, more opportunity

to ask questions and really *hear* their answers. Unlike my Protestant church friends they did not verbally assault the senses with their Christian-ese language (and please do not misunderstand me here — I love that many Protestants are so at ease with their faith and able to wear it heartily on their sleeves in all situations! — I am simply describing how very different the two camps seemed). They were joy-filled, at-peace, generous women who seemed to just *be* at rest in Christ. It was not anything they actually said, it was the atmosphere about them, the total absence of a need to validate their Christianity. In hindsight, I can truly say they lived out the words of St Francis faithfully, "Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words."

At the end of our third year of homeschooling my husband finished a University degree and it was time to move across the state in pursuit of a new career for him. There was sadness at leaving good, solid friends, but there was excitement at what may lie ahead, too.

We attended a few churches to see if we could fit in, and eventually ended up at the local Anglican Church because the minister was a homeschool dad and we liked the family. The church service was what is known as 'High Church', similar in some respects to Catholic Mass, but not — if you can understand that. I admit I really enjoyed it. There was a feeling of awe, humility and grandeur towards God I'd not felt a tinge of since my early days visiting the Catholic Church for my 'sanctuary from loneliness'. Yet, something was still missing.

Continued page 12



Marium Regnum Familiae



Supporting Catholic Home Educators in Australia

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II on November 22, 1981, the Holy Father wrote, "May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, be also mother of the 'family church.' Through her maternal help, may every Christian family be a 'little church' in which the mystery of Christ is relived." This group is for Catholic homeschoolers in Australia, with the intent of encouraging and supporting each member in their vocation within their 'little church' in the home.

We ask Mary, Queen of Families to bless, guide and protect each of our families. May she aid us to fight temptation and comfort us in our sorrows. May she help us on our pilgrim path to heaven there to enjoy her company to praise Jesus her Son for all eternity.

The above comes from a group named after Mary Queen of the Family. What sort of group is it? It's free to join. Meetings are any time you can make it, day or night. You probably won't need to travel far to get there. *Marium Regnum Familiae* is an internet based group.

Mothers need to talk: news, gossip, asking for help, reassurance or sharing a new discovery. Schools are a great opportunity for talk. What do you do when your children don't go to school? Some are fortunate to have monthly or weekly get-togethers with other like-minded families. Others rely on the telephone and the internet.

The internet has served as a resource for a little more than a decade now. It is still seen as new and daunting for many people. One trend in recent times is the use of the internet for social networking. More and more personal journals and web logs are popping up. You can read about what families are doing for lent all over

the world (especially the United States).

Mailing lists and message boards are ways of sharing messages with a group of people. Mailing lists send copies of messages to the email address of each member. Message boards arrange the messages in a web page for members to browse. Often a question attracts replies within days. The more members, the more chance that someone will see your question and be able to give an answer.

Marium Regnum Familiae currently comprises a mailing list and a message board for Catholic homeschooling mothers based in Australia. It is not as busy as some of the more popular American groups, but has a good mixture of homeschoolers, some veterans of many years, many new just starting out. Some members astonish the reader with their creativity in devising ways to celebrate the liturgical year. Some have valuable ideas for making life easier. Some need a shoulder to cry on. All have something to share.

Links:

The mailing list — a way of sharing emails with a large group of people:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MariumRegnumFamiliae/>

The message board — for sharing messages on a web page:

<http://www.signsandwonders.com.au/cgi-bin/MariumRegnumFamiliae/YaBB.pl>

At the time of writing this message board is unavailable, but should be fixed soon.

The above board was inspired by this American message board for homeschooling mothers:

<http://www.4realllearning.com/>

This group is also open to mothers from around the world. There are several Australian members already.



Homeschoolers are only human

Beverley Paine, <http://homeschoolaustralia.com>

Homeschoolers are human too. Sounds silly doesn't it? Kind of obvious... However, I think it's good to remind ourselves, and perhaps others, of this fact from time to time.

During my first decade of homeschooling I found a tendency in magazines, newsletters and anything else published by home educators to be upbeat and positive about homeschooling. Good news stories — so lacking in the every day media — were abundant. They dominated. I rarely read anything that wrote about the 'down' days, and how hard it was to juggle housework, earning an income and educating the children at home.

I even stopped reading for a while because it seemed that every child was gifted and talented and all the mums were 'supermums'... I felt like we weren't making the grade. My confidence dived. One day I suddenly realised that I was contributing to this aura of 'success' in my attempts to support others in my writing, and that other people probably felt a lot like I did when I read these encouraging stories, very wobbly about homeschooling.

So about ten years ago I got brave and started to write about the not so happy days, the days where everything seems to be going wrong. We all have them, but there is this kind of taboo about talking about them. I could see how alienating this 'stiff upper lip' attitude was and wanted to reach out to other people like myself, help them feel 'normal' and sane, create the kind of community that would be there for them, and me, when the doubts set in.

Homeschoolers are human. And humans err. They also hurt each other. They get it wrong as often as they get it right. Like everyone they make mistakes. They have the same set of social skills as everyone else. I've never met anyone whose social skills were perfect or flawless...

There is this persistent image of homeschoolers, both in the homeschooling community and more generally, that we're somehow above being typically human. As though having withdrawn our children from a flawed education system our intention is to give them some kind of utopian educational experience that will produce amazing super-people with perfect social skills and who will excel in just about any field they

choose...

Reality-check time! We're human, no different from any other group of humans with something in common that get together to support that commonality. Most of us aren't at all interested in creating a better society through educational revolution: most of us just want to do the best by our kids. Some are refugees from school, mending painful wounds; others are idealists who, like me, can see the potential for a very successful way of learning to re-emerge in human society. I see past those differences between us. I recognise that the pressures of every day life affect us the same as they do any mum or dad with children in school. I know that most of our 'issues' with everyday homeschooling life stem from the kind of problems every family faces, because like them, we're only human.

My goal since I began writing about our homeschooling life and my thoughts about it, has always been to build bridges between home educating families, to make it easier to feel okay about being human, even 'normal' mums and dads, even though what we're doing — educating our children at home — is an extraordinary task. I'll always be here to talk about what has, for us, been an extraordinary journey with our children.

For those home educators that want to be 'out there' supporting others along this journey it helps to remember that we're all human. We don't always play nicely, and we don't always have the time or energy to support the efforts of others; we have very different ideas about what constitutes support and what form it should take... We argue and fight among ourselves. We make friends and we lose friends. We're only human.

Some of us think that because we are all doing the same thing — educating our children at home — we belong to one group and need to think and act the same. That's not how it is. The nature of home education is that it reflects an amazing diversity of experience and a strong need to be and act as individuals, to honour our individual differences as families. That makes it very hard to support home education en masse. Although this may seem an unreasonable and unattainable goal it's been my goal from the beginning and sits at the core of my Homeschool Australia website. The only way I can imagine achieving that goal is to say, "Hey, we're all human, we never stop learning how to parent, education is a life-long experience,



we're learners too, we'll always worry that we're not getting it 'right'; we're more alike than we are different and by sharing our stories we can help each other."

I do recognise that now my children are grown up I have less in common with home educators than I once had. The issues and problems parents opting to educate their children home now are, in many ways,

different to the ones I faced when my children were young. Although some of my thoughts and insights are timeless, many are becoming obsolete, succumbing to the 'generation gap'. And that's okay. Perhaps my place will be taken by other enthusiastic writers with similar goals. My message to them is to always remember that home educators are only human.

World Youth Day 2008

<http://www.wyd2008.org>

WYD08 will be held from 15-20 July 2008 in Sydney. The program will include:

- Tuesday 15 July - Opening Mass of welcome celebrated by Cardinal George Pell and Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko of the Vatican, followed by a concert of welcome
- Wednesday 16 July - Friday 18 July - Catechesis (teaching) sessions every morning and Youth Festival events in afternoon/evening
- Thursday 17 July - Arrival and welcome of the Holy Father
- Friday 18 July - Stations of the Cross a travelling dramatised re-enactment of Our Lords Passion and Death
- Saturday 19 July - Pilgrimage walk to Randwick Racecourse, evening Vigil with The Holy Father and a sleep-out under the stars
- Sunday 20 July - Final Mass with the Holy Father at

Randwick Racecourse and concluding events

World Youth Day has been held in Buenos Aires (1987), Santiago de Compostela (1989), Czestochowa (1991), Denver (1993), Manila (1995), Paris (1997), Rome (2000 Jubilee), Toronto (2002), and Cologne (2005)

In the Southern Highlands

Helen Brearley

Cross and Icon at Penrose Park

Saturday, 29th March
9am – 2pm

Mass will be celebrated at 11am by Bishop Ingham then there will be adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and quiet time for people to pray and reflect. Then about 1pm there will be a procession to the grotto with the Cross and Icon before it goes to the next port of call at 2pm. After the Cross and Icon have left there will be an activity of some sort for the youth (details tba).

Everyone is most welcome to join us and help carry the Cross and Icon in and then down to the grotto.

If anyone requires more information they can ring The Brearleys (02) 4884 4326 or the Monastery (02) 4878 9192.

Other regular events in the Southern Highlands

Homeschool get-togethers on Third Sunday of the month at Pauline Fathers Monastery, Penrose Park. Mass 11am, BYO picnic lunch, 1pm Confession, 1:30pm Divine Mercy Devotions and Benediction, Afternoon tea and footy game etc. All welcome.

The Extraordinary form of the Mass (Traditional Latin Mass) is celebrated in Goulburn on the fourth Sunday of the month at 4pm. Not specifically for homeschoolers, but I only recently found out and thought it would be worth passing on if anyone is interested. Thanks to the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter.

September Camp at Fitzroy Falls

has moved to October for 2008. The camp will be held from 20th – 24th of October. That's the second week of Term Four.

Bookings open on 1st May 2008. Contact Michele Vieira (02) 4829 0113.



Home Education Association

<http://www.hea.asn.au>

The Home Education Association Inc. (HEA) has been formed to support, promote and encourage the practice of home education.

The HEA has no affiliation with state education authorities and all members should note that privacy is an Association priority.

The broader objects of the HEA are as follows:

- To uphold the principle that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children.
- To promote a broader awareness of Home Education and its benefits throughout Australia.
- To promote and encourage the development of Home Education Networks.
- To provide services and resources to Home Education Networks and individual home educators.
- To endeavour to procure any rights, privileges, concessions or benefits relating to home education for home educators and their families.
- To maintain a respect for the diversity of philosophies and methods used by Home Educators.

Services / Benefits

While individuals and home education groups will still run their own affairs, we see the HEA as an umbrella organization offering benefits to home educators which are difficult for smaller networks and individuals to achieve.

These are the sort of things your membership helps to provide to the home educating community:

- A website kept updated, and phone and email answering network service, to answer questions from enquiring and new home schoolers, the media and researchers.
- Lifting the profile of home education in the political arena by letter writing at opportune times.

- HEA produces promotional material. Contact the office if you can distribute brochures promoting homeschooling in your local area.
- **Discounts** to all HEA events and many education Service Providers.
- **Aides** for support groups to run introductory evenings in local areas.
- **Parent** courses in getting started and overcoming burnout are also run regularly by home schoolers qualified in both many years of personal experience and in adult education. These are available on CD for those unable to attend the courses.
- **Communication** across state borders on issues relevant to all home schoolers. The HEA website lists support groups and contacts by state, and hosts discussion forums. News items and articles relevant to home schoolers are published on the site.
- **Insurance** was the driving force in setting up the Association. Most groups require insurance to run conferences and to be able to hire halls. Broadform liability covers HEA members and their families for legal liability associated with any HEA activity. We also have an accident insurance policy for those who organize activities, and work experience cover for teenagers.
- As you use your HEA membership card you will be promoting home schooling as a legitimate educational alternative to museums and bookstores offering education discounts.

Membership

Membership is available to all home educating families in Australia. The cost of membership is \$50 per family per year, plus a \$10 joining fee for new or expired members.

Membership application forms are available from <http://www.hea.asn.au> New members in 2008 receive two free booklets written by Beverly Paine from <http://homeschoolaustralia.com>



Fratpack: a traditional Catholic social youth group



2008 promises to be an exciting year for Fratpack, the Fraternity of St. Peter Youth Group. World Youth Day is the largest youth event in the world and Fratpack will be there. But that is just one of the monthly activities planned for this year. Luna Park, Bondi Beach, Abseiling, Snorkelling, the next Narnia Movie and general Serious Fun are just some of the destinations. There are also retreat days for more spiritual pursuits.

Fratpack members are 13 and

older. Young members who turn 13 by July 2008 are also eligible to join Fratpack. Events are held on Saturdays, usually towards the end of the month.

The Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter is active in several dioceses around Australia. Fraternity priests offer the traditional Latin Mass daily, and provide wide ranging pastoral care for the faithful centered upon the traditional prayers and sacramental forms loved by the Saints and so highly prized by the

Church.

For more information about Fratpack's activities for 2008, please contact:

Fratpack
66 View Street
Lawson NSW 2783

or phone (02)4759 3121 or email d.tmoore@bigpond.net.au with Fratpack in the subject.



FSSP do Holy Week at Champion College

Holy Thursday: Sung Mass of the Lord's Supper, 8pm

Good Friday: Stations of the Cross, 11am

Sung Afternoon Liturgy, 3pm

Holy Saturday: Easter Vigil (sung), 8pm

All at Champion College, 8-14 Austin Woodbury Place, Old Toongabbie.

Australian Catholic Students Association

<http://www.newspringtime.org.au>

The Australian Catholic Students Association (ACSA) is a national organisation of Catholic students and graduates from tertiary institutions within Australia committed to witnessing the Gospel message of hope as proclaimed by the Magisterium and the Tradition of the Catholic Church.

ACSA National patron Cardinal Pell says: "Young people are here to set the church on fire. Old people are here to stop them burning it down." ACSA is doing its bit.

ACSA's other National Patron is Assoc. Prof. Tracey Rowland. Its national chaplain is Fr. Gregory Jordan S.J. of Brisbane.

Through its online journal *New Springtime*, ACSA provides a forum for young adults to read about and contribute to Catholic life at its fullest.



New Boys in the Bush

Book review by Veronica Brandt

December last year saw the release of the fifth in Fr. Tierney's Bush Boys series. The books describe the adventures of boys in the fictional Wild Bush Mountains. Each rousing tale fleshes out the ABCs of camping, ABC standing for Australian Bush Catechism.

So far the books have charted the Cumberland families, plus cousin Cuthbert and neighbours Kevin and Sam. Each boy has learned basic bushcraft — how to light a fire with only one match, not to take pyjamas when camping, the folly of wearing jeans in the bush. The reader will be familiar with the lessons by now. Mr. Cumberland taught his sons, and his sons have taught everyone else in turn, passing on the photocopied catechism.

This installment takes a new turn. The new boys have no catechism and their father, Max, has a rather peculiar philosophy of teaching. He calls it the 'discovery method'. Instead of learning the catechism, the boys will be *discovering* for themselves.



Now, the discovery method is fine in the classroom. Max is a very successful teacher. He prepares lots of hands on activities for his students to allow his students to *discover* mathematical principles for themselves. Perhaps this supervised, guided discovery method would be univer-

sally successful, but what's the fun in that. Instead Max allows his boys to *discover* certain things with no parental guidance or even supervision. Academic and moral education is done traditionally with tutoring and spanking as appropriate. The things left to the discovery method are 'how to's, such as how to wield an axe, how to drive a Land Rover, and how to explore the bush. It is amazing that they survive the fifty three chapters!

The back claims it is "an ideal read curled up in your bed or a comfy chair," but I'm not so sure. The book is not your tame, sleepy comfort read. There are no dreamy gazes at the "wild and lyric beauty" of the bush. The pace is bumpy with lots of dialogue. There is trouble around every corner with lots of detail. The story is full of potentially fatal accidents embellished with lots of Australian colloquialisms.



From talking to other grown up readers, the wealth of detail is most memorable about the bush boys books. Trivial bits and pieces of information are scattered everywhere. This book is no exception. In its pages the reader may pick up handy latin words like *convivium*, what became of the explorer William Wentworth, what is meant by 'mad as a cut snake', the symbolism behind the Union Jack, and much more. We even get more of a glimpse of the Lawson's reli-

gion lessons which are woven into everyday life.

The story takes a back seat now and again. The novel tends to become more like a textbook. There are numerous lists and diagrams to clarify the detailed digressions. Footnotes clear up some of the more obscure references. The appendices are not as exhaustive as the previous book *Bush Boys on the Move*.

As well as diagrams there are illustrations throughout the book. Callum Elvis has drawn lively pictures of the boys' misadventures. Here you can see his portraits of the main protagonists, Jack, Jim and Joe. Vicky Leach has drawn studies of stoves, irons, camping tools and such that you might see on an old farm in Australia. Andy Elvis provided the maps and diagrams.



There are lots of reasons to read this book. It gives a good insight into Fr. Tierney's opinions on homeschooling and raising children. His viewpoint comes from experience living with a homeschooling family as well as from a firm grounding in history. The books draw on Australian culture from the 1800s right up to the present day. *New Boys in the Bush* could inspire you to simplify your own life. It might save you money. It could even save your life.

The books are available from Newman Resources, PO Box 697,



Merrylands NSW 2160, telephone (02) 9637 9406. New Boys in the Bush is \$16.50 or pick up the set for \$55 (save \$7.50). Postage on a sin-

gle book is \$5.20. Ring for postage on the four volume set.

Remember to download the latest

Bush Boys magazine from the same page as Keeping In Touch. Full of complementary information for reading with or without the books.

Shall We Bring Him Home?

Tricia Button

Homeschooling was something I had always been interested in, but I did wonder if I would ever have the patience to actually do it! But as our son who was in year one, began to show signs of struggling academically and generally being unhappy, we started to consider our options more closely. Noises were being made by teachers that Thomas needed to be tested for learning difficulties because he rarely finished his work and was easily distracted. This unsettled me, as I didn't want him to be labelled when he was so young. I also knew that most of his difficulties could be attributed to the distractions inherent of a teacher student ratio of 1:26.

I was also disappointed that although he was attending a Catholic school, very few of his classmates attended Mass. Good friends of ours with a child the same age as Thomas told us that when their daughter gave a speech about the rosary, she was ridiculed by some children. Alarm bells started ringing. Incidentally this family have also decided to homeschool. We wanted our children to be immersed in their faith and not have to feel like the odd ones out for living a Christian life.

I lived and breathed homeschooling for six months before I was willing to make a firm commitment. This was such a huge decision for all of us that I didn't want to rush into it only to throw up my hands and quit in term one. For me this would be a permanent decision, and I wanted to be as prepared as possible.

After much angst we decided to bring Thomas home right away rather than wait and see if things improved. I was very apprehensive, but also extremely excited. What excited me most was the faith journey we would take. Like many of my generation who are Catholic and had been educated in Catholic schools, there was much that I was ignorant of. My faith had recently begun to blossom after having attended a Celebrate Love weekend with my husband, and a Cursillo weekend. I

had finally made a conscious decision to leap into my faith. I knew that homeschooling would only deepen my commitment and understanding of my faith.

And so our journey began. For the first time in my life I felt like I was exactly where God wanted me. After years of trying to find my place, as it were, I was deliciously content. Swimming against the stream had never felt so right.

We had made the decision to bring only one child home. Our second son Campbell had just started kinder and loved every minute. We had two reasons for keeping him at school. The first being that he seemed to enjoy it so much, however the second reason troubled me a little more. I just didn't think that I would be able to cope with him all day, every day. Campbell had always been more of a challenge than our two other children. He was very easily upset and was generally a hand full. As time progressed things seemed to get worse rather than better. So it was easier to have a peaceful day and send him to school.

During term two I approached Campbell's teacher to inquire about his behaviour at school, as he had become quite difficult at home. She reported that he was an angel at school, but that she had noticed some things that were concerning her. I casually commented that I often wondered if he was autistic, but would then dismiss it because he did do so many things that autistic children could not. Her next comment marked a turning point in our lives.

"He's certainly not autistic, but I have wondered if he could have Asperger Syndrome."

When Campbell was a toddler, I had had almost the same conversation with a friend who was studying to become a teacher, but I had taken no further action. Now it could no longer be conveniently forgotten. We no longer had the luxury of thinking that he was just a little more eccentric than other children.

What followed was the most difficult year of my life, thus far.

I began to read anything I could get my hands on



about Aspergers. I instantly recognised Campbell in the descriptions of Aspergers. This gave me both a sense of relief and fear. Relief at the possibility of finally getting some answers and concrete help for our little boy, to intense grief at the loss that Aspergers then represented to me. My faith gave me strength, as I firmly believed that the Lord would not have given us Campbell if he didn't think we could do a good enough job! Even though I came close to doubting his choice at times.

Both my husband and I drew great comfort from a close friend who prayed with us during this time of waiting. Each of us had a strong feeling that Jesus had a special plan for our boy. We could picture Jesus tenderly embracing Campbell, and surrounding him with his divine love. This image gave me great strength at my lowest points.

Campbell was diagnosed with mild Aspergers three days before we embarked on a 400km move! The roller coaster ride began. We finally knew why Campbell wasn't like other kids, which helped us tremendously in parenting him. With each new book I read I began to feel as if I was getting to know what made my son tick. However, reading those books was very difficult. Every time I encountered the word "disability" I physically recoiled.

At home things steadily got worse. Campbell had intense meltdowns. He would scream, throw things and hurl verbal and physical abuse at all the family. I still bear a scar from one of his meltdowns during Mass. Most Masses were a complete disaster. I often wondered if our family would be able to withstand the difficulties that Campbell's behaviour presented. There were many times when James or I would have to leave the room during a meltdown to weep. We even lost who we thought were close friends because they were unwilling to accept that Campbell's behaviour was the result of Aspergers, not poor parenting.

Despite these challenges thoughts of homeschooling Campbell were still constantly on my mind. Most of my conversations with close friends would soon turn to this topic. I'm certain that I bored them to tears, although they were gracious enough to listen to the same concerns time and time again without complaint! I couldn't imagine how I could possibly bring him home and manage in safety. But I also knew that many people did homeschool Aspergers children and reported that their children's behaviour dramatically improved

as a result.

As his behaviour deteriorated, and my confidence in homeschooling and my understanding of Aspergers improved, I began to think that things couldn't get worse even with him at home. We were ready to trust what others who had been down our road had said. That it would be easier. We decided to try homeschooling him. I was learning to trust in my abilities and to lean on the Lord. The Scripture "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me" often came to mind. All the same I was scared witless!

Campbell has been home for three terms. It would not be an exaggeration to say that we have a different child. The meltdowns have all but ceased and he no longer chews his clothes or become physically ill due to anxiety. The anxiety of the school environment was undoubtedly the cause of his negative behaviour. He was able to hold it all together at school, but once home, he released all the anxiety that had built up over the day. He is now a happy little boy once again. One regret I have is that we didn't bring him home sooner.

I am now at peace with Campbell's diagnosis. Many of the things we dearly love about Campbell can be attributed to Aspergers. He looks at the world in a unique way. He has a wonderful sense of humour.

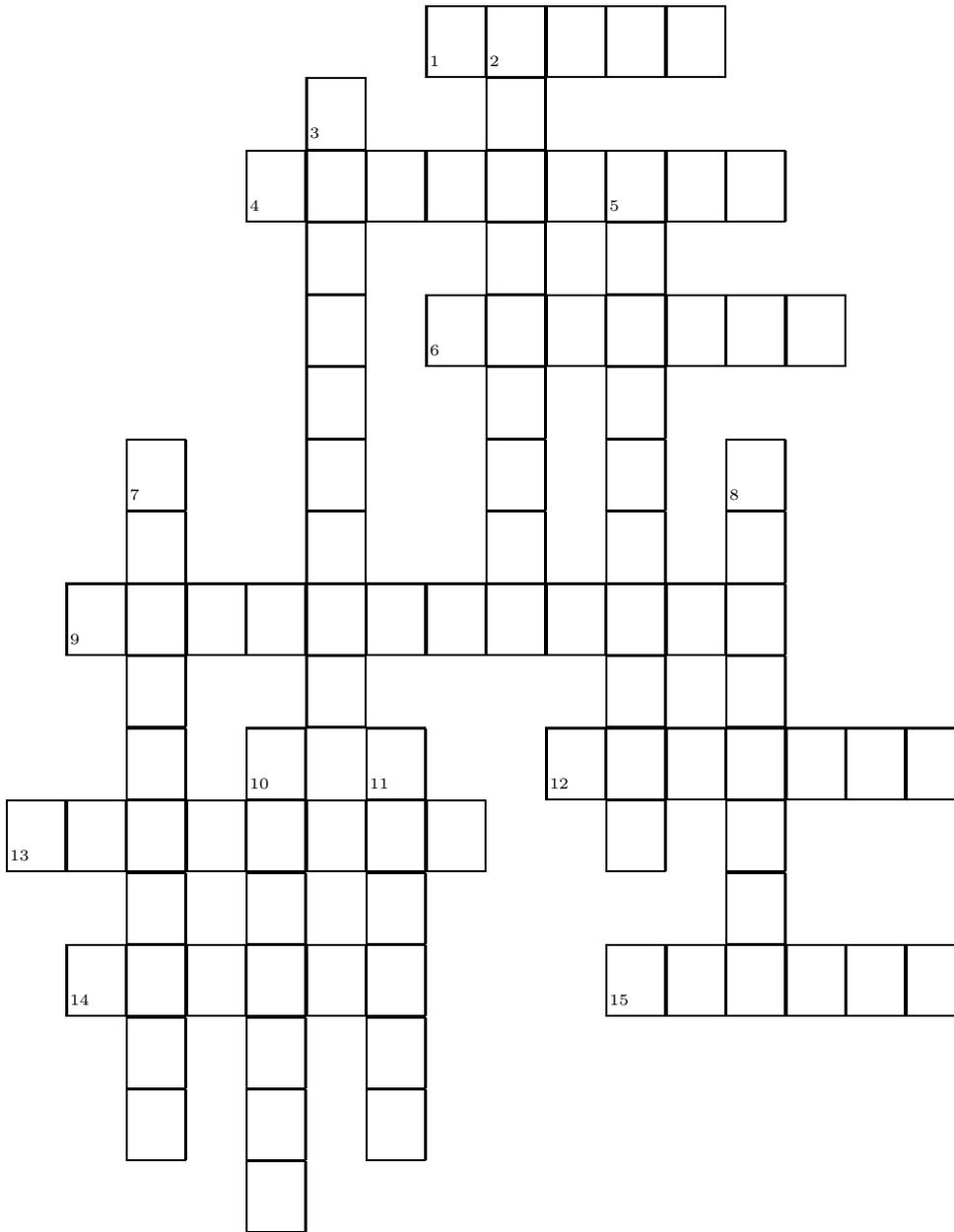
People with Aspergers are very literal in their interpretation of language. Upon asking Thomas to keep an eye open for something, Campbell asked if he could use two eyes! Or another time when I was purchasing a coffee, Campbell asked why there were three different size cups on the counter. After explaining that coffee was a drink for grown-ups and that they were the three sizes you could buy, he asked if the smallest cup was for short grown-ups!

His intense (some would say obsessive) interest of the moment is penguins. Consequently we all know lots about penguins. We also share our home with 15 or more toy penguins of varying size!

I share our story in the hope that it may encourage someone who is considering homeschooling a child with special needs. Often these are the children who most need to be educated at home, away from the bullies and pressures of school. As parents I think we need to believe that we are the experts when it comes to our children. We also need to trust that if the Lord places something on our heart, that He will give us everything we need to fulfil His perfect plan for our lives.



Puzzle



Across

- 1 Stabat _____ dolorosa (5)
- 4 Offering by a priest on an altar (9)
- 6 Feast day on 17th March (14th for this year) (7)
- 9 Feast day on 25th March (31st for this year) (12)
- 12 To make atonement we do _____ (7)
- 13 Jewish feast commemorating escape from Egypt (8)
- 14 Roman Govenor of Jerusalem (6)
- 15 Feast day on 19th March (this year 15th) (6)

Down

- 2 Joseph of _____ donated his tomb (9)
- 3 Other Mary at the foot of the cross (9)
- 5 Descendants of Jacob (10)
- 7 Prepare for Easter by making a good _____ (10)
- 8 Eat these on Tuesday to use up eggs and butter (8)
- 10 Hebrew children sang this as Jesus rode into Jerusalem (7)
- 11 Our ancestors ate manna in the _____ (6)



The Call to Follow, Part 2

Jenny Reynolds

A while later I came to realise it had something to do with the minister, who confessed that he did not actually believe all he was meant to in the church. Many of his ministrations were empty of authenticity and now I knew why.

One of the mothers in our small homeschooling group was Catholic. Her husband had previously been an Anglican minister, however received the call in his heart to leave and convert to Catholicism — he was now teaching at the Catholic Seminary. Again, she stood out among the lovely Christian women of our group. And again, it was not what she said, it was the atmosphere surrounding her, the solid yet gentle love for Christ that just *was*.

Around this time my closest friend, living elsewhere, had posted me a book as a gift of encouragement — Holly Pierlot's *A Mother's Rule of Life*. I remember at the time my friend saying not to worry about the Catholic bits but to read it and take in the rest. This turned out to be quite a challenge as the bits I took in were all the Catholic bits! I read and re-read that book three times in six months, eventually realising that I needed to know more about this Church that I had been told (in numerous Penetcostal, Baptist and Brethren churches I had attended) was the seedbed of the anti-christ.

I desperately wanted to ask the lovely Catholic homeschooler my big question, "so how did you get over the Mary hump when you converted to the Catholic faith?" but I held back because I felt I needed to. It should be mentioned that during this time I never discussed any of this with another soul, not even my husband. This was between me and God, and I had no idea where the journey to understanding would lead, but my prayer was that wherever I ended up it would be with my whole family and it would be a closer walk with Jesus.

A surprise call offering my husband a six-month teaching contract in another town brought to a halt my studies as we unexpectedly made haste to put into storage our belongings and prepare to live in a tourist park for the next half year. With a sad heart I once again said goodbye to good friends but rejoiced that my husband would finally begin the teaching career

he wanted, albeit a possible short stint if nothing else came up afterwards.

Life in the tourist park was fun: one room, four people, minimal possessions, and a whole lot of love to go around. Our spiritual life leapt forward as we found ourselves with time on our hands each day to read the Bible and talk together about it, no pressing household duties to perform (I could clean and sweep that room in 15 minutes), and barely any distractions from tv, games, or visitors. I thoroughly enjoyed that time and even today the children reminisce at how nice it was to be unencumbered with 'things'.

But God was preparing me for something I had not expected. My husband received a phone call one day offering him a job that he had not applied for, in one of the most remote locations in the country, by a man he had never heard of. (There are a few miracles tucked in that story, but best to save for another time).

A couple of months later we were sweltering in the desert town of Alice Springs, where his new job was teaching at a Catholic High School!

We began attending Mass. I fell in love with the Church immediately. My heart was drawn homeward and I knew I could not turn from this journey. Over the next year I attended RCIA classes with a lovely Canadian couple, Dan and Mona, and a feisty nun, Sister Margaret, to answer all my questions. So much volleying of ideas would bounce back and forth, challenging myself and them, and I grew to love these people deeply for the time, prayer and love they offered so freely.

But once again God knew I needed more. I needed a living example of a Catholic homeschool family, and so in His grace, He provided. An American family living in Australia for two years were the only Catholic family in the large homeschool community of Alice Springs. A chance invite to come for a visit and get to know each other was a God-gift in disguise. When I first walked into Pam's home I knew immediately they were Catholic and I wanted to cry with joy. Here at last God was allowing me to ask all the sticky questions still bottled up inside, in the atmosphere of a family whose love for God and their Church was thick with adoration. How blessed was I over the next year as she gave time over and again to my ponderings, questions and 'light bulb moments'. Her home library was offered at my disposal, helping enormously in my own



learning, and in my teaching of the children.

Alongside this I was able to lean on those beautiful Catholic ladies from my first homeschool group in Coffs Harbour, as well as some new long-distance friends who had heard of my quest and wanted to offer whatever assistance they could. Parcels of books and tapes arrived, though one got lost and never did turn up (maybe it was opened somewhere along the way and helped another? You never know with God!).

But for our family the way was now clearly marked. The children were baptised one year ago today, December 13th, the Feast of St Lucy. She was of Sicilian heritage, as are my children. Four days later they had their First Holy Communion and their Confirmation. Two days after that we left Alice Springs and moved as far west as our country extends for the next chapter of our life. Oh, how I missed Father Healy, Sister Margaret, Pam, Dan and Mona, and the other friends I had made there, but I put my trust in God and once again followed my husband.

Since July we have been here in Esperance, a lovely seaside town on the south coast of Western Australia. This is to be our stop-off point, the place where we unfurl our long trapped roots and plant them deep in the welcome soil — “God-willing” as my nana used to say. Our Lady Star of the Sea Church stands high atop the town watching over the stunning white sand

beaches. We thank God for this place of peace and beauty where we can worship Him and build relationships that will last, something we have longed for over the last 16 years of our marriage.

My journey towards joining the church has seemed a long one as I am working through the process of an annulment from my failed teenage marriage, but each day brings me closer to finally receiving Our Blessed Lord into my body. When Father Marion places his hand on my forehead to pray a heartfelt blessing on me, I fill with the heat of joy knowing that my time of waiting, though I offer it as a willing sacrifice, is nothing in comparison to my Lord’s sacrifice for me.

My prayer for those who read this is that they see through my inadequate mortal words to the heart beneath. My intent is not to put down the Protestant churches (many are filled with true lovers of Christ who put me to shame with their humility and sacrifice to others in the name of Jesus), but to share my journey into the richness and completeness of the Catholic Church, the Church I now call home.

This article is an abridged version from Jenny Reynold’s blog in December 2007. For the complete article see:

<http://www.mariumregnumfamiliae.blogspot.com>

This marvelous parable [of the prodigal son] gives us a fundamental lesson about education. Parents, educators, give the children confided to your care an understanding of this divine mercy by believing in it and practising it yourselves. It is this faith which will prevent them from falling again, and, if they fall, they will rise again; they will come back, because you will have acquainted them with the gentleness of God. They will say, “I know how good God is. I know how to abide in His mercy. From the depths of my sin, I shall rise up and go to my father.”

—*I Believe in Love: A Personal Retreat Based on the Teaching of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, by Father Jean C. J. d’Elbée



Distribution

Keeping In Touch is published by Australian Catholic home educating families four times a year. It is distributed primarily through the Cardinal Newman Faith Resources web site:

www.cardinalnewman.com.au.

If you would like to be notified by email when a new issue of *Keeping In Touch* is coming online, please advise Mr. Shaun Fanning, who currently maintains the address list, by email: tarlohill@bigpond.com.

If you need a printed copy and cannot get a friend or neighbour to download and print it for you, please contact:

Mr. Shaun Fanning
 Tarlo Hill
 2142 Taralga Road
 Tarlo NSW 2580

Otherwise, if you avoid the internet or just don't get around to printing *Keeping In Touch* you can still get a printed copy. The Brandts are trialling a Print and Post Service for \$10 for four issues (one year). Back issues are also available for \$2.50.

Mrs. Veronica Brandt
 8 Beauford St
 Woodford 2778
 veronica@brandt.id.au

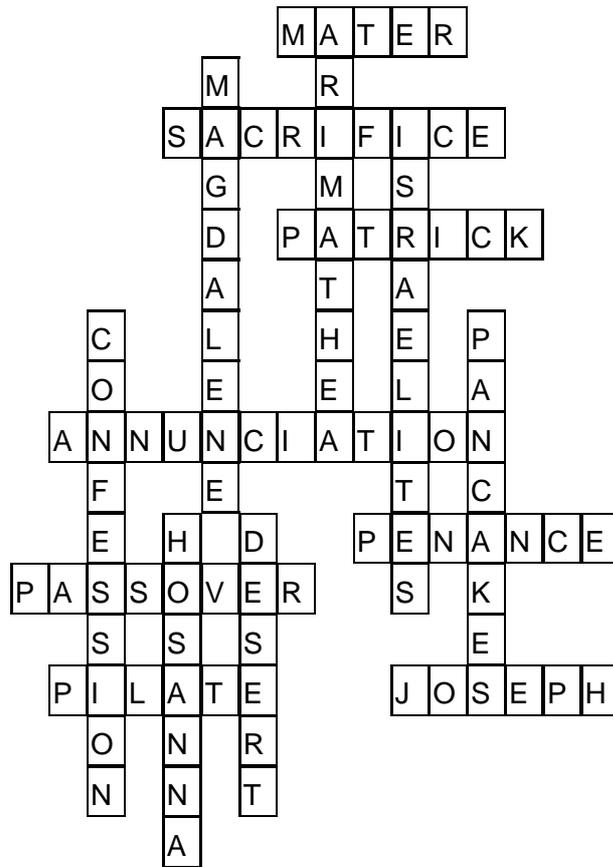
Next Edition

The next edition will be edited by the Clark family. Please send contributions for Term 2, 2008 of *Keeping In Touch* to:

Teresa Clark
 PO Box 8
 Panania NSW 2213
 twclark21@gmail.com

Deadline for each edition is the end of the second week of the term. For Term 2, 2008 that will be 9 May.

Puzzle Solution



Publication

Keeping In Touch is published about the end of the fifth week of each term.

The editors are responsible for the content of their edition and feedback is always welcome. This edition is edited by Mrs. Veronica Brandt, details above.

Thank you to all the generous people who took the time to write articles or send in useful and interesting information.

We would like to encourage all families (both parents and children) and anyone who supports home-

schooling to have a go at writing for *Keeping In Touch*. By contributing to *Keeping In Touch* you will be supporting, encouraging, entertaining and helping other homeschoolers.

If you would like to edit a future edition of *Keeping In Touch*, please contact the Elvis family for more information.

Andy and Sue Elvis
 PO Box 968
 Mittagong NSW 2575
 Tel. 02 4862 3387
 elvisfamily@optusnet.com.au