

Horizons

ASH WEDNESDAY ACROSS THE DIOCESE

Heart on Country: A
Transformative Gathering
for First Nations Education

Inspiring our Future
Authors and Editors



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Horizons

FROM THE EDITOR

INGRID MCTAGGART

We Catholics love the metaphor of a journey or path when we want to describe a process and change.

Case in point, the journey from Lent to Easter is not a straight line; it's a slow walk with moments of pause to reflect, pray and look beyond ourselves. Lent asks us to sit with the harder realities of life, both personal and global, rather than rush past them.

Starting with Ash Wednesday, we're reminded of our shared humanity, fleeting and fragile. Those ashes quietly tell us that none of us walks alone, a reminder that what affects one affects all. The beautiful images of Ash Wednesday celebrated across our diocese are a visual representation of this - different places, different communities, all receiving the same symbolic mark, bringing us all together.

It's impossible to ignore the world around us. News of conflict, division, and suffering reaches us daily, and it can feel overwhelming, leaving us in a state of dread. As a journey,

Horizons is a conduit for news and information, helping to bind the Toowoomba Diocese together. The magazine aims to promote the work of our Diocese's Parishes and Ministries so God's mercy, love and the joy of the Gospel are experienced, celebrated and shared.

We wish to acknowledge the Aboriginal people God placed upon this land, the first custodians and caretakers of the land upon which we now build our lives and gather to worship. We also pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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Lent doesn't offer easy answers; it offers moments to reflect. Through prayer, fasting, and generosity, we can respond not with despair or indifference, but with compassion and kindness. As a destination, Easter doesn't deny pain; it arrives passing through it. Easter reminds us that love is stronger than violence and light breaks through darkness.

As we continue our march toward Easter, the invitation is to carry hope beyond ourselves. Let it shape how we speak, how we treat others, and how we pray for a world that desperately needs healing. Amongst the chocolates, lollies, bunnies and bilbies, we can remember that we may not be able to change everything, but we can choose to be people who live the promise of Easter.

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Cover image: St John's School Roma student receives ashes. See how we celebrated Ash Wednesday across our diocese on page 4.

TOWARDS EASTER AND SYNOD 26

Our common journey through the season of Lent towards Easter festivities has arrived early this year.

As we move into the plans and hopes we have for this year, Lent provides us the chance to take hold of important things that can colour our perspective on all that lies ahead. The call of Lent should never be just for the 40 days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Our attitude to these Lenten basics should offer us much for the way we live each day. As I said in my Ash Wednesday homily: When we fast, we loosen our grip on comfort; when we give, we loosen our grip on self; when we pray, we loosen our grip on control. All these Lenten fundamentals lead us to making space for God's possibilities... and they can be surprising to say the least!

Once again, we face Easter joy with serious concerns for a world avoiding peace and one that is too eager to engage in conflict, even war. We find it hard to make sense of this as it taints our world which too easily accepts a spiral of violence as a way forward.

When we are deeply saddened by fighting and the futility of war, we know that the light of Easter faith is rising in us. Our risen Saviour submitted himself to violence and death, to show that Christ is intimately connected to those who are suffering through the outrage of conflict. The One who conquered death tells us that we cannot find life through anger or destructive behaviour. May this Easter light move warring parties to dialogue and reconciliation.

Our significant journey as a Diocese this year is towards our SYNOD 2026. We have established that 23/24 October will be the days for this important gathering towards our future. My hope is that this event, which is not just these two days, but all the events that lead up to it, will embrace the length and breadth of the Toowoomba Diocese. Soon, you will receive information about the "listening sessions" that will be held right across the Diocese and that will form the foundation of the work of the Synod.



Bishop Ken Howell, Project Compassion Launch and Commissioning 2026

As I said in the Proclamation of the Synod last year: I warmly encourage the active participation of all laity, religious, and clergy in this Synod. Each member of our Diocese brings a unique perspective and a valuable contribution, and it is essential that we create an inclusive environment where everyone feels empowered to share their insights. The fruitfulness of this Synod experience will depend on our collective commitment to listening,

learning, and working together for the common good of our Church. Please pray for the success of our Synod.

Blessings to you and your loved ones as together we walk towards Easter celebrations.

Bishop Ken Howell
Bishop of Toowoomba
March 2026



Ash Wednesday

St Ursula's College
Toowoomba

With the beginning of the season of Lent, schools and parishes across the Toowoomba Diocese gathered for Ash Wednesday liturgies, marking the start of a solemn journey of preparation for Easter. In moments filled with stillness and reflection, students, staff and parishioners received the sign of the cross in ash, hearing the timeless call: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." This pictorial feature captures moments of quiet contemplation, introspection and communal prayer.

St Joseph's College Toowoomba



St Mary's School Goondiwindi



Assumption College Warwick



Ash
Wednesday

Sacred Heart Primary School Toowoomba



Sacred Heart School Cunnamulla



St Stephen's School Pittsworth



Holy Name Primary School Toowoomba



“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

St Maria Goretti School Inglewood



Downlands College Toowoomba



St Joseph's School Millmerran



St Saviour's Primary School Toowoomba



Mary MacKillop Catholic College Highfields



St John's School Roma



St Mary's College Toowoomba



Our Lady of the Southern Cross College Dalby



St Joseph's School Stanthorpe





YOUNG HEARTS ON FIRE AS ACYF FANS THE FLAMES OF FAITH

INGRID MCTAGGART, DIOCESE OF TOOWOOMBA

If you could bottle the energy of the 6,000 young people who converged on Melbourne for the 2025 Australian Catholic Youth Festival (ACYF), it would be enough to light up the whole city! For three unforgettable days, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre became a place where faith came alive through music, conversation, prayer, laughter and friendship. The Toowoomba group included an eclectic mix of clergy, parishioners, and school representatives. The group included Bishop Ken Howell, Rachel Pingel, Diocesan Youth Ministry Officer, Fr

BJ Perrett, Fr Bony Abraham with Warwick parishioners and school leaders from Assumption College, Fr Nathan Webb with Stanthorpe parishioners and student leaders from St Joseph's School and Principal Mr Andrew Kendall, Mrs Megan Mahoney and Mrs Gianna Zanatta-Blaxland.

For many young people, it was more than just an event. It was an encounter. "ACYF is unlike anything else in the church today. It's a place where faith comes alive," shared Rachel, who witnessed firsthand

how even those who "wouldn't call themselves religious" encountered God simply through the music and atmosphere. "Modern worship music truly is a bridge." Said Rachel. "The new songs, the bands, the enthusiasm, and the authenticity of leaders like Fr Rob Galea and Emmanuel Worship resonate deeply with young people. They speak in a language this generation understands." That sense of possibility, of a Church alive, joyful, and welcoming, was reflected in every corner of the festival.



A large group of young people and leaders from the Toowoomba Diocese travelled to Melbourne for ACYF 2025.

DAY ONE: PILGRIMS OF HOPE

For many in the Toowoomba Diocese group, the festival began the moment their feet hit Melbourne’s streets. The festival kicked off with a three-kilometre pilgrimage walk from St Patrick’s Cathedral to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. For student leaders from St Joseph’s School Stanthorpe, gathering and walking with so many other young people was a highlight. The pilgrim walk set the tone: this was a movement, a mission, a witness of joyful faith.

The opening plenary session kept the energy going with musical performances and a warm welcome from church leaders. Archbishop Peter Comensoli, Melbourne Archdiocese, offered encouragement to the young people gathered before introducing a special message recorded by Pope Leo for

ACYF. During his message, the pontiff reflected on two young saints, Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati. Both differ in their approach to faith and in their personalities, “Yet, they both had a profound relationship with God and sought to do his will in their lives; as a result, we can see from their photos that they radiated a deep joy in their eyes.” Reflected Pope Leo.

Delivering the keynote address, Cardinal Mykola Bychok’s testimony left a lasting impression. Speaking of the power of prayer, he urged young people to remain close to Christ. He concluded by leading a decade of the Rosary for peace, a moment of stillness in a festival alive with energy.

Annika McAlister from Warwick described the plenary sessions as her personal highlight, “The feeling in this moment is indescribable. Looking around to see so many youth, singing to and worshipping God is

incredibly beautiful.” She added that as a young Catholic who often feels alone in her faith, seeing thousands like her “really touched my soul. I have hope in our future as Catholics.”

DAY TWO: A CHURCH THAT LOOKS LIKE THE WORLD

For many, one of the most transformative experiences was seeing the universal church alive in its global diversity. From Eastern Rite liturgies to international speakers, ACYF showcased a church far bigger than what most young people see day to day. Nick Gasparin from Stanthorpe said, “ACYF was an experience I will remember for the rest of my life. Observing thousands of young people on fire for Christ opened my eyes and ignited my faith.” He went on to describe listening to Sr Mary Grace and experiencing a Holy Qurbana from the Syro-Malabar community as “a privilege.”

Sr Mary Grace from the New York-based Sisters of Life delivered a powerful message of being seen, known, and loved by the Lord as part of day two’s opening plenary session. “I never knew that God had a unique plan for me.” Sr Mary Grace told the crowd. “I thought God just expected me to make the most of it... But it wasn’t until I experienced God’s love inside of me that I began to believe that he not only cares about what’s going on, on the outside of our lives, but he created me to find him on the inside.”



Photo Credit: Thomas Webb.



Some took the opportunity to do some sight-seeing. Photo Credit: Ava Naug.



Warwick ACYF team, including students from Assumption College Warwick.



Bishop Ken Howell enjoyed a relaxed chat with Toowoomba Diocese pilgrims.
Photo Credit: Ava Naug.



Bishop Ken Howell (centre) with St Joseph's School Stanthorpe 2026 Student Leaders.



World Youth Day Cross and Icon on display at ACYF.
Photo Credit: Ava Naug.



St Joseph's School Stanthorpe leaders.



ENCOUNTERS THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Everywhere you turned at ACYF, there were moments of deep encounter, whether through worship, conversation, or moments of silence.

For Fr Bony Abraham of Warwick, the most powerful part was simply watching the young people discover they weren't alone, "Large gatherings like ACYF offer something unique... they draw young people into a collective joy. They allow them to see, often for the first time, thousands of other young Catholics who are passionate about their faith or sincerely searching for it. In that atmosphere, they discover that they are not alone."

Another highlight was the World Youth Day Cross and Icon, which were entrusted to the youth by Pope St John Paul II in 1984. These symbols of Christ's love for humanity have been carried around the world, making a pilgrimage from parish to parish, diocese to diocese, and country to country, including our own diocese prior to World Youth Day Sydney 2008. Fr Chris Ryan MGL delivered a keynote address with a prayer experience with the cross and icon. He reminded us, "If you need to know if God loves you; if you need to know if God really cares about you, look to the cross of Jesus."

The cross and icon will next tour Korea in the lead-up to World Youth Day 2028 in Seoul.

DAY 3: SENT FORTH WITH JOY

The festival concluded with a grand commissioning Mass, "nothing run-of-the-mill," as one participant noted. The Melbourne Youth Orchestra and Trinity College Choir are lifting voices and hearts in worship.

Chris Gasparin from Stanthorpe said the Mass was a standout moment for him, highlighting the universality of the church. "Young people from all walks of life, all regions of Australia and overseas, different rites, different cultures, prayer styles, at different places in their faith journey, yet all connected by one common aspect: Jesus Christ and His Church."

As Archbishop Peter Comensoli sent the young pilgrims out with the words "Go. You are sent," the message was clear: ACYF isn't something that stays in Melbourne. It's an experience young people carry home to their parishes, their friends, their families, and their future.

Our own Bishop Ken captured the spirit of the moment after a one-on-one meeting with pilgrims from the Toowoomba Diocese, "It's great to be alive in the church today... I've seen the church very alive here these past few days."

Fr Nathan Webb of Stanthorpe reflected on the experience, "It was a joy to share the experiences of ACYF with the young people of the diocese... To unite in such vigour, fervour, and joy lifted my spirits. The church is very much alive."

ACYF shows us what's possible: a Church that is alive, joyful, and welcoming, especially for the next generation. Let's bring that spirit home. Let's give our young people the chance to experience a Church that sings, celebrates, and invites them to meet Jesus in a real way.



Photo Credit: Thomas Webb.



Photo Credit: Thomas Webb.



Priests of the Toowoomba Diocese gathered at Holy Spirit Seminary, Banyo, for their annual retreat.

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD AND RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

FR MICHAEL O'BRIEN, ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL

For many of the priests of our diocese, the annual retreat is a time of remembering, not only previous retreats, but also as we gather at Holy Spirit Seminary, the days of being in this place in another era. I'm sure the memories come flooding back, the memorable times and the not so!

This was the starting point for our retreat director this year, Fr Gerard Kelly. Fr Gerard is a priest of the Archdiocese of Sydney, ordained in 1980. He has worked extensively in the areas of ecclesiology, sacramental theology and ecumenism, mainly within the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

Fr Gerard invited us from the beginning to take a moment to relate to our God in the sense of remembering our place in history. The invitation was to know that God has positioned us at this time

with priests before and priests after us. When remembering, we are called to not fall into the trap of nostalgia, which entices us to remain in the past - to long for what has gone. When we do this, we are without hope. Lamenting in the scripture writings is not about nostalgia, it is about remembering, and looking forward with a new heart.

“Nostalgia is a failure to recognise that God is alive in the present, just as God was alive in the past, and the living God is leading us into the future.”

And so this began our journey with Fr Gerard. The paths he took us along included an understanding of God's time – Kairos and the change of era in which we exist, the struggle of listlessness and loss of faith at times, perspectives on the Eucharist, pastoral ministry as a ministry of mercy, the priest's prophetic

office, place of the word of God in our lives and the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

It was a wonderfully wide-ranging time of reflection and new knowledge. I'm sure we have all gained spiritual depth through the insights of Fr Gerard and we are grateful for his time with us.

“I think we live with a certain tension is our own dealings with God. We can be caught between, on the one hand, the otherness of God, the majesty of God, the distance of God from us, and on the other hand, the closeness of God and our intimacy with God. Both of these are important; both are, in a very real way, about a relationship with God. How do we keep that balance?”

**Pray for
The Holy Spirit Seminary
as we prepare great men
to become great priests
for Queensland.**

www.seminary.catholic.net.au



Bishop Ken Howell commissioned school leaders as this year's Project Compassion ambassadors.

YOUNG LEADERS CARRY CHRIST'S LOVE INTO PROJECT COMPASSION 2026

JOE KELLY, CARITAS AUSTRALIA

It was great to see a packed St Patrick's Cathedral Toowoomba for the launch Mass of Project Compassion on Sunday 15 February. Sixteen of our schools were represented at the Mass celebrated by Bishop Ken Howell. Leaders from each school processed their school banners into the cathedral at the beginning of Mass, with Bishop Ken commissioning them to be ambassadors for this year's Project Compassion at the conclusion of the liturgy.

Each school received a lantern to remind them that they bring the light of Christ to others, especially during Lent, when our charitable fundraising goes to help projects in the Asia Pacific region, Africa and the Northern Territory. Joe Kelly, Diocesan Director for Caritas, explained to the congregation, "Caritas Australia is able to continue to offer support in areas where other agencies have withdrawn from due to their strong connections on the ground. Over 300 projects were able

to be supported last year due to the tremendous amount - \$10 million dollars that was raised through the Lenten Project Compassion appeal across Australia in parishes and schools.

The need for assistance is always there, and we hope people can be just as generous this year."

Project Compassion is a Lenten fundraising and awareness appeal conducted each year by Caritas Australia. This year's theme, "Unite Against Poverty", calls to mind a poignant moment in John's Gospel (Jn 17.23) when, on the night before he died, Jesus prays that they may all be one. It is a prayer for unity, that his friends will stay together and work together to embody his mission, in which the marginalised are central.



Representatives from schools around the Toowoomba Diocese joined the local parish community to launch this year's Project Compassion appeal.

Be sure to keep an eye out for the iconic donation boxes and envelopes, and listen to the inspiring stories of individuals and partners from around the world who have overcome challenges in their own lives and gone on to become beacons of hope and resilience in their communities. May God bless you for your continued support.

If anyone requires further information about Project Compassion, they are welcome to contact Joseph.kelly@caritas.org.au



PREPARING FOR SYNOD: SPIRITUALITY AND READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

DR DAVID TUTTY, DIOCESE OF TOOWOOMBA

As we prepare for our diocesan synod, it would be helpful to reflect on how best we can engage with the process.

The dynamics of a synod require an ever-deepening spirituality that is rooted in our baptismal call to mission and in our willingness to listen to God's Spirit. A key part of this journey is to collectively 'read the signs of the times' and to seek ways of responding to the needs as best we can.

A synodal spirituality begins with a commitment to humility and ongoing conversion. We are all invited to let go of our own fears, prejudices and ideologies and to deepen our listening skills so that together we can humbly walk this synodal journey. The hope is that this process will deepen our openness to God and to each other so that a faith-filled consensus might grow.

A key part of a synodal spirituality is the call for us to 'read the signs of the times'. This task was given to us firstly by Pope St John XXIII in his 1961 letter *Mater et Magistra* and later by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in their pastoral document *Gaudium et spes*. This asks us to take seriously our context and how best we can respond to the needs and issues we see.

To 'read the signs of the times', Pope St John XXIII draws on the simple method used by Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn. This cardinal had experience ministering amongst those who were poor and he founded a group called the Young Christian Workers. The Cardijn method is best summarized as 'see, judge, act'. We first observe what is happening. We

assess this issue by drawing on best analysis and theological reflection. And then we are called to act in ways that respond to the needs and address the root causes of the issues we see.

We are asked to do this from a particular perspective. Pope Leo XIV asks that we begin with a special love for those who are poor and marginalised. He calls us not only to listen to those who are poor but also to listen with them. Pope Francis asked us to hear the 'cry of the earth' and the 'cry of the poor'. It is with eyes informed by these struggles that we 'read the signs of the times'.

While Pope Leo XIV has been pope only a short time, the issues that he has chosen to raise arise out of his 'reading the signs of the times'.

Our pope has called us to be alongside those who are poor and marginalised. He talks about being a church with and for those who are most poor. In his encyclical *Dilexisti*, he critiques economic systems that generate poverty and inequality. Pope Leo rejects the so-called trickle-down economics and challenges those who are rich living in their comfortable bubbles.

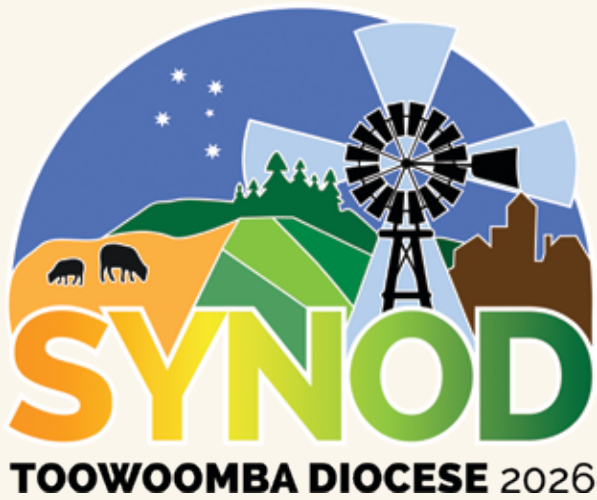
Pope Leo has continued Pope Francis' commitment to hearing the 'cry of the earth' alongside the 'cry of the poor'. Pope Leo is aware that the question of climate change is divisive yet he stands with Pope Francis urgently calling us to reduce our carbon emissions and to live more sustainably on planet earth. Pope Leo sees *Laudato Si'* as a true gift as it calls us to the fullness of conversion.

Our pope has spoken out concerning violence and war. His first words as pope were 'Peace be with you all'. In his recent message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Leo called us to be unarmed and to build dialogues that are disarming. He sees that peace is more than a goal, that it is a presence and a journey that guides and defines our goals. At the heart of this peace is an awakened conscience that frees us from the desire to have power over others.

Pope Leo also recognises the wounds we have inflicted upon indigenous peoples over the centuries. He sees that we need to re-read our history and our reality and that last year's Jubilee for Indigenous peoples was an important moment where we could focus on indigenous history, spirituality and hope. Pope Leo builds on Pope Francis' visit to Canada and has returned 62 indigenous artifacts to Canada.

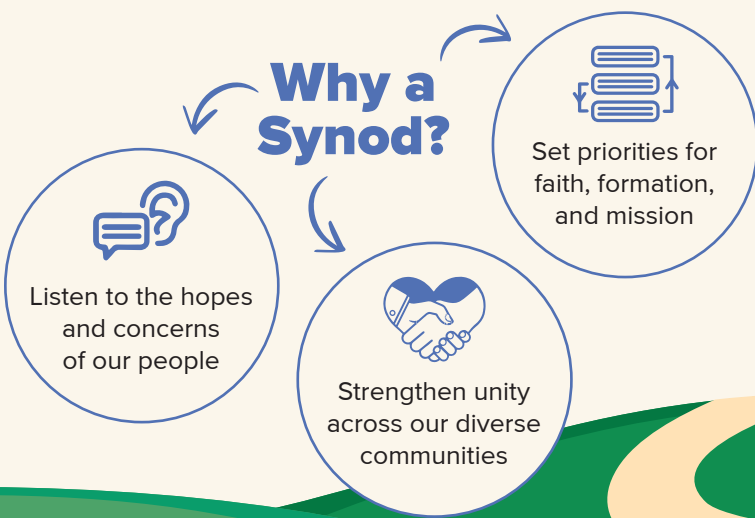
Focusing on how we are church together, Pope Leo has begun a regular Wednesday audience catechesis focusing on the Second Vatican Council and its teachings. Vatican II is the 'guiding star' for the Church's modern journey and he calls us to read again its documents. For Pope Leo, the Council reminds us that 'Jesus Christ radically transforms man's relationship with God, which is henceforth a relationship of friendship ... the only condition of the new covenant is love' (see John 15:15).

For our upcoming synod, we need to read our 'signs of the times' together. This task is spiritual and needs to be shaped by our increasing humility and openness to conversion.



The Toowoomba Diocese is having a **Synod**

A time of **prayer, listening, and discernment** as we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for our future.



How You Can Be Involved?

- Attend listening sessions
- Individual reflection & formation opportunities
- Diocesan-wide prayer

As we listen, discern, and walk together, we invite you to pray this prayer regularly for our Diocesan Synod.

Synod Prayer

Draw near to your people, gracious Father, as together we walk the path of our Diocesan Synod.

You have blessed our Diocese with your mercy, guidance, and strength through many seasons of joy and challenge. Now we seek your wisdom as we discern how best to serve your mission in our world

Send forth your Holy Spirit into these days of seeking, listening, and yearning, that we may recognise your voice, discover your paths, and make Christ known to all.

Illuminate our minds with your light, shape our vision according to your will.

With your Spirit leading us, may there be no limit to our faith, our hope and our endurance.

Through Christ our hope and our companion on the road.

Amen.

Our Lady of the Southern Cross, Pray for us.

April
Conversations in the Spirit – Facilitator Training

May–July
Regional Listening Sessions (open to all)

Every voice valid, clergy, religious, and lay faithful. No expertise needed, just an open heart.

23–24 October
Diocesan Synod Gathering (for Members)

For more information:
www.twb.catholic.org.au/synod
synod@twb.catholic.org.au

Our Life - Our Mission - Our Future



Ecumenical Pastoral Carers gathered at St Patrick's Cathedral for World Day of the Sick.

THE COMPASSION OF THE SAMARITAN INSPIRES PASTORAL CARERS

NICOLE RANGIIRA, ECUMENICAL PASTORAL CARE

Throughout my blessed years as an Ecumenical Pastoral Carer, it continues to be very meaningful to commence each new year with our Commissioning Service. On Tuesday 10 February, Ecumenical Pastoral Carers from Toowoomba and regional communities were welcomed by Bishop Ken Howell to celebrate at St Patrick's Cathedral Toowoomba. We were also pleased to welcome Bishop Cameron Venables (Anglican Church), Rev Dylan Miegel (Uniting Church), and Bishop Ben Henschke (Lutheran Church) to the ecumenical prayer service, as well as other special guests in Pastoral Care leadership. Carers present represented diverse local health care facilities, including Toowoomba Hospital, St Vincent's Private Hospital, St Vincent's Care Services, Toowoomba Hospice, Oakey Hospital and Aged Care Facility and Beauaraba Assisted Living Facility in Pittsworth.

The date of our Commissioning always coincides with the World Day of the Sick. Pope Leo's theme for this year was "The compassion of the Samaritan: loving by bearing another's pain." As Ecumenical Pastoral Carers, we're deeply moved by the Good Samaritan's decision to extend love and compassion. The Good Samaritan gazes upon the wounded man; he stops, attends to his wounds, spends money to meet his needs, and, above all, gives of his time. In very busy health facilities, staff are stretched, the system is very limited, and so the time pastoral carers spend listening to patients/residents and their loved ones is a gift!

Pope Leo explains in his Message for World Day of the Sick 2026, "Love is not passive; it goes out to meet the other. Being a neighbour is not determined by physical or social proximity, but by the decision to love." I never take for granted the extraordinary generosity of God that is reflected in the faithful commitment of our Ecumenical Pastoral Carers. As they each come alongside those who are dying, grieving and suffering in any way, their encounter is an authentic hope to bring God's healing love and mercy. It is our trust in a God who seeks to bring comfort, justice and peace during our times of suffering that enables us to courageously decide to bear each other's pain. It is with heartfelt gratitude that provision is made through the support of our church communities and the health facilities we serve in to pastorally care for all people no matter what they believe.

During the service there was a special time of thanksgiving. We thanked God for the pioneers of Ecumenical Pastoral Care, for their vision, discernment, faith and hard work. We gave thanks for Ecumenical Pastoral Carers who had

recently retired or whose circumstances prevented them from continuing to serve. We prayed for God's love and blessings upon each of them. We also extended our heartfelt gratitude to all those patients and loved ones who have trusted us amid their most vulnerable life experiences. Listening from the heart to their thoughts and feelings and allowing us to lovingly hold hope for their healing is a very privileged, sacred space.

The delicious afternoon tea kindly provided by St Vincent's Private Hospital Toowoomba was enjoyed by all. We all really value sharing the journey with one another.

If you know someone in hospital or aged care who would welcome a Pastoral Care visit, please reach out.

Interested in becoming an Ecumenical Pastoral Carer? Contact Nicole Rangiira on (07) 4616 6415 for more information.

Please pray for our Ecumenical Pastoral Care ministry. May we always know hope.



Ecumenical Pastoral Carers received a blessing from local heads of churches.

NEW ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY TOOWOOMBA LEADERSHIP TEAM SET TO LEAVE THEIR MARK

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY QUEENSLAND



L to R: Mark Copland and Mark O'Brien.

After a well-lived life full of achievements, from becoming a mayor and owning a business, to helping establish the Save the Bilby Fund and touring internationally with a band, Mark O'Brien has taken on one of his biggest challenges yet. The Allora resident was recently appointed President of St Vincent de Paul in Toowoomba, leading local efforts to provide support and hope for Darling Downs residents experiencing homelessness, poverty and other hardships. "I've had a life full of opportunities. It would be wrong if I didn't do something with them," Mr O'Brien said.

Toowoomba remains one of St Vincent de Paul's fastest-growing areas of need in Queensland. In the last financial year, across Toowoomba and the Darling Downs, the Society supported more than 35,000 locals – an increase of more than 65 per cent compared with

2020–21. "It's been a very challenging time for St Vincent de Paul in the Darling Downs, with rising rent costs, increasing living expenses and more locals facing homelessness," Mr O'Brien said. "But it's also an exciting time for us to rise to the occasion, form new connections within the community and remind each other why it's so important to help people in need. I feel lucky to be in this position."

Mr O'Brien has been a Member of the St Vincent de Paul Society for 48 years. Joining him in his goals is another Mark – Mark Copland, the Society's new Executive Officer for the Toowoomba region and a lifelong social justice advocate. "From our Members on the frontline of support, to volunteers in our Shops, and those who donate or purchase from our retail centres, everyone has an important role to play in helping locals doing it tough," Mr Copland said.

The pair share a strong interest in First Nations advocacy. Mr Copland currently sits on the Board of the Goolburri Aboriginal Health Advancement Company, while Mr O'Brien spent "40 beautiful years" working alongside Aboriginal communities in the western Downs. "Being able to spend time with First Australians has been one of the joys of my life," Mr O'Brien said. "I'm keen to help our Society strengthen its reconciliation work."

Another key focus will be growing local youth programs. "We have an incredible team of young servant leaders in Toowoomba, and we want to support them to continue and expand their great work," he said.

To learn more about Membership or volunteering opportunities, visit vinnies.org.au/get-involved.

LEADERSHIP FOCUS FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

RACHEL PINGEL,
DIOCESE OF
TOOWOOMBA

YOUTH LEADER TRAINING

At the end of January, a passionate group of Youth Group leaders gathered for a full day of training and preparation ahead of an exciting new youth ministry launch in Term 2.

The day brought energetic conversation and deep reflection as leaders explored what it truly means to guide young people in faith. Together, they unpacked the heart of youth leadership, the call to be missionary disciples, and practical ways to share the Gospel with authenticity and joy.

By the end of the day, the team left feeling inspired, equipped, and united in their mission, ready to create a vibrant space where young people can encounter Christ and grow in community.

NET 10X LEADERSHIP

This year, I've been blessed with the opportunity to join the NET Ministries 10X Leadership Program for 2026, a journey that began with a transformative 12-day retreat in Peregian Springs alongside the NET Teams for the year ahead.

The formation experience centred deeply on surrendering to Christ and intentionally choosing to make Jesus the Lord of your life. Through powerful teachings, prayer, and shared testimony, we were invited to respond wholeheartedly to that call.

For me, the retreat offered something even more profound: sacred time and space. Moments of personal prayer, group prayer, and praise became truly impactful,



Youth Group leaders enjoyed a day of training facilitated by Rachel Pingel.

grounding me in God's presence and renewing my sense of mission.

Stepping away from everyday noise to encounter God so intentionally has already shaped the way I lead, serve, and live, and I'm grateful for what lies ahead in the 10X journey.



Rosies volunteers Chris, Kim and Jim collecting backpacks from Alison (left) and the Stationery Aid team.

COLLABORATION EASES BACK TO SCHOOL PRESSURE FOR LOCAL FAMILIES

ROSIES FRIENDS ON THE STREET TOOWOOMBA BRANCH

As families across the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region prepared for the new school year, Rosies volunteers once again joined with Stationery Aid to ensure local students could step confidently into their classrooms. This year, 201 book packs were distributed to 81 families, including 180 fully personalised packs tailored to each student's individual booklist. The support reached 31 schools across the region, reflecting both the scale of need and the strength of community collaboration behind the project.

For more than a decade, Rosies has provided generalised backpacks to families in the local community, many of whom we meet through our street outreach and youth engagement programs. These packs have long been a practical lifeline for households doing it tough. However, the introduction of personalised packs, made possible through an ongoing partnership with Stationery Aid that commenced with the 2025 school year, has been profoundly impactful in ensuring that each child has the exact stationery and

books required for their learning. The difference is unmistakable: children proudly holding their new backpacks, excited to see their own name and their own list reflected in what they receive.

Retired teacher and Rosies volunteer Kim Gilliland, spoke about the impact on students' wellbeing and learning. "Having the right supplies gives students a sense of self-respect and pride. You can see how happy and proud they are when they open their packs," she said. "When children don't have what they need, it becomes an obstacle to their learning. These packs help remove that barrier." Volunteers also noted how much pride children took in receiving their own individual backpack, an experience that reinforced the value of personalised support.

This year's distribution also revealed a widening spread of need across the region. Families from an increasing number of schools sought assistance, with many having recently moved due to rental pressures or cost of living challenges. Some of the families

Rosies regularly supports were already receiving help from other organisations, highlighting both the depth of need and the importance of coordinated community responses. The backpack project stood as a clear example of what can be achieved when local groups work together with a shared purpose.

The initiative was made possible through the generosity of the Kela Foundation, Asia Pacific Aerospace and Fairholme College, alongside Rosies' ongoing partnership with Stationery Aid. Their combined support ensured that children across Toowoomba, Oakey, Pittsworth and surrounding communities could begin the school year equipped, confident and included.

This collaboration continues to reflect the heart of Rosies' mission: offering connection, dignity and practical support to those who need it most. The smiles on children's faces - and the relief expressed by parents - speak to the profound impact of this simple but meaningful act of care. To find out more about Rosies, visit rosies.org.au.



Mater Dei Primary School Toowoomba students participating in "Roaming Pictionary".

EMPOWERING TOMORROW'S CHANGEMAKERS AT MINI VINNIES DAY

VINNIES YOUTH TOOWOOMBA

On 27 February, the Toowoomba Vinnies Youth Team ran a Mini Vinnies Day, hosted at St Anthony's Primary School Toowoomba. The day was full of activities, games, and workshops, all aimed at building up and encouraging our Mini Vinnies Crews throughout the diocese while opening their eyes to social justice issues.

Our Mini Vinnies Day aimed to inspire the students in the work they do, in hopes of encouraging a lifelong love of service learning; to remind them they are part of something bigger than themselves; and to give them ideas and equip them for their year of Mini Vinnies work ahead.

In attendance were yr 5/6 students from St Anthony's School, Mater Dei Primary and St Thomas More's Primary Toowoomba, St Francis De Sales School Clifton, Mary Mackillop College Highfields and St Joseph's School Stanthorpe. All the students on the day participated to their full potential, and many ideas and conversations emerged.

While the first half of the day focused on activities around Vinnies, where Mini Vinnies sits in the wider Vincentian community, privilege, homelessness and empathy (all promoting prominent social justice issues), the second half of the day was all about the students, their groups and how they can best run their Mini Vinnies crews within their schools and communities.

This looked like different workshops focused on building and sharing ideas across mixed school groups, promoting teamwork and conversation. Time to get into their own school groups was provided, with schools receiving an action plan to complete, giving them a way forward and something to cement their ideas. These plans were then shared with the entire cohort for the day, and we can't wait to see how they all turn out.

As the day came to a close, we gave the students time to reflect



St Francis de Sales School Clifton students at the conclusion of Mini Vinnies Day.

on what they are truly thankful for in their life and in their school.

Our final moment of the day was spent pledging to the values of a Mini Vinnie and a promise to make a difference in their own world. All the students stood together and said the Mini Vinnies Pledge in unison.

All in all, it was a very successful day with so much positive feedback for our team here in the office. It is always an honour to be able to present something we put time, effort and love into, and watch it play out with so much being taken away from the day by those who attended.



FROM TOOWOOMBA TO THE WORLD: LIVING THE SPIRIT OF MISSION TOGETHER

CATHOLIC MISSION

In 2026, the Catholic Church celebrates a significant milestone: 100 years since the establishment of World Mission Sunday by Pope Pius XI.

This year, Pope Leo XIV has chosen the Theme, “One in Christ, United in Mission”, which calls upon us to recognise unity as the foundation of mission and highlights our shared responsibility to live our faith together. As the Pope’s international mission agency in Australia, Catholic Mission embraces this theme as we mark the 100th anniversary of World Mission Sunday. We wish to highlight that mission is born through a relationship with Christ and with one another, and is lived each day through compassion, prayer, solidarity, and hope.

Here in Toowoomba, this global celebration will come to life in ways that reflect the heart of our own community, grounded in faith, connection and a strong sense of local belonging.

Throughout May, parishioners from across the Diocese are warmly invited to join our Rosary Prayer sessions

online via Teams. Whether you are in the city, on the Downs or in one of our rural communities, these moments of prayer offer a simple but powerful way to stand in solidarity with Catholics across Australia and around the world.

On 29 August, we will host a Mission Ambassador training session in the Conference Room at St Patrick’s Cathedral Centre. This gathering will equip and encourage local leaders from our parishes and schools to share stories of mission, inspire generosity and strengthen the missionary spirit within our own Toowoomba communities.

In October, our young people will come together for a Children’s Mission Day Liturgy. In a Diocese where family, school and parish life are closely connected, this celebration will highlight the joy and generosity of our children, reminding us that the future of the Church is missionary by nature and already alive in their hearts.

As missionary people, we walk together as sisters and brothers, standing alongside communities near and far,

supporting children, communities, and future Church leaders across education, healthcare, and spiritual care. We share their hopes and challenges, building relationships rooted in trust, dignity and mutual respect, and recognising that every community has gifts to offer.

In a world often divided by difference, the centenary of World Mission Sunday offers a powerful reminder: by being united in mission, we become partners in meaningful change. Mission is not something we do alone, but something we live together.

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.”

Corinthians 12:12

To learn more about the work of Catholic Mission and the upcoming activities, visit www.catholicmission.org.au



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HISTORY MAKING DISCOVERY FOR ST VINCENT'S

JANE SMITH, ST VINCENT'S
PRIVATE HOSPITAL TOOWOOMBA



Three generations of doctors – graduated from the University of Sydney. Left to right: Dr Peter Jones (1988), Dr Margaret Sheehy (Jones) (1923), Dr Brian Jones (1954). Used with permission of Dr Peter Jones.

Evidence has recently come to light that the first resident medical officer at St Vincent's Hospital Toowoomba might have been, unusually for the 1920s, a woman.

She is one of a number of pioneering women whose contribution is being celebrated at the hospital during Women's History Month this year.

Dr Margaret Mary Madeleine Sheehy was born in Sydney in 1899. A bright student, in her final year of school she was awarded a "University Exhibition" (scholarship) to study Medicine at the University of Sydney. Margaret began her studies in 1917 and graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery in May 1923, one of only ten women in a graduating class of 100.

According to family history, despite her excellent results Dr Sheehy had trouble finding a job in a hospital due to her gender. Being from a devout Irish Catholic family, she appealed to Archbishop James Duhig of Brisbane, who helped her secure the post in Toowoomba. The Sisters of Charity had officially opened St Vincent's in November 1922 and admitted the first patient in March 1923. While it was served by visiting doctors initially, no evidence has yet been found that any resident doctor was employed before Dr Sheehy arrived in November 1923. It was reported in the "Catholic Press", that, at a reception to farewell her one year later, the committee praised her "high ability and amiable disposition" and spoke of the great respect she had earned from the sisters, honorary medical staff and nurses.

Women in the medical profession at the time faced prejudice from the public and some of their peers, as well as inequality in their working conditions. In 1927 Dr Sheehy took a job at the Kenmore Mental Hospital in Goulburn. She was thrilled at first to be paid the same as her male colleagues, only to discover that her first two pays had been made in error, and that as a

woman she would receive roughly half the rate. She had to go without pay for a while to correct the overpayment.

Margaret Sheehy married Cecil Jones in 1928 and had four children. After a break from medicine to raise her family, she returned to work during the war years, serving at the blood bank and outpatients at the Rachel Forster Hospital in Redfern. After the war, she continued working part-time, possibly pioneering the concept of part-time employment for female doctors with children.

Margaret was widowed in 1972 but lived in the family home almost until the end. When she was about 85, she was asked to help when a fellow parishioner fainted in church. When she found she couldn't get down to take his pulse, she realised it was time to cancel her medical registration. (Happily, the parishioner recovered.) The Medical Board was reluctant to remove her name from the register, but Margaret insisted. She died in 1999 at almost 100 years of age, leaving behind four children, 19 grandchildren, and many great-grandchildren, including one who became the third generation of the family to graduate in medicine from the University of Sydney.

The first woman to register as a doctor in Australia was Dr Constance Stone (in 1890); the second (and the first in Queensland) was Dr Lilian Cooper, who arrived from England in 1891. Early "lady doctors",

as they were called, struggled to gain respect from the public and the medical profession. Thanks to pioneering women like them, about 100 years after Margaret Sheehy's appointment, women constituted about 46.6% of registered medical professionals, but the numbers are growing, with more than 50% of new medical graduates in Australia now being women.

Dr Margaret Sheehy was not mentioned in St Vincent's first annual report, probably because by the time it was printed, she had left and been replaced by Dr WM Butler (a man). Her significant role here was almost lost to history. That error has now been rectified and the story of Dr Sheehy's vital contribution has been restored.



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DIOCESAN DISPATCH

CLERGY MOVEMENTS IN BRIEF:

Fr Jamie Collins has been appointed as Parish Priest of Dalby (including Bell), Priest Director of Jandowae, and Administrator of Tara Parishes. **Fr Jim Cronin** has retired to Toowoomba from active parish ministry. He will offer supply work to parishes. We thank Fr Jim for his service.

Fr Bony Abraham has been appointed as Parish Priest of Our Lady of Lourdes and Parish Director of St Anthony's Toowoomba. These parishes will continue to share a pastor. For this reason, **Fr BJ Perrett** will receive a new appointment soon. We thank Fr BJ for ministry supporting Fr Jamie and during this transitional time between Parish Priests.

Save the Date



Big Band on the Green

17 May 2-4pm
Overlooking St Patrick's
Cathedral Toowoomba.



Pilgrimage of the Migrant Jubilee Cross

22 June to 5 July

Carlo Acutis Relic & Exhibition

13-15 July

Ignite Conference

24-27 September



Sonya Lynch



Sonya Lynch, Diocesan Financial Administrator

Following an extensive recruitment process, Sonya Lynch has been appointed Diocesan Financial Administrator. Sonya currently holds a senior financial administration position within the Diocesan Finance Office and has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the operations of the Toowoomba Diocese. She succeeds Tom Jolley, who is retiring.

Before her current role, Sonya served as Business Manager of St Mary's College Toowoomba and spent a significant number of years with the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office, providing accounting and financial management support to schools across the Diocese. She has also previously worked within the Diocesan Office in a parish support and review role. Upon the announcement, Bishop Ken Howell said, "I warmly welcome Sonya to this new role and look forward to her contribution to advancing the mission and work of the Diocese in the years ahead."

DIOCESAN DISPATCH

FAREWELL FR FRANCIS KRITSADA SUKKAPHAT

“I Thank God for this Blessed Year in Toowoomba.”

Fr. Francis Kritsada Sukkaphat

As I approach my 25th anniversary of priesthood, this time in the diocese has been especially meaningful. It has been a year of language learning, new experiences, and pastoral service at St Patrick’s Cathedral, St Thomas More’s Parish, and Toowoomba Hospital. I have met many people, joined parish activities, and encountered those seeking God.

Although one year is not long, it has allowed me to experience the life of the Church here. I have seen many beautiful moments, as well as the challenges faced by the diocese.

I am grateful to the Diocese of Toowoomba, Bishop Ken Howell, my fellow priests, and all the faithful I have met. Thank you for your kindness, welcome, and support. I will always remember Australia as a peaceful land with beautiful nature and caring people. God has blessed this land greatly, and our challenge is to work together to share and pass on our faith.

I now return to Thailand to continue my mission at Pattaya Orphanage, which celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. We care for about 120 children and operate a small kindergarten for around 50 children who

are deaf or have autism. Visit www.thepattayaorphanage.org to learn about my mission. I never imagined serving in an orphanage when I was ordained, but this is God’s will, to care for children in need with His love.

I will keep you in my prayers. Let us pray for one another. You are always welcome in Thailand. “Khop Khun Khrab.”

Farewell from the Community

Nicole Rangjiira and Fr Michael O’Brien

For twelve months, Fr Francis Kritsada Sukkaphat has been a quiet, steady presence in Toowoomba. In that time he has become a familiar friendly face, whose gentle spirit has left an imprint on many.

At St Patrick’s Cathedral, parishioners speak of a priest whose quiet nature and joyful approach became a gift to the community. Fr Michael O’Brien, Dean St Patrick’s Cathedral, reflects on how readily Fr Francis stepped into parish life, always willing to assist at Masses and ceremonies, always offering himself with humility and warmth. “He will be missed by many people.” Fr Michael said.

That same gentle spirit followed Fr Francis into the corridors of the

Toowoomba Hospital, where he spent two days a week visiting patients, families, and staff with Pastoral Carers. Nicole Rangjiira, Ecumenical Pastoral Care, recalls the morning routine that began with shared devotions before the team moved on to the busy wards. “Fr Francis is gentle and generous in his care for others.” Said Nicole.

Nicole remembers one moment in particular: a long-term patient nearing the end of life, Fr Francis was asked to bring comfort and reassurance with an Anointing of the Sick. He responded with the same tenderness he showed in countless smaller encounters, those quiet moments when he would place a hand on a patient’s shoulder and simply say, “Get well soon.”

“I will always remember him with gratitude in my heart and for many reasons! I thank God for the goodness that shines from the heart of this very faithful servant.” Said Nicole.

He returns to Thailand to continue his mission at the Pattaya Orphanage, home to around 120 children and a kindergarten supporting children who are deaf or autistic. Though his time in the diocese has been brief, the impact of his presence has been lasting. As he departs, the community sends him with gratitude, affection, and prayer.



Fr Francis (centre) farewelled by the St Thomas More’s Parish community.



Fr Jim Cronin (2nd far right) was farewelled by the Bell community

FARWELL FR JIM CRONIN

NARELLE MCINTYRE, ST JOSEPH'S PARISH DALBY

For parishioners at Dalby, Bell and Jandowae, Fr Jim Cronin's decision to retire from full-time ministry at the end of 2025 came as a bit of a shock. He had been talking about retirement, but most thought it would be down the track, after all, he was "too young to retire"! However, Fr Jim was fortunate to make that decision on his own terms, without it being imposed on him due to ill health or infirmity. He was grateful for the support of Bishop Ken Howell, his fellow priests and parishioners in supporting this decision.

Although Fr Jim had spent some time in Dalby back in 1975, his tenure as our Parish Priest started at the beginning of 2016, when he succeeded Fr Michael Cooney.

In late November, parishioners gathered at St Joseph's Parish Centre in Dalby to farewell Fr Jim. It was a communal opportunity to express deep gratitude for his faithful pastoring and to wish him good health and happiness in his retirement. As the occasion was a combination farewell and Parish Christmas Party, there was plenty of celebration, fellowship, food, and entertainment from our talented Filipino singers and musicians, as well as a Fr Jim Trivia challenge.

Peter Cuskelly, Principal of Our Lady of the Southern Cross College Dalby, thanked Fr Jim on behalf of parishioners and the college community for his ten years of devoted ministry and his fifty-one years of priesthood. Peter summed up the decade of Fr Jim's Pastoral Care saying, "He has walked with us through times of joy and times of challenge, always offering words of wisdom, comfort and hope. Fr Jim's leadership has strengthened our community, and his kindness has touched each of us in ways we will never forget."

In responding, Fr Jim highlighted the

importance of the love and friendship provided by his own family and the many parish families who have shared his life over the years. He has often spoken of the people who have helped him grow as a person and a priest, from his time as a "baby priest" through to his retirement. These people obviously left a deep impression on Fr Jim, sustaining and encouraging him in ministering to and with the many and varied communities in his priestly journey.

May God bless you abundantly in the years ahead, Fr Jim!



Dalby community farewelled Fr Jim Cronin (4th from left) during a Christmas-time celebration.

CHOOSING A CATHOLIC SCHOOL: A PARTNERSHIP OF FAITH, CARE AND HOPE

MADONNA SLEEBA,
ACTING EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR

For families, choosing a school is about much more than classrooms and curriculum. It is about entrusting children to a community that will walk with them, nurture them and support them to grow into the people God calls them to be. At Toowoomba Catholic Schools, families are invited into a partnership grounded in faith, care and shared responsibility.

At the heart of every Catholic school is a commitment to faith lived each day. Gospel values shape relationships, learning and decision making, helping children grow in kindness, respect and compassion. Families can be confident that faith is not an “extra”, but something gently woven into everyday school life, guiding students as they learn how to live well with others and make wise choices.

Every child is known and valued within our school communities. We recognise that each student brings unique gifts, strengths and experiences, and we seek to nurture their academic, emotional and spiritual growth. Our schools strive to be places where children feel seen, supported and encouraged to flourish, whatever their individual journey may be.

Families can also take reassurance in the quality of teaching and learning offered across Toowoomba Catholic Schools. Our teachers are committed, professional and deeply invested in the wellbeing and success of their students. Through contemporary and engaging learning experiences, students are supported to reach their potential while developing confidence, curiosity and a love of learning.



Catholic schools are communities of welcome. Families do not need to be Catholic to belong. We warmly welcome families from all backgrounds who value a respectful, caring and values-based education. In our schools, diversity is embraced, and every family is invited to feel at home.

Partnership with parents is central to the Catholic school experience. We recognise parents as the first and most important educators of their children and seek to work closely with families in a spirit of trust and collaboration. Open communication, shared understanding and mutual respect help

ensure that children are supported consistently at school and at home.

Above all, Toowoomba Catholic Schools are committed to providing safe, caring and disciplined environments where wellbeing is a daily priority. Within these communities, students are encouraged to care for others, stand up for what is right and learn how they can make a positive difference in the world.

Choosing a Catholic school is choosing a community that walks alongside families - offering faith, care and certainty as children grow, learn and discover who they are becoming.



Early Career Teachers for 2026 at the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Induction.

A STRONG START FOR OUR EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

MADONNA SLEEBA, ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Toowoomba Catholic Schools (TCS) is delighted to welcome an impressive new cohort of graduate teachers to our vibrant educational community across the Toowoomba Diocese in 2026. In January, we proudly introduced our Early Career Teachers (ECTs) at the TCS Induction, an inspiring beginning to their professional journey. These enthusiastic educators are ready to make a meaningful difference in the lives of their students as they embark on their teaching careers.

Across the two-day induction, our new teachers were immersed in TCS culture and the Support to Succeed (S2S) Program. This introduction not only welcomes them into TCS but also establishes what it means to be a professional within a Catholic school community. Participants explored our approach to teaching and learning, gained insights from our Set for Success panel, and learned practical strategies to support their wellbeing. They focused on building the foundational knowledge and skills needed for a confident start in their classrooms.

The induction emphasises creating safe, supportive and highly effective

learning environments, covering professional boundaries, positive relationship-building and establishing productive classroom cultures. A special blessing by Bishop Ken Howell at St Patrick's Cathedral further connected our teachers to the heart of our Catholic tradition and community.

By the program's end, teachers leave with a clear understanding of TCS's purpose, their role within it and the extensive support available to them. S2S strengthens capability, confidence and resilience, equipping teachers to thrive - not just survive - in their early years of teaching. Structured learning, coaching and mentoring promote quality and consistency across all TCS schools.

S2S brings a collaborative spirit to life across all the schools in the Toowoomba Diocese. Mentoring plays a pivotal

role, offering early career teachers guidance, reassurance and professional growth opportunities. At the same time, it empowers experienced teachers to lead and contribute to a culture of continuous improvement.

As a community, we are excited to see the impact our newest educators will make and look forward to celebrating their achievements throughout the year. Here's to a wonderful year ahead, we can't wait to hear about their experiences and successes.



L to R: Lucy Morcom, Madelyn Schultz, and Makella Hoad.

HEART ON COUNTRY

WEAVING CULTURE, FAITH AND LEARNING

A TRANSFORMATIVE GATHERING FOR FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION IN 2026

TOOWOOMBA CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

Educators from across Australia will converge in Toowoomba from 12–14 August 2026 for the Queensland First Nations Catholic Education Conference – Heart on Country, a major event dedicated to strengthening cultural understanding, educational equity and community connection. Hosted by Toowoomba Catholic Schools, the three-day conference offers a rich and immersive program designed to deepen participants’ appreciation of First Nations perspectives and enhance their capacity to support students in culturally responsive ways.

The conference opens with a powerful On Country experience at the Bunya Mountains, Booburrgan Ngmmunge, “mother’s breast”, a sacred place of deep cultural significance for the Jarowair people and First Nations communities throughout Southeast

Queensland. Home to the world’s largest natural stand of Bunya trees and an important ceremonial gathering place for thousands of years, the site provides an ideal setting for reflection, learning and spiritual grounding. This full day immersion invites educators to engage with Country, listen to stories and appreciate the interconnectedness of culture, land and identity - core themes that will resonate throughout the conference.

Among the most impactful is Connection to Country, where participants learn about identity, belonging and deep relationship to land. Complementing this is the Water Ceremony at Paradise Falls, offering a moment of spiritual grounding and reflection. Participants may also join the Rainforest Walk at Dandabah, gaining ecological and cultural insights embedded in Country;

or try their hand at clap stick making, a practical cultural activity rooted in tradition. Creative expression is further encouraged through a collaborative artwork project led by a First Nations artist and a weaving workshop, both celebrating the enduring storytelling power of First Nations artistry.

The remaining two days shift to Toowoomba, where keynote speaker Noel Pearson, respected lawyer, advocate and founder of the Cape York Partnership, will challenge and inspire attendees to think deeply about educational equity and the transformative role schools can play in shaping opportunity for First Nations



Keynote speaker: **NOEL PEARSON**





Guest speaker:
TIM NORTON



Guest speaker:
KELLY HUMPHREY



Guest speaker:
ERICA BERNARD

students. He brings a compelling perspective to the conference’s focus on holistic education, emphasising the ways identity, spirituality and academic growth interweave in the lives of young people. His insights will complement workshops, forums and

yarning circles designed to deepen professional practice and strengthen cultural competency in schools.

This is the first time Toowoomba has hosted this significant statewide event, the conference marks an

important milestone for the region. With limited places available, Heart on Country promises to be a deeply meaningful professional and personal journey, one that encourages all attendees to walk together, listen with intention and lead with heart.

2026 QUEENSLAND FIRST NATIONS CATHOLIC EDUCATION CONFERENCE



Diocese of Toowoomba
Catholic Schools

HEART ON COUNTRY

WEAVING CULTURE, FAITH AND LEARNING

12-14
AUG

Educators from across Australia are invited to gather in the beautiful city of Toowoomba, on Jarowair of the larger Waka Waka Nation and Giabal Country, for Heart on Country – Weaving Culture, Faith and Learning, a transformative three day event in August 2026.

This is more than a conference - it’s a call to listen deeply, learn respectfully and lead with heart. We look forward to welcoming you to Heart on Country in 2026.

REGISTER NOW

WWW.TWB.CATHOLIC.EDU.AU



ST FRANCIS CATHOLIC COLLEGE FOUNDATION PRINCIPAL COMMENCES ROLE

TOOWOOMBA CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

Mr Chris Oakes has officially commenced his role as the foundation Principal of St Francis Catholic College Westbrook, marking an exciting milestone in the establishment of Toowoomba Catholic Schools' newest college.

Previously Deputy Principal at Downlands College, Chris brings extensive leadership experience and a proven ability to create thriving, faith-filled learning communities. His career includes senior roles at St Michael's College Gold Coast, and St Laurence's College Brisbane, where he demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence in education and community engagement.

In his new role, Chris will lead the development and future growth of St Francis Catholic College from the ground up. He is widely recognised as an outstanding educator and visionary leader, passionate about shaping a



St Francis Catholic College Foundation Principal: Chris Oakes.

college that is distinctively Catholic and deeply connected to its community.

"Opportunities to build a school community from the ground up are rare and incredibly special," Chris said. "I look forward to working alongside families and the wider community to create a place of wonder - a college where every student is known, valued and challenged to reach their full potential."

Chris's leadership will ensure the Franciscan charism is embedded at the heart of the college, using it as

a powerful way to teach and model the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. This distinctive approach will make St Francis Catholic College a beacon for Catholic education in the region.

Dr Pat Coughlan, Executive Director: Toowoomba Catholic Schools, said the appointment signals an exciting chapter for Westbrook. "St Francis Catholic College will be a contemporary Catholic learning community for Westbrook. We are delighted to welcome Chris Oakes, whose faith, experience and vision will guide the College as it serves families for generations to come."

Located on the corner of Shoesmith Road and Boundary Street South, St Francis Catholic College will open its first stage in January 2027, catering for students in Prep to Year 3 and Year 7. The College will grow to become a co-educational K-12 school, offering state-of-the-art facilities and a vibrant community hub designed to meet the needs of the rapidly growing Westbrook region.

Enrolments for the foundation year are now open. For more information, visit www.sfccwestbrook.catholic.edu.au





St John's School Roma: Year 12 Students received their badge during a special induction ceremony.

BACK TO SCHOOL

As a new school year begins across the Toowoomba Diocese, communities gathered for uplifting Masses and Liturgies to mark a fresh beginning. It was wonderful seeing so many smiling faces of students, teachers and parents helping to bring joy to the new year. These moments of hope, excitement and togetherness set the tone for the year ahead. This pictorial feature captures the spirit of optimism, pride and community that makes each school's start of year traditions meaningful and memorable.



Holy Name Primary School Toowoomba



St John's School Roma: Primary school choir sings at Opening Mass.

BACK TO SCHOOL



Assumption College Warwick Student Leaders.



Sacred Heart School Cunnamulla.



St Patrick's School Allora: Student leaders were commissioned during St Patrick's Opening Mass.



St Mary's School Goondiwindi.



The washing of the feet, a cherished tradition at St Ursula's, symbolises humility, service and love, setting a meaningful tone for the year ahead.



St Ursula's College Toowoomba



St Joseph's School Stanthorpe: The community celebrated Foundation Day, marking 151 years since the Sisters of Mercy arrived. Year 12 and Year 6 leaders were commissioned following Mass.



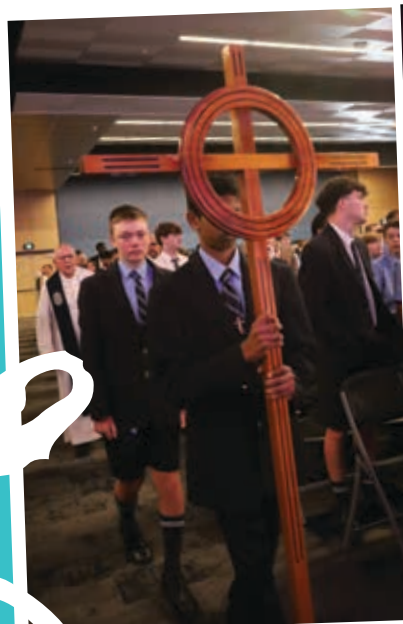
St Joseph's School Stanthorpe: Eden Shatte receives her School Captain badge, proudly pinned on by her parents, Nathan and Nicole.



Mary MacKillop Catholic College Highfields: Junior School Welcome Mass.



Mary MacKillop Catholic College Highfields: Junior School Leadership Badge Ceremony.



St Mary's College Toowoomba.



Mary MacKillop Catholic College Highfields: Senior School Welcome Mass.



Our Lady of the Southern Cross Dalby School Leaders.

BACK TO SCHOOL

EDUCATION



St Stephen's School Pittsworth: The Prep class enjoyed a tour of their church.



St Maria Goretti School Inglewood: Year 6 School Leaders, Celeste, Ellie Jayne and Lilah, were commissioned during the Ash Wednesday Mass.



St Joseph's College Toowoomba: Senior Induction Ceremony.



St Joseph's School Millmerran.



St Saviour's Primary School Toowoomba



L to R: Grace Manahan, Heidi Favaro and Principal Andrew Kendall.



L to R: Grace Manahan, Grace Roberts and Principal Andrew Kendall.

CELEBRATING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INSPIRING PATHWAYS

JULIE-ANN SPILLER, ST JOSEPH'S SCHOOL STANTHORPE

On 2 February, the St Joseph's School Stanthorpe community gathered to celebrate outstanding academic achievement, welcoming back two exceptional 2025 Year 12 graduates to receive our highest honours.

Heidi Favaro was awarded the 2025 Sister Maureen Keenan RSM Dux of the School Award, while Grace Roberts was recognised as Proxime Accessit (Runner-up Dux). These prestigious awards acknowledge their dedication, perseverance and unwavering commitment to excellence throughout their senior years. Both young women achieved exceptional academic results, and we extend our warmest congratulations and prayers as they commence their university studies. Their achievements provide an inspiring example for our current students.

A further highlight of the occasion was the presentation of senior ties to our 2025 Year 12 Leaders. This significant tradition symbolises their commitment to leadership, service and responsibility within our school community. It was a proud and memorable moment as our senior cohort embraced the opportunities and challenges of their final year.

We were also honoured to welcome back 2014 School Captain, Grace Manahan, who addressed our secondary students and assisted with the presentation of awards. Since graduating from St Joseph's, Grace has forged an impressive and inspiring pathway. She is an Australian Army Reserve Officer and law graduate, and in 2024 was awarded the prestigious Fulbright Program Scholarship.

Grace recently completed a Master of Laws in National Security Law at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and is currently finalising her admission to practise law in the United States. Her professional work reflects a deep commitment to global leadership and international collaboration.

In her address, Grace encouraged students to pursue their aspirations with courage and confidence, reminding them that St Joseph's School and the Stanthorpe community provided her with a strong foundation for success.

We thank Grace, Heidi and Grace for returning to share this special occasion and for inspiring the next generation of St Joey's graduates to strive for excellence in all they do.

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AUSTRALIA DAY AWARD FOR RISING SPORTS STAR

ST URSULA'S COLLEGE TOOWOOMBA

Congratulations to St Ursula's College Toowoomba student, Amelia Kidd, who received the Australia Day Junior Sports Award (U17).

Amelia continues to set the standard for what it means to be a young athlete and leader. In 2025 alone, she earned selection across multiple Darling Downs representative teams, competing in cricket, touch football, soccer and AFL. She also secured places in not one but two Queensland squads, the U15 Queensland cricket team and the U15 Queensland AFL team.

Her talent and determination didn't stop there. Amelia was selected for the Brisbane Lions AFL training

squad, becoming the youngest athlete to make the final squad and competing against elite teams well beyond her age group.

Despite travelling to Brisbane several times a week for high-level training, Amelia continues to balance her schoolwork, community commitments and volunteer coaching. She gives her time generously to support younger students, helping them build skills and confidence. Her humility, positivity and willingness to lift others create a culture of inclusion and teamwork at the College.

Amelia truly embodies excellence, perseverance and community spirit.



Amelia Kidd with her Australia Day Award

She's not only an exceptional athlete but also a young leader whose impact reaches far beyond the sporting field. Congratulations, Amelia, on this incredible achievement.

A NEW CHAPTER OF LEADERSHIP FOCUSES ON FAITH, EXCELLENCE, AND COMMUNITY

ASSUMPTION COLLEGE WARWICK

Assumption College Warwick has welcomed its new Principal, Mr Mick Floyd, who steps into the role with enthusiasm, humility and a clear vision for the college's future.

"It is with great excitement and a deep sense of responsibility that I begin this journey," he shared. "I am honoured to join a community with such a rich tradition of faith, learning, and service, and I look forward to building on this strong foundation."

The Principal's vision is built around three key pillars: faith, excellence, and community, each shaping the direction Mick hoped to lead.

Faith and Values at the Centre

At the heart of his approach is a commitment to strengthening the Catholic identity of the college.

"Our Gospel values of generosity, compassion, wisdom and justice must guide everything we do," the Principal said. "I want every student, staff member and visitor to feel a genuine sense of belonging and purpose here."

A Passion for Teaching and Learning

Celebrating recent student successes, he is inspired by what is already being achieved at the college. "Our graduates have shown that you can achieve anything you set your mind to," Mick noted. With a focus on innovative teaching and high expectations, the Principal aims to continue nurturing a culture that challenges and supports students. "We will prioritise literacy, numeracy, creativity and critical thinking. Education should open doors, my role is to ensure students feel empowered to walk through them."



Mr Mick Floyd.

Strengthening Community Partnerships

Collaboration is another cornerstone of leadership. "Great schools are built when partnerships thrive," he said. "I'm looking forward to working closely with families, staff, parish leaders and the wider Warwick community. Together, we can create opportunities that help our students flourish."

As he embarks on this new chapter, Mick promises to lead with integrity, compassion and generosity. "United in our mission and values, I know we will achieve great things for our students."

ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR COLLEGE DUX

ASSUMPTION COLLEGE WARWICK

Assumption College Warwick is privileged to celebrate our top ATAR student for 2025, Amy Ryan, whose remarkable academic accomplishments and dedication to learning have set an inspiring standard within our college community. Amy achieved an outstanding ATAR of 99.70, complemented by exceptional subject results, 96+/100 across all six subjects, including perfect scores of 100/100 in Physics and 100/100 in Study of Religion.

Her academic commitment was further recognised by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, receiving a Certificate of Academic Commendation for achieving an A in all six General subjects, along with Subject Commendations for the highest results in Physics and Study of Religion.

In 2026, Amy begins an exciting new chapter, commencing a double degree at QUT in Bachelor of Business (Finance) / Bachelor of Laws (Honours). She has also been accepted into the prestigious QUT College of Excellence and awarded a QUT Excellence Scholarship (Academic). Amy hopes these opportunities will broaden her understanding of future career pathways and continue to challenge her in her academic pursuits.

We asked Amy to reflect on her



L to R: Principal Mick Floyd and Amy Ryan.

journey at Assumption College, the experiences that shaped her, and how the college has influenced her path beyond graduation.

Favourite Memory

Amy fondly recalls the Year 10 Emu Gully camp, an experience that built resilience and shaped her outlook heading into senior schooling. She also cherishes her time debating in the QDU Toowoomba competition, an opportunity she highly recommends to future students.

Preparation for Life After School

From debating to university holiday program references and meaningful work experience, Amy says the support she received helped define her future study goals in law. She credits camps, excursions, and the close-knit community for teaching teamwork and strengthening her sense of belonging.

Lasting Influence

The values, connections, and memories gained at Assumption College continue to guide her, inspiring confidence and encouraging her to embrace new opportunities.

Advice to Prospective Families

Amy highlights the exceptional academic support, personalised coaching, and strong relationships across the college. She believes the caring, community-focused environment helps students achieve more than they ever imagined.

Amy's achievements exemplify the spirit of dedication, resilience, and community that Assumption College inspires in all students. We congratulate Amy on her outstanding results and wish her every success as she embarks on this exciting journey ahead.

A graphic for Assumption College Warwick. It features the college's logo (a red star with a white 'M' inside a green hexagon) and the text 'ASSUMPTION COLLEGE WARWICK CO-EDUCATIONAL CATHOLIC SECONDARY COLLEGE'. Below this, it lists the address: '6 Locke Street (PO Box 347) Warwick QLD 4370' and the phone number '07 4660 4000'. At the bottom, it says 'Personalised Educational Experience - all ways, for always.' and includes a small image of the college building.

An advertisement for a 'Win a \$300K FIRST PRIZE PACK' promotion. It features a woman hugging an elderly woman. The text says 'Your ticket helps support St Patrick's Cathedral Restoration & gives you the chance to WIN a share in 395 prizes!'. There is a QR code and a 'SCAN ME TICKETS \$10' button.

INSPIRING OUR FUTURE AUTHORS AND EDITORS

SARAH LILBURNE,
OUR LADY OF
THE SOUTHERN
CROSS DALBY

Literacy in the early years at Our Lady of the Southern Cross College Dalby, has been put to real-world use, inspiring authors and editors of tomorrow. The 2025 Year 1 and 2 students engaged with Australian author Andy Griffiths and the collators of a book that highlights the local Bunya Mountains. The Year 1 students and their teachers, Mrs Dellit and Miss Black, delved into the literary skill of writing persuasively. While Ms Joyce's Year 2 students were called on to help proofread and provide feedback on the draft layout of an activity book.

Andy Griffiths' famous Treehouse Series was a favourite classroom read for the Year 1 students; however, the series has concluded, and it was decided that the students needed to write to the famous author to encourage him to keep writing more of the stories they enjoy so much. To their amazement, at the end of last year, Andy wrote back, thanking the students for their beautifully written and persuasive letters. He sent each student an "Adventure License" that certifies them as adventure readers "in this or any universe" and reported that while the Treehouse Series is completed,



Year 2J with their copy of the activity book they contributed to.

there will be other books, including the You and Me Series, for them to enjoy. Mrs Dellit reports that receiving the letter from Andy has inspired more enthusiasm for literacy in the classroom.

Mrs Joyce's Year 2 class was given the opportunity to proofread and edit the draft of a book compiled by the Bunya Mountains Community Association. The book is a fun and informative learning resource for children to learn about the Bunya Mountains, and this was an exciting opportunity for students to put their learning from throughout the year into practice. Students provided

feedback on the layout, additional information, images, and activities in ways they thought would enhance the book, as well as proofreading for any errors. This feedback and proofreading were gratefully received and actioned before the book headed to the printers. Those students were recently presented with their own published copy of the activity book as a thank-you for their time, effort, and expertise.

Well done to the students in the Early Years for using your literacy learning to make a difference.

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RCIA GOING STRONG AT CATHEDRAL

GABRIELLE SAIDE, ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL PARISH

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) has been an integral part of the faith journeys of many people since its inception in St Patrick's Cathedral Parish Toowoomba in July 1987.

On 14 December 2025, Bishop Ken Howell Confirmed and received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church David Kinney, Ian Micheal, Rachael Anderson and Karol, Scott, Bryce and Milton Clark at St Patrick's Cathedral.

These seven candidates, led by Catechists Jenna Baguley, Mary Allen and Gabrielle Saide, began a series of educational meetings using the resource "At Home with God's People" in June. Their faith journey began in other faith denominations, leading them to the Catholic Church through searching, discernment, and the power of the Holy

Spirit. Their enthusiasm and thirst for knowledge were an inspiration to Sponsors and Catechists alike.

On 22 February, at St Patrick's Cathedral, Bishop Ken Howell presided at the Rite of Election for Catechumens Andrew Barry from Leyburn, together with Elizabeth and Victoria Cross, Matthew Gemmell, Damien Moore, Gypsy Rosser, Isabelle Watson and Jordyn Wolrige from the Cathedral Parish. Together with their Godparents, they were called forward to be presented to Bishop Ken and sign their names in the Book of the Elect. The parish community welcomes these elect and promises to pray for them as they continue

their journey to Baptism at Easter.

The Call to Continuing Conversion is for those who are already one with us in Baptism and who seek full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter. Katrina Cross, Drew Gatfield, Henry Jeffers and Roderick Slatter together with their sponsors were called forward for a Blessing. These 12 people are an inspiration to those around them with their commitment to a loving relationship with God and their enthusiasm to embrace the teachings of the Catholic Church.



RCIA Candidates and Sponsors at St Patrick's Cathedral, December 2025.



Catechumens and Godparents at St Patrick's Cathedral, February 2026.

PARISH



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CELEBRATING CHURCH SEVEN DECADES STRONG

MARTY KERLIN, OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL CHURCH YANGAN



Yangan Community gathers to celebrate 70 years since the opening of their church.

In December 2025, Bishop Ken Howell was welcomed to Yangan and concelebrated a special Mass with Fr Franco Filippetto, Fr Terry Hickling and Fr Brian Connolly at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Yangan to mark 70 years since the opening of the church by Bishop William Brennan on 4 December 1955.

The Holy Cross Parish (Killarney-Yangan) is situated 30 kilometres east of Warwick, and as it no longer has a resident priest, it comes under the umbrella of St Mary's Parish Warwick. The community is fortunate to have alternating Mass and Lay-led Liturgy each week.

Over 130 people gathered for the special Mass, many of whom travelled from

neighbouring local parishes and as far as Sydney, Brisbane and Toowoomba. Some were descendants of the original local committee who worked tirelessly and employed numerous community activities for years to raise the necessary 4,300 pounds to build the church.

Several attendees had personal ties to the Yangan church, including marriages, baptisms, First Holy Communion, and involvement in parish committees over the years.

Special guests included representatives from the Missionary Sisters of Service, Sr Pat Quinn and Sr Nancy Doyle. The Missionary Sisters (then the Rosary Sisters) visited the parish many times over the years since 1965, and an important part of their

work was preparing children for the Sacraments, home visits and supporting families in need.

The celebrations continued after Mass, at the Yangan School. The high standard of the catering, hospitality and efficiency of the parish ladies was outstanding. The event gave people ample opportunity to have refreshments, renew acquaintances, catch up with family, and meet current parishioners.

It was recognised on the day that a great debt was owed to those people who had the vision, perseverance, and commitment to build the church, and it remains the focal centre today for spiritual guidance for Yangan and the extended community.

MOTHER AND SON WELCOMED TO THE FLOCK

PATTI MCNAUGHT, ST MARY'S MACKILLOP PARISH HIGHFIELDS

On 8 February, our parish was filled with excitement as Kylie Ireland and her son Lucian were officially welcomed to St Mary MacKillop Parish Highfields through Baptism.

We had got to know them very well, as they always attended Mass while going through the RCIA Program. Kylie has always shown keen interest and decided to take on the task of setting up for our morning teas after Mass.

Her decision to become a Catholic was influenced greatly by her youngest son, Lucian. He was thriving at Sacred Heart Primary School in Oamaru, New Zealand. He received the "Character of the Year" award, but once he moved schools, he lost his spark. Kylie felt that if she learnt

about the Catholic faith, she may be able to help Lucian feel supported and confident.

She had been to a Catholic School for all her schooling and had always been in the company of Catholic people. Her daughter, Nirvara, who attended a Catholic High School, was already Baptised.

Meeting with our priest, Fr Brian Noonan and discussing the parable of "The Mustard Seed" was a defining moment for her. Realising that it only takes a small amount of faith to enable us to grow in understanding of our faith, this encounter gave Kylie hope and encouragement



Highfields community welcomes Kylie and Lucian Ireland.

to continue her faith journey.

As she began the RCIA program, everything started to make sense in addressing any preconceived notions and new understandings. The discussion on the weekly gospels and reflection on what this means in our daily living gave both Kylie and Lucian direction each week.

There have been many "ah-ha" moments throughout the RCIA program, and so much is relevant to Kylie's life. Thank you to Fr Brian and Naomi Goddard, who led the RCIA Program, and our wonderful Liturgy Team.

PARISH IN BRIEF



In early December last year, parishioners in Cecil Plains celebrated the 95th anniversary of Our Lady of Lourdes Church. To mark the occasion, Bishop Ken Howell celebrated Mass, with Frs Thomas Areekuzhy, Ray Johnson and Kerry Costigan concelebrating. Bishop Ken also blessed and unveiled a commemorative plaque. Following the Mass, the community gathered to share a meal and cut a special anniversary cake.



During a transitional period between Parish Priest appointments, Our Lady Help of Christians Church Bell welcomed Bishop Ken Howell for Sunday Mass. This was the Bishop Ken's first trip to this part of the diocese. After celebrating Mass, Bishop Ken met with parishioners over a cuppa and some tasty treats. He was given a tour of the Bell Biblical Garden.



PARISH IN BRIEF

What began in 2009 as a simple birthday catch up for a group of St Mary MacKillop Parish Highfields ladies, quickly grew into a monthly tradition. Instead of buying a present for the birthday girl, we would donate money to charity. The gathering was the brainchild of Colleen Weber, and soon included the golf girls, and about ten years later, the husbands joined in too.

COVID tried to spoil the fun, but the group bounced back, meeting after Mass to keep the friendships flourishing. Nearly 20 years on, they still gather at a local café, sipping tea, solving the world's problems and often chatting their way from Sunday morning right into the afternoon.



Provincial Superior Fr Abraham Kochupurayil MCBS met with Bishop Ken Howell and Fr Thomas Areekuzhy MCBS at Bishop's House as part of his visit to MCBS priests serving in Australia.

Members of the local Vietnamese community at St Mary's Parish Charleville brightened the Lunar New Year celebrations by wearing their national dress in the colours of their flag.

Immaculate Conception Parish Jandowae Christmas Party.



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