

Areté 

Issue 7 | Summer edition

# VELLIS

*et Remis*



## Manger to mission

Bearing Christ to the World



Student Spotlight, Stories  
of Grace and More.



Students ascending the hill at Mt Carmel Retreat Centre at their final Intensive for 2024.  
Photography: Cheryl Surrey

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# HELLO FROM

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Chris

As we come to the close of another year, we are proud to present the seventh edition of *Velis et Remis*. It's been a year of growth and reflection, and we are excited to share with you the fruits of this journey.

In this special December issue, we feature a student spotlight on Joseph Wehbe, whose inspiring story reminds us of the power of faith in action. We also offer a beautiful reflection by graduate Filomena Mihas on the meaning of the Visitation, delving into the profound encounter between Mary and Elizabeth and its significance for us today. In addition, we have a guest contribution from Hazel Lim, Mission Manager at the Sydney Centre of Evangelisation and an Areté graduate who explores the relevance of mission in light of the Nativity story—a timely reminder of our call to share the joy of Christ's birth with the world. Finally, Felicity Chang shares about her experience on the Areté Centre team.

May this Christmas season be a time of deepening faith and renewed commitment to the Church's mission, as we share the hope and love of Christ with all.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. We are grateful for your continued support and prayers.

We hope you are inspired by this issue.



We also want to wish you a blessed and joyful Christmas season and a wonderful new year!

**Fr Chris Ryan MGL**  
**Director**  
**Areté Centre for Missionary Leadership**



# THE VISITATION

## A QUIET ENCOUNTER OF LOVE, JOY AND MISSION.

*By Filomena Mihas*

The Feast of the Visitation invites us into a moment of quiet awe and wonder as Mary, pregnant with Jesus, visits her cousin Elizabeth, who is carrying John the Baptist. In this encounter, we witness Mary as the living tabernacle, bearing the very presence of Christ within her. It is a profoundly supernatural moment, as John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth's womb, recongising Jesus. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, acknowledges Mary as the mother of our Lord.

This meeting is also deeply human — two women, each on an unexpected journey coming together in recognition of God's promises unfolding in their lives.

This image of Mary carrying Jesus within her and sharing Him with others has become a reminder for me of what it means to carry Christ in my own life and share him with those around me. This is the heart of Christian ministry.

We often imagine that mission requires grand speeches or dramatic gestures but, like Mary, we can be called to share God's love in quiet, meaningful ways. Mary didn't need to preach or perform miracles; Mary's humble response to her calling invites us to reflect more deeply upon what mission truly involves.

The Feast of the Visitation is a powerful invitation to missionary discipleship and it deeply resonates with me in this season of Advent, especially in my role as a carer. Caring for a loved one can be a daunting and often overwhelming task, but Mary's visit to Elizabeth offers a powerful example of how to serve in love even in the most challenging moments.

Just as Mary, despite her uncertainty went to Elizabeth with a heart full of humility, faith and joy, I too am called to bring Christ's love into my role as a carer. Especially when the path is hard and often painful, it is an opportunity to embody that same selfless love. The Visitation reminds me that like Mary, I am called to serve not out of obligation, but out of a deep love that reflects the presence of Christ.



# Living Out the Joy of the Nativity

*By Hazel Lim*

**Hazel Lim, Mission Manager, Sydney Centre for Evangelisation shares the significance of missionary leadership in light of the Christmas story.**

Expectant parents eagerly awaiting the arrival of their little ones often pause from their busy lives to reflect on their hopes and concerns, preparing for their new 'call to love.'

Similarly, during the season of Advent, Christians are invited to pause, reflect, and prepare. This period invites spiritual reflection on how we have lived God's 'call to love' in our vocations, especially through our baptismal call to be missionary disciples.

Advent is a season of spiritual renewal. Reflecting on the story of Jesus' birth can heal, strengthen, and inspire us in our mission to share the Good News.



“Areté was what reignited my heart to be more intentional and encouraged me to step-up as a missionary leader.”



Hazel with Bishop Barron.

From the Annunciation to Christ's birth, Mary and Joseph faced immense challenges – uncertainty, fear, and rejection – yet they remained steadfast in their divine mission. Understanding and accepting the significance of their calling, they fully committed themselves, trusting in God's plan as they carried and offered Jesus, God's precious gift, to the world.

Likewise, as missionary disciples in our everyday lives, we may feel anxious, unprepared, or discouraged. In such moments, we are invited to return to that first encounter when we wholeheartedly committed to the Great Commission. Let us call upon the Holy Spirit to illuminate our minds, rekindle the fire in our hearts, and breathe life into our gifts so that we, too, may joyfully spread the light of Jesus to the world.



With Fr Chris at Hazel's 2020 Areté Graduation

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Jesus, our servant King, born in a humble manger, exemplifies the highest form of humility and selflessness. As missionary disciples, we are called to serve with humble and generous hearts. We must continually return to God, seek and extend forgiveness, and align our actions with His will rather than our own. Our mission is sustained not by our efforts alone, but by God's grace and providence. By surrendering ourselves and inviting Christ to lead, we become faithful and fruitful witnesses to His love.



In the stillness of the Nativity, we are reminded of 'Emmanuel: God is with us.' Though the path of missionary discipleship can seem overwhelming or daunting, we are assured of God's abiding presence. Like the shepherds who heard the angel's message under the night sky, we are called to "be not afraid" and rejoice in the good news: "A Saviour has been born to us; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). We are never alone, as God incarnate dwells among us, offering unfailing love and faithfulness.

May the example of Mary's fiat, Saint Joseph's steadfast courage and prayer, and the boundless joy and hope of the infant Jesus nourish, encourage, and energise us to be witnesses of God's love, bringing His light to the world.

Holy Family, pray for us!



Hazel speaking at an Areté Retreat in 2021





# The Digital Missionfield

RAFTING A STRATEGY & C  
IN BEAUTY, TR

# MILESTONES AND NEW BEGINNINGS

*By Fr Chris Ryan MGL*

A

nd that's a wrap. The 2024 cohort's year finished on November 29 with our annual Mass and Graduation dinner.

52 students completed the Foundations of Missionary Leadership Program this year, which brings the number of people who have undertaken the course since the program began in 2020 to 200.

Over those five years, we have welcomed students from eleven Australian dioceses as well as from two dioceses in New Zealand. Our youngest student was 18, while our oldest student was in her eighties.

Our students have included diocesan and parish youth ministers, family educators, evangelisation and RCIA coordinators, parish ministry leaders, school principals, RECs, family educators, as well as Catholic education and chancery staff.

Perhaps most importantly has been the sizeable number of 'people in the pews' who have studied with us because they simply want to make a difference in their parish.

When I reflect upon the past five years, I am grateful to God for the extraordinary group of people who have come to be more deeply formed as leaders for the Church's mission.

To all the graduates of the Foundations of Missionary Leadership program, thank you for your witness and for your commitment.

What's next for the Areté Centre? Well, in January we will welcome another 50 students to the Foundations of Missionary Leadership Program. Eight of these students will undertake the program as a Graduate Certificate through the University of Notre Dame, which is up from six students in 2024, and 3 in 2023.

It's always exciting for the team and the faculty to meet a new cohort of students and the 2025 group will be no exception. The Foundations of Missionary Leadership program is the core of the Areté Centre's ministry.

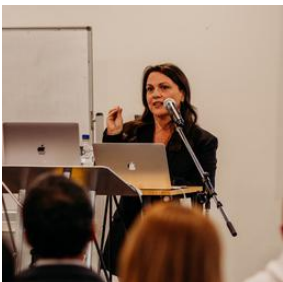
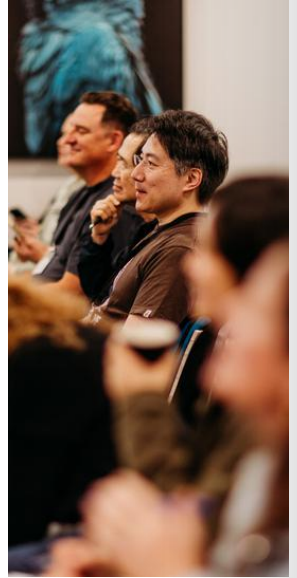
It's our flagship as it were, and we have no plans to stop offering the program any time soon. We believe we best serve the renewal of the Church by doing our bit to form lay leaders in evangelisation. Is there more for Areté to do? That's really up to the Lord. We just want to be faithful to what he has asked of us. *Velis et remis.*



*“I am grateful to  
God for the  
extraordinary  
group of people who  
have come to be  
more deeply formed  
as leaders for the  
Church’s mission.”*

F R C H R I S R Y A N M G L





# Joseph Wehbe Class of 2024

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**Meet Joseph Raymond Wehbe, a Lay Chaplain with Catholic Care Western Sydney and Blue Mountains, serving at the Children's Hospital in Westmead. Through the Areté Centre Joseph has deepened his Catholic faith, discovered his charisms, and embraced bold and Spirit-led leadership that enriches his ministry and personal life.**

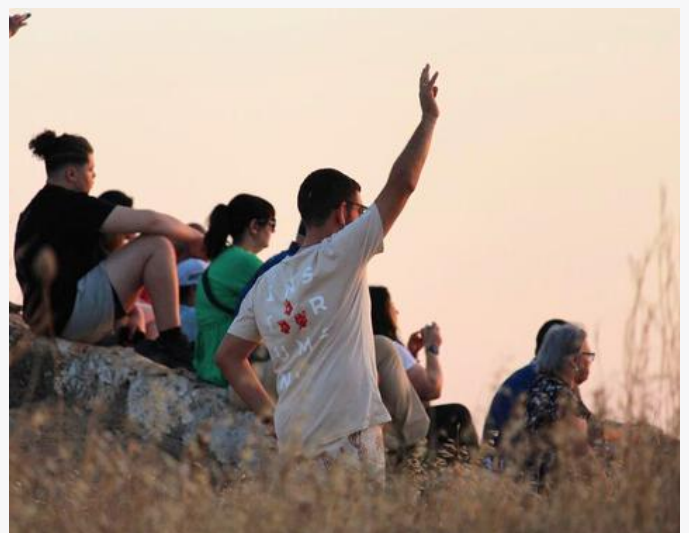
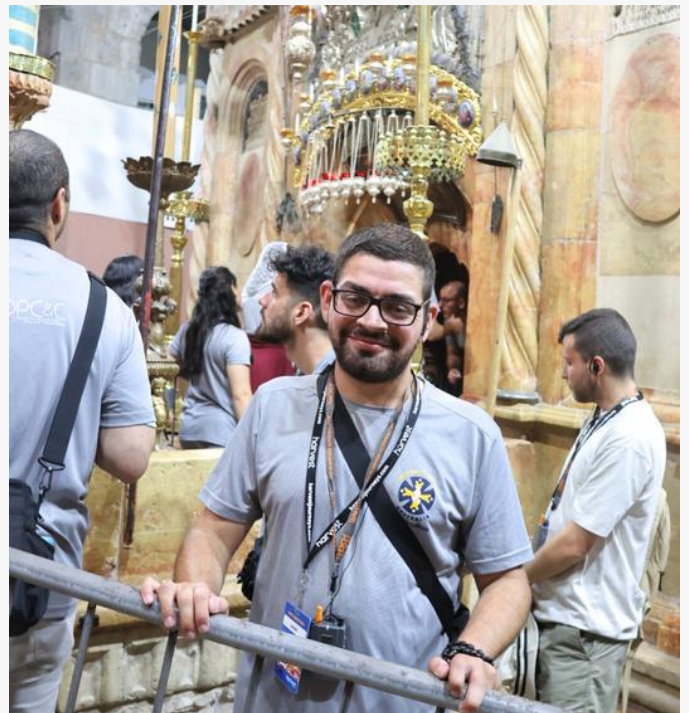
**We sat down with Joseph to learn more about his journey of faith and leadership.**

**Which Parish do you belong to?**

St Raymond Maronite Catholic Parish, Auburn NSW.

**In what ways has Areté deepened your understanding of Catholic faith and how has this impacted your professional or personal life?**

Areté has deepened my understanding of the Catholic Faith in an enriching and unique way as it explored the personal, spiritual, liturgical, academic and pastoral elements that I have found are all important in being formed as a Catholic. Both professionally and personally Areté has shaped how I communicate, love, minister, and accompany others on their quests to know God. It has also given me the courage to be bold, vulnerable, and open to God's love, which He freely invites me to enter into constantly.



**What is one highlight or experience during your journey that you can share with us?**

One highlight amongst many would be the friendships I have built during the year. Journeying with amazing people on fire with Holy Spirit encouraged me to continue to move forward when challenging times came my way. The late-night singalongs around the piano and the one-on-one conversations that were shared reminded me of how the early Church used to come together in fellowship while on mission.

**During the course you discovered your charisms, how has this changed or impacted your leadership style in your professional work or as a parishioner?**

When I discovered my charisms, I knew I was in for a rollercoaster ride with the Holy Spirit, yet I had no idea how the Holy Spirit was going to manifest these charisms within me. Since discovering that I had the charisms of healing and encouragement, the Holy Spirit has allowed me to help others receive physical, emotional and spiritual healing, as well as the encouragement to be bold in taking a leap of faith in engaging in a ministry where I get to use them. I also have a new perspective on how to incorporate faith in the workplace.



“  
When I discovered my charisms, I knew I was in for a rollercoaster ride with the Holy Spirit, yet I had no idea how the Holy Spirit was going to manifest these charisms in me.”





### **What did you find most challenging during the Areté journey?**

Taking what I had learned from the course into my parish ministry and finding that there was not a lot of receptivity to concepts such as forming a statement of mission, vision and values. I was challenged, discouraged, and felt as though I was misunderstood. As St Ignatius of Loyola teaches though: Desolation leads to Consolation.

### **What is your favourite bible verse?**

Proverbs 3:5-8  
"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones."

### **Who is your favourite saint?**

My favourite saint is St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Her unwavering dedication to serving the poorest of the poor with love and humility inspires me deeply. She embodied Christ's call to love others selflessly, and her example reminds me to see the face of Jesus in everyone I meet.





# Songs, Speeches & Sweet Memories: Celebrating Graduation 2024

*By Laura Neeson*

The 2024 Areté Centre Graduation Night was a heartwarming celebration of faith, friendship, and achievements. Layla Estasy delivered a heartfelt student address, reminiscing about the memories shared throughout the year, while Danny Clark expressed gratitude to the staff, faculty, mentors, and volunteers who made the journey possible.

A highlight of the evening was the students' traditional thanksgiving hymn, made even more special this year by Dominique Farah's original song, *Velis et Remis*, performed

as a duet with Joseph Wehbe, and accompanied by her husband on guitar and her son on backing vocals.

The celebration continued with a packed dinner at Enzo's Restaurant, where graduates and guests enjoyed fellowship, shared memories, and cut a celebratory cake.

It was a fitting conclusion to a transformative year, sending forth graduates inspired and ready to continue their mission.

Congratulations to the Areté Centre Class of 2024!



# VELIS ET REMIS

*Lyrics & music by Dominique Farah*

## Verse 1:

Life is a journey, not meant to be taken alone  
We forget You are there, thinking we can do it on our own  
We are made for a purpose: to love You and our neighbour  
So we offer our lives in surrender to you, Our Father.

## Refrain:

You are the wind in our sails moving us forward  
We are your Church, called to mission, called to love and know you more  
To make your kingdom come, we must all remember this:  
Sails and oars, velis et remis!  
Velis et remis!

## Verse 2:

In a world that can often feel so cold and dark  
Give us courage to be the ones who ignite that first spark  
Enlighten our minds and illumine our hearts  
So we may use our gifts to serve as one body with many parts.  
(Refrain)

## Verse 3:

When the pull of the enemy becomes too much  
Come and find us, come embrace us, let us feel Your healing touch  
Holy Spirit, source of wisdom, source of light  
Reveal to us anew the saving love of Jesus Christ.

## Final refrain:

You are the wind in our sails moving us forward  
We are your Church, called to mission, called to love and know you more  
To make your kingdom come, we must all remember this:  
Sails and oars, velis et remis! (x4)

You are the wind in our sails moving us forward  
We are your Church, called to mission, called to love and know you more  
To make your kingdom come, we must all remember this:  
Sails and oars, velis et remis!  
Velis et remis!



# **A Journey of Faith, Loss, and Unexpected Blessings.**

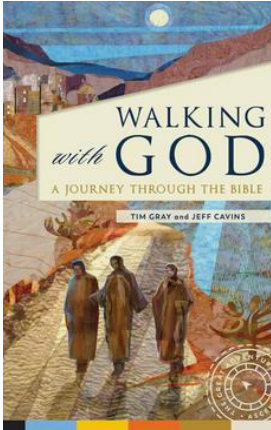
*By Felicity Chang*

2024 was a chaotic year for me, from starting a new job after an eight-year hiatus to losing my beloved father. There were times when I felt so overwhelmed by everything – physical exhaustion, mental stress, emotional overload or spiritual attacks – that I was ready to give up. But every time I doubted my worth, every time I felt that I was walking alone, God sent one of His angels to me – Fr Chris, Laura, and so many past and present Areté students – to comfort me, reassure me, or just to give me a much-needed hug.

Having the opportunity to work alongside the great minds of Fr Chris and Laura, both experts in their respective fields and so God-centred, was an absolute blessing. It was also amazing to witness the Holy Spirit moving and transforming the students, getting them all fired up to be missionaries.

I never thought that I would ever work in an event management-type role within a religious organisation - this being so far removed from my professional training and expertise. Yet I know now, I am exactly where God wants me to be. He met me where I was, refined me, moulded me and sent me forth. He has bestowed blessing upon blessing. My cup runneth over!

# Watch | Read | Listen



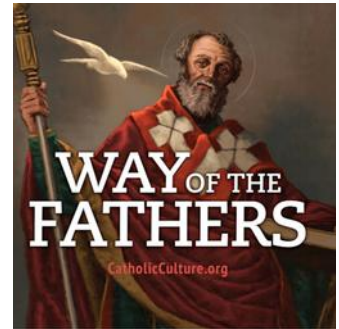
## Walking with God by Tim Gray and Jeff Cavins

Walking with God presents the Bible as a unified story of salvation, guiding readers from Genesis to Revelation with clarity and depth. Tim Gray and Jeff Cavins expertly connect Old and New Testament events, revealing how they point to Christ and the Church.

Accessible yet rich in insight, this book is perfect for anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of Scripture and grow closer to God. A must-read for personal study or group discussion!

## The Way of the Fathers – catholicculture.org

A podcast about the Fathers and Doctors of the Church—the foundational figures of Christian history. Hosted by Dr. Jim Papandrea; seasons 1-3 were hosted by Mike Aquilina. Listen to this podcast on: Apple Podcasts | Spotify | RSS feed | YouTube Channel.



## Mary of Nazareth (2012)

Director: Giacomo Campiotti

Mary of Nazareth, starring Alissa Young, is a captivating portrayal of the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, exploring her journey of faith, courage, and unwavering trust in God's plan. The film's greatest strength lies in the inspired casting of Alissa Young as Mary. Her performance radiates both grace and humanity, bringing to life Mary's profound spiritual depth and her tender, maternal love. With its compelling narrative and exceptional performances, Mary of Nazareth is a beautiful tribute to the Mother of God and a must-watch for the Advent and Christmas season. Watch it on the FORMED App.

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WITH BILL DONAGHY

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SATURDAY, 18 JANUARY 2025

Join Bill Donaghy for a 2.5-hour immersive experience exploring wonder through art, music, and theology. Reignite child-like amazement and embrace the beauty of human connection and creation. Let's journey back to joy!

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