



JOHN PAUL II CENTRE FOR LIFE

*Loving, serving and defending
life, marriage and family*

John Paul II Centre for Life c/- Catholic Diocese of Christchurch, PO Box 4544, Christchurch 8041 ☎ 022 503 9249

🌐 jp2.org.nz
✉ info@jp2.org.nz 📘 [jp2centre](https://www.facebook.com/jp2centre)

The John Paul II Centre for Life is entering another season, with a new Director taking on responsibility for development of programmes and revamp of the website. We are delighted to welcome Theresa Klaassens who has been appointed by the Board to this important post. A brief bio is included in this newsletter.



Image used with kind permission from artist Therese Jackman

As we journey through Advent, our thoughts turn to the mystery of Christ taking on a human form, amazingly becoming one of us in order to become one WITH us and in this way achieve our salvation. The intimate union God desires with us is not limited to our mind and spirit but reaches to the very depths of our flesh. Kristin Collier, Professor of Internal Medicine, draws on recent scientific research to illuminate this profound mystery and the consequent greatness of our human dignity in her reflection on microchimerism and the incredible connectedness and cooperation that exists between a mother and her unborn child. We have featured her extensive article in this issue as it is a wonderful witness to God's infinite goodness and greatness. As Mary "pondered the words that were said about Him", we invite you, too, to meditate on these words during this liturgical season.

I offer my personal thanks to all of you - our esteemed supporters - who have made it possible through your sacrifices, for the John Paul II Centre for Life to continue working as leaven in our culture to defend life, and to strengthen marriage and the family. I am so grateful to each one of you. As I retire, I also wish to convey how thankful I am for the opportunity afforded me to serve the cause of life during my 18 years of association with the JP II Centre (and its predecessor, the Family Life Centre). I hope to see you at our Thanksgiving Mass at the ProCathedral, 7.30pm on 6th December, where you will have an opportunity to meet our incoming Director. An RSVP would be appreciated if you can attend, so that we provide adequate supper afterwards in the Narthex.

May our dear Lord bless you abundantly this Christmas.

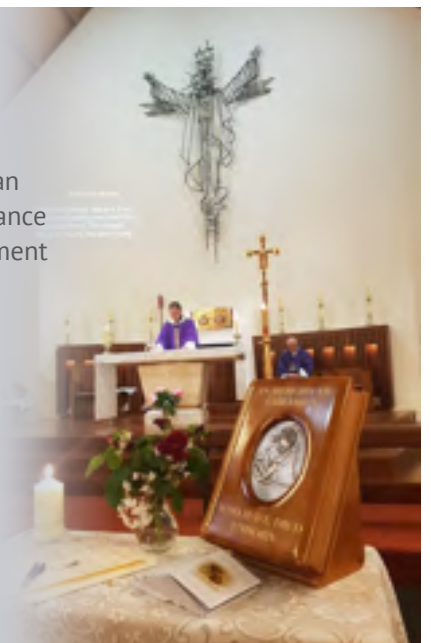
Shalom, **Maria Schmetzer**

The 2022 Mass of Remembrance

The John Paul II Centre for Life hosted its annual Mass of Remembrance on the 9th of November at St Theresa's Church, Riccarton, to commemorate and pray for all children who died before or at birth, and for their families. This was a beautiful way to acknowledge those who are not here with us today in a tangible way, as many families struggle to grieve properly, with no body to bury and no public way to mourn their loss or recognition for the immensity of their loss. At the Mass of Remembrance, attendees had

the opportunity to write the name of an unborn child in the Book of Remembrance and to light a candle in acknowledgement of this life. The mass was one of great peace and healing as attendees were assured of God's love, and mercy.

We extend an invitation to anyone who wished to come but was not able to, to visit the Adoration Chapel at St Gregory's Church in Bishopdale, where you can inscribe your child's name in the Book of Life.



Some Human Beings Carry Remnants of Other Humans in Their Bodies

by Kristin M. Collier

Relationship is at the heart of the scriptural narratives of our redemption. In them we are told of a creator God who makes himself known to his people, who loves and cares for his children through intimate relationship, who is physically present with them, and desires that none of them should perish.

God himself, the maker of all things, enters into a relationship with mankind through a covenant in a way that is physical, intimate, and eventually, incarnate. From the very beginning of the creation of man, God is said to have “walked” with man...in the “cool of the garden with Adam and Eve and speaking to them by name.” Thus, from the beginning, we see a God who is anything but distant from mankind. Eventually coming ever closer to his people through his creative and redemptive act in his Son, God’s children bear the very image of God himself in Jesus Christ, the Lord Emmanuel.

The Psalmist writes that each one of us is created in a loving way by God who “knitted us together” in our mother’s womb. Anyone who knits knows the love, creativity, patience, intentionality and vision that is involved in that craft. In the mother’s uterus, God is involved in the creation of a person at the cellular level in a way that is active, personal, relational and physical. In the Genesis account, Adam was formed by bringing together earthly matter and spirit from God to form God’s son from earth. “*The Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.*” Adam was not conceived; he was formed. Later, Eve was taken from Adam in order that man should not be alone. Thereafter, through Eve, “the mother of all living” all of mankind would come into being through conception.

Conception is rooted in the Latin, “to take from.” We see the first conception of life through woman in Genesis 4:1, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.’” We see conception as this beautiful process, which God enables through woman, to bring forth human life. In Luke’s gospel, we find the same bringing forth of our Lord incarnate. Because of his love for the world, God chose to send his eternal Son Jesus, to be conceived a man of flesh and sinew through the body of his mother, Mary. The Father conceived of both divinity and humanity together in Mary’s womb. Thus, in Mary, God joined together Heaven and earth. “*The Holy Spirit will come upon [Mary], and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God*” (Lk. 1:35).

Through Jesus, the Father enters into a physical relationship with humanity through his union by the Spirit with our flesh in his Son Jesus Christ. This beatific union of relationship between the Father and his Son Jesus Christ is a witness of the bond between God and man, not just at the personal level, but at the cellular level as well. It is in Mary’s womb where God brings together things of heaven and things of

earth. God truly becomes one with mankind by becoming a man. Thus, there is a relational-personal-cellular construct in humanity, witnessed through creation, and testified through the incarnation of the Lord.

We see this relational construct illuminated at the level of the cells, between a mother and her prenatal child, beginning shortly after conception. In a mother’s womb following conception, God is building between mother and child an anatomic masterpiece, a relational organ, that can only be described as amazing: the human placenta. Like God’s hand reaching out for man as depicted in Michelangelo’s art on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel, baby and mother can be thought of as reaching out for one another at a physiological level to build the placenta. The placenta is therefore considered a fetomaternal organ because it is made by both the baby and mother (and Providence). The placenta is the only purposely transient organ in humans and is the only single organ that is created by two people in cooperation. Through the placenta, mother and prenatal child interface. In one organ we see the function of what is usually performed by multiple organs and systems. The placenta provides the function normally assumed by one’s lungs and kidneys and additionally has metabolic, thermo-regulatory, endocrine and immune function.

Historically, the placenta has been called the “afterbirth” as it is delivered after the baby and it has long been considered nothing more than an afterthought. This, however, is changing. The National Institute of Health (NIH) is researching the placenta in a \$50 million dollar project in order to better understand its role. As the *NIH website* says, “The placenta is arguably one of the most important organs in the body.”

In addition to the creation of the placenta, the interconnectedness between the prenatal child and her mother is intimate and more profound than previously believed. We know that genetic material from the prenatal child crosses through the placenta and can be found in her mother’s circulation. This DNA is analyzed in some of the prenatal screening tests done to look for chromosomal abnormalities. The interaction at the level of genetic material however between mother and prenatal child goes much beyond that of a transient crossing of genetic material into maternal circulation. This is illustrated in what is called “microchimerism.”

The “chimera” in Greek Mythology is the fire breathing creature that is made of three distinct creatures - a lion’s head, a goat’s body and a serpent’s tail. In science,

“Both mother and child create together the masterpiece of the placenta. This is the only organ that is created by two people in cooperation. Through the placenta, the growing baby sends some of his own cells into his mother - cells that integrate into the mother, and last for her lifetime. This radical mutuality at the cellular level challenges our longstanding ideas about human beings existing as singular autonomous individuals.”

microchimerism is the presence of a small population of genetically distinct and separately derived cells within an individual. The growing baby sends some of her cells across the placenta into her mother in a way that we are only beginning to understand. These cells migrate to various sites of maternal tissue and integrate into them. They then assume the function of the surrounding tissue and begin to function as such. The presence of fetal cells in maternal tissue is known as fetomaternal microchimerism.

Microchimeric cells have been found in various maternal tissues and organs, such as the breast, bone marrow, skin, liver and brain. Early and late effects of these cells have been hypothesized. Some of these cells appear to target sites of injury and may help mother heal after delivery by integrating into the Cesarean section wound and helping to produce collagen. Fetal cells may be involved in the process of lactation by signaling the mother’s body to make milk. Others have been thought to help protect a mother against breast cancer later in life. This process likely involves negotiation and cooperation between mom and baby at the cellular level. Researchers are in the early stages of attempting to understand the full function of these cells, but some models suggest that some of these cells continue to aid the mother years after her baby is born and may even influence spacing of future siblings. There is increasing evidence that fetomaternal microchimerism persists lifelong in many childbearing women and may have important implications for the immune status of women. Some studies suggest that fetal cells protect women against autoimmune disorders. The full significance of fetomaternal microchimerism remains unclear and in some studies the cells have been linked to higher rates of diseases. The reality of this process challenges our longstanding ideas about human beings existing as singular autonomous individuals.

Human beings carry remnants of other humans in their bodies. This process is bidirectional, as you would expect in a relationship. Male cells may occur in the blood of as many as 8-10% of healthy women without sons and no history of abortion or pregnancy loss. This may be the result of a phenomenon called “the vanishing male twin” or could be the cells that entered her mother’s circulation from a previously carried male child, and then entered her own circulation. Identical twins exchange these cells through their shared placenta. The end result of these processes is that many of us are interconnected at the cellular level. What is truly amazing is that these cells are not inert. It would be one thing to have the cells from another person in your body and for them to do nothing. But it is another thing entirely that these cells become integrated into maternal



God inscribing a child's fingertip by Alice Curtis

tissue and are active and working in ways that we are just beginning to understand. This is radical mutuality at the cellular level. Think about mothers who have lost both prenatal and postnatal children, and how they have longed for their children still to be with them in some way, and now we see that they are in fact. What can we deduce from this mother-child cellular interconnectedness? We can say that Mary not only carried the Son of God in her body when he was in her womb, but that she likely carried his cells in her body throughout her life in a way that further magnifies her position as the glorious Theotokos.

The existence of the placenta and fetomaternal microchimerism provide glimpses into the cooperation and interconnectedness that exists at the cellular level between mother and child in the relational biology of mankind, which God has magnificently designed. The mother-child symbiosis serves as a beautiful example of God’s relational creation in a way that speaks to interconnectedness, mystery, and beauty. The ultimate mystery and beauty is seeing this process as having taken place through our Lord Jesus Christ who was conceived through this same biological process in the womb of his mother, Mary. What amazing love God has for mankind that he would come to earth in the flesh through the conception of Jesus the Son in the womb of a woman, to join himself to man at the cellular level in order to physically redeem and reconcile mankind to himself through his Son’s birth, death and resurrection. In the words of St. Augustine:

Man’s maker was made man, that He, Ruler of the stars, might nurse at His mother’s breast; that the Bread might hunger, the Fountain thirst, the Light sleep, the Way be tired on its journey; that the Truth might be accused of false witness, the Teacher be beaten with whips, the Foundation be suspended on wood; that Strength might grow weak; that the Healer might be wounded; that Life might die.

Author Kristin M. Collier MD, FACP is an assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan and director of the University of Michigan Medical School Program on Health, Spirituality and Religion.

An Introduction to our new JP2 Director

My name is Theresa and I have taken on the role of Director for the John Paul II Centre for Life. I have recently finished my Management and Marketing degree at Canterbury University. I am excited to put all I have learned, and my life experience, into service at the John Paul II Centre for Life.



“to build a culture which affirms life, marriage and family” has always been a goal very close to my heart. Having the opportunity to work directly for this mission at the JP2 Centre, has been an answer to a prayer. I am very excited to take on this role ”

I was raised in a large Catholic, pro-life, home-schooling family in Whakatane and (if it wasn't obvious enough from that description already) was blessed with parents who not only talked about but also modelled the importance of the family in their day to day lives. Because of this, the mission of the JP2 centre "to build a culture which affirms life, marriage and family" has always been a goal very close to my heart. Having the opportunity to work directly for this mission at the JP2 Centre, has been an answer to a prayer. I am very excited to take on this role and I have loved working alongside Maria Schmetzer (the outgoing director) and trying to absorb the immense knowledge and heart that she has for this cause.

I bring to this position experience as a Loving for Life facilitator in Catholic secondary schools around the country. We teach a sexuality and relationship programme which aims to show forth the truth and beauty of the Church's teaching. Having also attended several Theology of the Body courses, I am passionate about helping young adults to learn about the immense dignity of the human person. This teaching, developed by Pope John Paul

II, does a great job of explaining why the human person has value and is made for fulfilling relationships with others and with God, and what true love looks like.

To go alongside this, I'm also in the process of completing my training in the Billings Ovulation Method for Natural Family Planning, which has allowed me to come to a much greater understanding and appreciation of the way a woman's fertility works and how our cycles have been designed.

During my time at the University of Canterbury, I was on the exec of the ProLife Club there. We worked at trying to bring about a culture of life on campus, and ran various workshops, got in speakers, and promoted prolife causes throughout Christchurch and New Zealand.

Next year I'm getting married to an amazing Catholic man who fully shares my deep desire to serve the cause of life. Being the director of the JP2 Centre is an awesome opportunity to merge the skills that I have with what I'm most passionate about. I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity and I look forward to meeting you in person.

Seeds of Hope

The John Paul II Centre has partnered with Be Not Afraid (USA) in a new ministry, Seeds of Hope, to walk alongside families in NZ whose unborn child is diagnosed with a genetic disorder, disability or life-limiting condition. It is very hard for these families to find the support they need to withstand pressure - from medics, family and friends - to abort, and go on to parent a child with special needs. We want families to know that we are there to assist them and we would love to hear from families who have already walked this path and would like to support others throughout the country.

We are delighted to share with you that baby Ava, (pictured here) who has a genetic anomaly, survived birth and is doing well while awaiting heart surgery in Auckland. Congratulations to her parents, Michael and Liza, for their persistence in obtaining the best medical help for their beautiful baby.



JOHN PAUL II CENTRE FOR LIFE ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

Race Night

After a two-year hiatus due to Covid restrictions, the John Paul II Centre for Life Race Night was held in early September.

This ever-popular Spring event attracted people from all over Canterbury to enjoy a night with friends, family and fellow parishioners at Addington Raceway.

Eleven priests vied for the Priest Punter of the Year Trophy. Holding fast to his formula for success (betting on the favourites), Fr Peter Farrant pipped the other padres at the post, winning this coveted trophy for the second time.

We are grateful to all those who supported this fundraiser, through attending and buying raffle tickets, and to our wonderful private and corporate sponsors, not all of whom were Catholic, including Lloyd and

Oli Hickman, Vivace Espresso, Giesen Wines, ThermoKing, Commodore Hotel, Murney Family Trust, Diamond Racing, Riccarton PaknSave, Tudor Foods, CDF and Cranford Alehouse.

We are also indebted to Bernard Smith for the Silent Auction Prizes, two beautiful statues of Our Lady, which he made himself.



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The Selwyn Catholic Parish, with bases at Darfield, Leeston and Lincoln, is a vibrant parish, with ongoing initiatives founded by a people of deep faith. For more information contact them at 03 325 2770, selwyncatholicparish@gmail.com. Visit them at 31 Gerald Street, Lincoln.



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RICCARTON



JOHN PAUL II CENTRE FOR LIFE

JPII Thanksgiving Mass

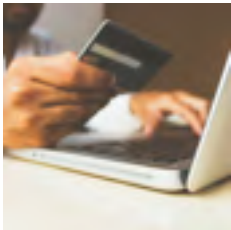
Tuesday 6 December @ 7.30pm
St Mary's Pro-Cathedral Chapel

followed by supper in the Narthex and an opportunity to meet the New Director.

JOHN PAUL II CENTRE FOR LIFE

We are a Charitable Trust with a small team of part time staff, a volunteer Trust Board AND A BIG MISSION.

For ways to donate see our website: www.jp2.org.nz



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