

CATHOLIC EDUCATION WEEK 2016: FACE OF MERCY

2016 Catholic Education Week celebrations were launched on Friday, May 21 with a Mass of Thanksgiving at St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat followed by the annual 30 Years of Service Award Dinner. Fr Justin Driscoll celebrated Mass with Frs Peter Sherman, Anthony Nagothu and Sajan Matthew concelebrating. Following Mass, guests gathered for the Dinner to celebrate and acknowledge staff who have contributed thirty years of service to Catholic Education.

The theme for Catholic Education Week this year is *Face of Mercy*. This theme invites us to focus our attention on how we show mercy – a love that is generous and inclusive and empathetic and active - in our education communities and in our lives. Pope Francis, in declaring the Jubilee Year of Mercy, invited us to live in the light of the word of the Lord: “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (cf. Lk 6:36). Being the *face of mercy* is quite a challenge. It requires that we consider others, that we reach out a helping hand, that we walk with others, that we listen for what is needed rather than impose our own solutions...



As a Catholic education community, we celebrated with many staff who have clearly been the *face of mercy* in their school communities. Almost thirty Catholic education staff from across our diocese were recognized for providing thirty years of service to Catholic education. Imagine how many lives they have each touched with their work in Catholic schools!

In addition, we recognized Sr Marg Carmody (pictured right) with a Ballarat Diocese School Advisory Council (BDSAC) Outstanding School Service Award and the inaugural BDSAC Leadership Awards were presented to acknowledge leaders who had made a particularly significant contribution to Catholic education. In their own way, each one of these leaders has been the *face of mercy* across Catholic education:

- The Partnership Award was presented to Marie Ewing, Music and Arts Specialist Teacher at St Colman's Mortlake and St Thomas' Terang, for leadership that has promoted Catholic education in the local and school communities through the Arts.
- The Catholic Leadership Award was presented jointly to John Crowley, Headmaster, St Patrick's College Ballarat, and Eileen Rice, Principal, St Alipius' Parish School Ballarat East, for inspirational leadership and witness to God's presence in their respective school communities throughout the Ballarat Hearings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.



- The Fullness of Life Award was presented to Karen Bambridge, Individual Learning Needs Coordinator, Loreto College Ballarat for consistently outstanding leadership and commitment to advocacy and inclusive practices in the areas of student learning.

With such leaders in our midst, Catholic education in the Diocese of Ballarat is clearly responding to Pope Francis' call to "be merciful". How thankful we are to have the opportunity to model ourselves on them and to be the *face of mercy*.

Audrey Brown
Director of Catholic Education







30 Years Service to Catholic Education ~ 2016 Recipients

Patrick Allen	St Joseph's PS, Warrnambool
Maria Beer	Sacred Heart PS, Mildura
Darren Beks	Monivae College, Hamilton
Tim Bourke	St Colman's PS, Mortlake
Brigid Brady	St Thomas More PS, Alfredton
Jane Daffy	Sacred Heart PS, Colac
Elaine Dargan	Loreto College, Ballarat
Donalda Davidson	Damascus College, Ballarat
Anne Enright	St Aloysius' PS, Redan
Pamela Hacking	Trinity College Inc., Colac
Alda Hubbard	Trinity College Inc., Colac
Chris Kavanagh	Bungaree Parish Schools
Jo-Anne Kennedy	Damascus College, Ballarat
Mary Knight	St Mary's PS, Robinvale
Deidre Lawlor	St Michael's PS, Daylesford
Anne Mangan	St Augustine's PS, Maryborough
Georgia Murrell	All Saints Parish School, Portland
Julian Petrie	Damascus College, Ballarat
Stephen Russell	Our Lady Help of Christians, Wendouree
Ivanka Saric	Damascus College, Ballarat
Michael Saunders	St Patrick's PS, Camperdown
Mark Stahl	St Francis Xavier PS, Ballarat East
Denise Walsh	St Patrick's PS, Koroit
Anne Wines	Emmanuel College Inc., Warrnambool

Fr Justin Driscoll's Homily can be read below:

**Homily by Fr Justin Driscoll (Vicar General) at Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat,
Friday, May 20, 2016 to celebrate the commencement of Catholic Education week**

A few weeks ago, on the ABC's Q&A, Tony Jones hosted an all Christian panel, amongst whom there was considerable disagreement about controversial subjects – such as climate change, marriage equality and abortion to name a few!

One of the panellists, John Haldine, a Catholic philosopher, provided a stance that is, I suggest, inspired by and consistent with the first Pentecost according to the New Testament (the readings from tonight's Mass are those of last Sunday's feast of Pentecost). Such inspiration is also consistent with the normative stance that we have adopted for the project that seeks to enhance the Catholic identity of schools in our Diocese. Recognising that while there is much disagreement on many controversial subjects, John Haldine, say that our disagreeing should not be allowed to divide our communities. For this to happen he says, liberal societies such as ours need to learn the notion of 'reasonable disagreement.' Many of us here are familiar with what we call courageous conversations, but to engage in dialogue in what we call dialogical schools, as an expression of our Catholic identity, we need to develop dispositions that foster healthy dialogue and for such dialogue to be genuine we need to learn to engage with difference.

The research that seeks to enhance the Catholic identity of our schools recognises that we exist amidst plurality, so difference is all around us! One of the hallmarks of the Church that the New Testament narrates as being born at Pentecost, celebrating in spirit filled communities, is that it was united, and yet diverse, with many languages, yet discovered one voice, is local but at the same time universal – which is later Councils described in our Creed as being One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

Importantly, the stance we take in such dialogue is centred on Jesus Christ, our foundation and inspiration, but those who hold contrary views from ours, John Haldine says, "are neither wicked or stupid." While some may fear that this is a sign of relativism, authentic Catholic identity needs to learn to know its place in a pluralistic culture such as ours, where Christianity is not the religion of the empire, but increasingly a minority speaking from the margins – this may be the re-contextualised environment that we seek to evangelise from.

One of the challenges for the churches is to accept joyfully and humbly, a minority role within a pluralist society – which might be a manifestation of the Gospel images for the kingdom of being salt and leaven (small but influential!). In our western culture where conventional, institutional religion is in decline, the churches are presented with the opportunity to rediscover the ancient and earliest expressions of the church as a community which served as a sign of contradiction to every established order. When we discover ourselves on the margins of our culture, we will discover that we are not there alone, but that there are many who are already marginal who have been so for a very long time and that our being there could in itself be prophetic, an opportunity to exercise what we know to be our preferential option for the poor, according to our own social justice teachings. This is the opportunity to be in genuine solidarity with the poor and the powerless.

The discover, or rediscovery, of our weakness and apparent powerlessness, is painful and humbling for us as a church which has so often thought of itself as belonging to the corridors of power rather than the vulnerability and poverty of the streets. More and more, at times in spite of herself, the church is becoming counter cultural! Can we grasp this new, yet ancient position joyfully and humbly?

So how to disagree while maintaining communion and respectful engagement is quite a challenge at times such as this. The attitudes of the heart within us which the Spirit transforms will be revealed through the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But so many times we think the opposite of love is hate. But no, the opposite of love is fear.

Love is outward, delighting in difference, open to the new, makes room for new people, is ready to offer hospitality, is ready to forgive and start again.

Fear on the other hand, builds up walls, is inward looking, defensive, aggressive, ready to hate, deny hospitality, constrained by anxiety, unable to take on anything new, enforces the rules, and adopts a rigid approach to the interpretation of Scripture and other faiths.

So why is it so hard to live out Christ's teaching to love one another? Is it our fears? Always, we need to begin with our own hearts. We need to recognise our fears. Of what are we afraid?

In this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, let our love for God overcome our fears and let our disagreements not divide us. Let our Church, and our Catholic schools be, as Pope Francis asks, Doors of Mercy, through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons and instils hope. Such Doors of Mercy are also to take us out and be the door from which we as the Church must go out to proclaim mercy to all. Pope Francis says *"May we reach out to them and support them so that they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship and our fraternity... Together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!"*

Pope Francis has said repeatedly that the message of Jesus is mercy. He says *"For me, and I say this with humility, it is the Lord's strongest message."* We, of course need to ask; for Catholic schools in our Diocese of Ballarat, what does this look like and what evidence would we seek for its presence?

The presence of fear does not mean we have no faith. Fear visits everyone. But as Max Lucado says, *make your fear a visitor and not a resident.* Help the Spirit make fear a visitor in you and not a resident. Let the Pentecost lead us from fear to courage, from despondency to hope, from isolation into communion and may the love of God complete its work in you, in the power of Christ's name. Amen.

Fr Justin Driscoll

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