

NAIDOC CELEBRATIONS

There are several days or weeks throughout the year that provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the opportunity to celebrate the richness of their culture and history, none more so than NAIDOC Week. This year the theme was ***We all Stand on Sacred Ground: Learn, Respect and Celebrate***, which focussed on their strong spiritual and cultural connections to the land and sea. Aboriginal communities across Australia encouraged people from the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and wider communities to attend events such as government functions, cultural days, open days at Aboriginal Co-operatives and social activities. Each year NAIDOC Week commences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, with many parishes and community groups celebrating through masses, liturgies and ecumenical services.

Jeanette Morris, Education Officer - Indigenous Education, Catholic Education Ballarat

Here we read about two schools in the Diocese who acknowledged this week:

NAIDOC week fell during the school holidays so it was with delight that **St Alipius Parish School Community, Ballarat East** celebrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture during the last week of term. There was a fabulous launch to the week when Uncle Bryon Powell shared a Smoking Ceremony with the community and the Aboriginal Dance Group from Loreto College performed a beautiful traditional dance that told the story of women picking berries. The theme for NAIDOC Week this year was '*We All Stand On Sacred Ground*'.

Mass was celebrated for NAIDOC Week and the community acknowledged that 'to hold something as sacred means valuing it enough to allow it to transform you'. It was affirmed that the land is sacred and hopefully, over the break, students, teachers and parents had the chance to sit with the land and allow it to speak to them, to restore and to renew. Principal, Eileen Rice said that she spent some time by the ocean letting the sound of the waves wash over her and walking along the beach. Eileen told the students that she finds the ocean, the desert and the bush are the places that bring her peace and allow her to change those things inside that hold her back.



The students also engaged in some wonderful activities both at the school and at the Koorie Hub in Main Road. Deanne Hayes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer for the school organised Peter Lovett, Emma Lehane and Belinda Jakiel to run these sessions. Peter, Emma and Belinda are all talented and passionate presenters and the St Alipius students certainly benefitted from the experiences.

At Mass it was also said that relationships can be sacred because 'something that is sacred is something that touches our souls, makes us respect ourselves and others and reminds us that we are able to love and be loved.'

Eileen said that the school's ongoing relationship with Deanne Hayes has had a sacredness to it and the community were very sad as they farewelled Deanne as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer for the school while she furthers her studies. Eileen said in her role as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Dee has touched the hearts and souls of all within the school community. She has engaged all at the school in exploring the richness of cultural diversity and has gently moved the school community towards a vision of a future where we respect ourselves, each other and the land that we have the privilege to walk upon. Eileen said, "I am so proud to call Deanne Hayes a colleague and a friend. I am a much better person when I am with her and she makes me view the world through the eyes of justice, equity and love. I am so sorry that Dee is leaving our staff team, so pleased that she will remain a member of our community and so proud that she has chosen to embrace full-time study and to pursue the world of options that will bring."

Deanne was farewelled with the following blessing: ***An Australian Blessing – written by Betty Pike, Aboriginal Catholic Ministry***

*May you always stand as tall as a gum tree,
Be as strong as the rock Uluru,
As gentle and still as the morning mist,
Hold the warmth of the campfire in your heart.
And may the Spirit of God, the Creator of this great south land of Australia, always walk with you.*



Eileen Rice – Principal

"We call upon all people of good will, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to go out to one another in a spirit of love and mutual respect. In particular, we ask you, our Catholic people, to be leaders of reconciliation." Father Tom Doyle, 1993

Although this is a quote from 1993, it very much captures the spirit in which our NAIDOC activities at **Sacred Heart School Mildura** are planned and undertaken. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people come together "in a spirit of love and respect". We acknowledge and honour the Ancestral custodians of this land and pay our respects to elders past and present. Students, teachers and our community continue to become enriched in their learning because we plan, meet and work with Key Aboriginal people from our community. As we engage in "genuine dialogue" our understanding of our nation has grown and developed and we are becoming culturally and spiritually enriched.



In our NAIDOC journey of learning, Sacred Heart School continues to be educated about the importance of totems, of family, of paintings and story, of living in harmony with the land. We have come to know about spiritual law, connections, symbols, and all that we hold as sacred. Our NAIDOC practices and activities are now a part of our Sacred Heart ritual and tradition. Each year we renew our commitments and help our NAIDOC story to grow. Our NAIDOC experiences permeate life at Sacred Heart. They are not confined and isolated to a NAIDOC week of random experiences but are woven into the fabric of our school culture.

Our NAIDOC Mass, central to all that we do, includes our lovely welcoming ritual where school captains take the leadership role in this Mass. We light five candles - Candle 1 to acknowledge the unique culture of the Aboriginal people and its role in the life of Australia today, Candle 2 to acknowledge the elders, past and present who have



guided us with their wisdom, Candle 3 to acknowledge the tens of thousands of years Australia's indigenous people have understood the special relationship between mankind, nature and land, Candle 4 to acknowledge that we can learn much from the traditional knowledge of the Aboriginal people and we hope that we'll grow in understanding and respect for our land and each other and Candle 5 to remember the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been stewards of change, warriors of action and the peacemakers who have strived for unity and truth, wisdom and kindness and woven together in faith and trust.

Our Blessing ceremony always follows our Mass where each class has their own creation pole. The poles are newly blessed each year as part of our Blessing ceremony. Fr Peter Jose blessed the poles this year. The creation poles are painted over each year with symbols that depict what the class sees as being "sacred". The conversations and discussions happen early in the year and the painting follows soon - early in Term 1. Each child in the school gets to paint on their class pole. Note the names on the poles. The children understand that the poles are painted over but all the previous years are still there. This has quite a spiritual significance as each pole holds much that is sacred.



As part of the Blessing ceremony, school captains introduced all children new to our school to walk along Mumboola, the Dreamtime serpent who watches over our children. He builds trust and acceptance of the rules and regulations of our world. He nurtures our children. Mumboola weaves his way in between our Creation poles (pictured above). Other activities included sharing our stories about Mutawinji and the possum cloak and decorating the Graffiti wall. Throughout the week students had a chance to add a picture, a symbol, a message on the graffiti wall which is under a mural of Mumboola painted three years ago. We also launched a book, "Mumboola the Warrior Spirit". Amaroo, one of the Year 6 class illustrated the story at the end of 2014. It was professionally published and as part of our NAIDOC celebrations we had an official book launch. More activities are planned for the end of this term.

Rosemarie Zalec - Special Projects, Sacred Heart School Mildura.

Photos below also show some of the celebrations and activities this year.



