



Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst

## Christmas Message 2025

by

**Very Rev. Dr Brian Boyle, Diocesan Administrator**

Hello, my name is Brian Boyle, I'm the Administrator of the Sandhurst Diocese, in the period in which we are waiting for the appointment of our new bishop, and I'd like to offer this reflection for Christmas 2025.

Recently, I had the good fortune to be in Spain again, on annual holidays. This was my third visit to Spain, and probably, my last visit. I went in through Barcelona, the great city in Catalonia in the north of Spain, and I particularly went there to see the Church of *Sagrada Familia*, or what we would call the 'Holy Family'.

I first saw the Church about 25 years ago, and this was the third time I've been back. So, it was wonderful to see the progress that has been made on the building of this Church during this time.

The Church is the work of the great Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi; and in fact, most of Barcelona has many of the projects and architectural works of Gaudi in the city, but *Sagrada Familia* would have to be his masterpiece. It was begun in the 1890s, and by the time that Gaudi himself died in 1926 – in rather tragic circumstances – only part of the Church had been completed.

But now, nearly 100 years after Gaudi's death. They are getting very close to completing his masterpiece in Barcelona. If you go into the church, you would imagine it would look like most other churches, but it does not. Instead of pillars, there are what look like trees, and you have this sense of entering an enormous sacred forest, full of all these icons and images that he's put there. I'm sure that, in time, once it's completed, *Sagrada Familia* will take its place with many of the other great Christian churches of the world; places like *Hagia Sophia* in Istanbul, or St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

The Church invites you to see things that are familiar, statues, crucifixes, representations, divine images, all of which we are familiar with, but the way in which Gaudi presents these, and arranges these, and even depicts these, is really very different and very unique. It's an exquisite feast of the human senses and an exquisite feast of the human imagination

The Church takes as its theme – like most Christian churches – Incarnation; God becoming a human being in the person of Jesus himself. So, the eastern door is called the 'Nativity' door, and all the

statues depict the event of Jesus' birth. The western door on the other side of the Church is called the 'Death' door, it represents the crucifixion and death of Jesus and his resurrection.

Interestingly, the chief engineer in charge of the final section of the building of *Sagrada Familia* is an Australian. He's been working on the project for several decades and, bit by bit, he's worked his way up through the hierarchy to become now the chief engineer of the final part of *Sagrada Familia*, begun well over a hundred years ago.

He was in Melbourne about ten years ago and gave a talk at RMIT on the building of SG and many people, like me, went along to hear what he had to say. It was a most engrossing and fascinating talk. After he finished, he invited questions. And of course, one of the people in the room asked the question which represented the elephant in the room. She got up and said, "Why are you building a Church when people don't believe in God anymore?" And immediately, with respect but obviously with great conviction, he said to her: "Oh, Madam, we don't build for the present, we build for the future. And even if this century is one of disbelief, it doesn't mean the next century is going to be the same." In other words, he saw the *Sagrada Familia* as a great monument of faith in this present age; an age when people are very indifferent to religious values, when the Divine is banished from the market square and religion and faith have very little opportunity to present what they want in the public square itself.

Again, this year, 2025, dear friends, we focus on the Christ Child, depicted in this crib in Sacred Heart Cathedral, depicted in many other churches in the same way. We see again the poverty, the obscurity in which this child was born, a fringe dweller greeted by outsiders like shepherds, deliberately identifying with the poor of the world.

The child comes again, this year 2025, into a fractured and violent world. Again, with his message of hope, of love, and of healing.

The story of the birth of Jesus is the story that love always wins out, despite evidence to the contrary. That light will ultimately triumph over darkness. God does not give up on us.

Let us return again to the church of *Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona. Anywhere you stand in Barcelona, you can see the church on the skyline. It's quite an impressive monument; it's a symbol of the constant presence of the divine in this great city of Barcelona, a symbol that God continues to dwell among us as one of us, born again in the Christ Child 2025.

So dear friends, I wish all of you, your families, and your friends, a most blessed and peaceful Christmas 2025.

Thank you.