

# Star MESSSENGER

Dear Brothers and Champagnat Marists

Last week, *Logo*, this week, *Icon*.

The Icon reproduced here was especially commissioned for the Province. *Mary, Star of the Sea*, tenderly holding her Son and presenting Him to the nations of the Province over which she casts her luminousness.

In recent decades, the West has rediscovered Icons, and many people have found them a tangible aid to prayer. They are considered to be soul windows, entrances into the presence of the Holy.

Many of us are familiar with *lectio divina*, sacred reading, but fewer with *visio divina*, or sacred seeing. Icons, in a very particular way, call the viewers to a posture of prayer by connecting them with God through the use of holy figures and scenes. The icon itself is intended to offer a loving, heavenly gaze to the viewer. In technical terms, viewers don't look at an icon, they "read" it.

Not only is 'reading' an Icon a form of prayer, but the creation of an Icon is an exercise in prayer, littered with symbolism from materials to practice. Because icons tell a larger story, the content of the images is of the utmost importance. The result is intended to be a window into the transcendent. Look carefully at the Icon of 'Mary, Star of the Sea'. What do you see? Icons serve as invitations to keep our eyes open while praying. It is prayer to just look attentively at an icon and let God speak. The profound beauty of an icon is gentle. It does not force its way. It asks for time spent before it in stillness...gazing. We are invited to enter into the icon and come closer to the Holy One portrayed. Icons are a reminder of God's unconditional love.

The key steps to praying with an Icon are in Marian terms:

1. **Prepare:** Sit comfortably, still the body, focus the breathing.
2. **Ponder:** Take time to look closely at the icon. What do you see?
3. **Ponder and reflect:** What is the icon calling you to be? What is the message for you? What do you hear?
4. **Ponder and respond:** Read the icon once more by gazing on it. Respond in prayer.
5. **Ponder and rest:** Let the image of the icon rest in your heart.
6. **BE:** Give time for this to happen!

Icons serve as bridges to Christ, as links with Mary and the saints, as reminders of pivotal events in our faith journey. We use them to come closer, to cross over.

A warning from writer Maria Hamilton: *"If we are indifferent to the image of God in other people, we won't find the image in icons. One thinks of the advice given to medieval pilgrims: 'If you do not travel with Him whom you seek, you will not find Him when you reach your destination.'"*



WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHAT IS THE ICON CALLING YOU TO BE?



WHAT IS THE MESSAGE FOR YOU? WHAT DO YOU HEAR?

## 2023 Province Prayer Book and Religious Calendar

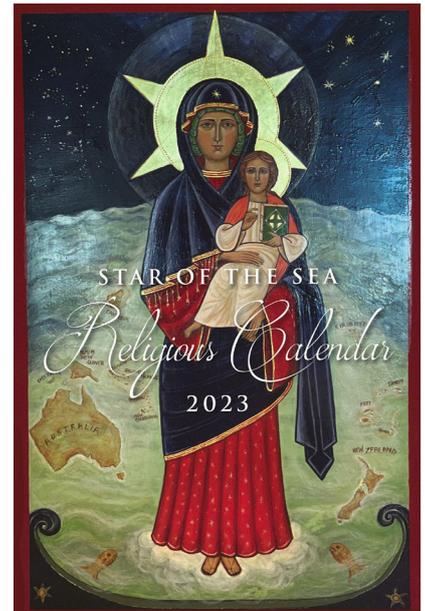
The 2023 *Prayer Book and Calendar* is on its way to communities. The Icon of Mary, Star of the Sea is on its cover.

Sincere gratitude to **Joachim Fabbro** who, for the second year, has been its designer and editor. We are most grateful Joachim, to you and your team of helpers and supporters!



**Br Peter Carroll FMS**

Provincial Designate



## Introducing Dr Ursula Betka, Our Iconographer

Ursula is an artist, iconographer, art historian and writer who was born and lives in Melbourne, Australia. She completed her undergraduate degree in art and design and taught in secondary schools for 12 years. She then returned to study and completed an Honours Degree, Masters and PhD in Art History. It was at this time that Ursula explored the theology and painting method of Byzantine Icons and Italian sacred images on wood panel. She published, painted and lectured in Art History and Iconography at the University of Melbourne for 14 years and then at Latrobe University in Bundoora for 7 years.

In 2002, Ursula also founded the *Elesmere School of Sacred Art*, which includes the teaching of workshop practices in Iconography, Italian tempera painting and gilding on wood panel, Illuminated manuscripts and Glass Painting and gilding. Ursula is an exhibition artist and iconographer who has also completed a number of significant commissions. In 2005, and again in 2018, her Icons were represented on the Australian and International Christmas stamp series commissioned by Australia Post. Her work is represented in Public Collections. Her 2017 solo exhibition,

*Icons & Sanctuary*, donated all profits to providing airfares for the arrival of Syrian refugee families to Australia. She has continued to be involved with the new Syrian community now living in Melbourne. Her *Holy Family* Icon is located in the Chapel at the Marist residence in Fitzroy North and she has previously completed a collection of small icons of St Marcellin Champagnat for the Province of Australia.

