

# “LOOKING FORWARD” IN THE SUNRAYZIA REGION

At the conclusion of the 2014 Sunraysia regional “Looking Forward” gathering conducted by the Diocese it was decided that this region organise another gathering in October with the sole intention identifying the strengths and needs of the parishes of Mildura, Irymple, Merbein, Red Cliffs, Ouyen and Robinvale.

The October meeting turned out to be extremely positive and after much discussion it was decided that we move towards a regional conference in 2015. However, before that a decision was taken that a small planning group travel to various Sunraysia parishes for Sunday Eucharist, morning tea with the parishioners, a short ‘issue sharing and planning’ meeting and ending with a shared lunch. Another key intention of these meetings was to show solidarity and spread the word within these Sunraysia parishes, especially Ouyen and Robinvale.

Initially our plan for the proposed conference was for a weekend gathering beginning on Friday evening and ending after Sunday Eucharist, however, due to the short planning time and availability of presenters we settled for one full day, Saturday, July 18<sup>th</sup>.



Under the guidance and encouragement of Fr Mick McKinnon our Regional Gathering took the title of “The Joy of the Gospel” and the program took the following extract from Pope Francis as a focal point for the day – “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by ‘attraction’” EG 14-15.

Our Keynote speaker Rose Marie Prosser addressed the issue of “Mission: Living out the Kingdom of God” and the workshops led by Peter Hudson, Don Walkley and Moira Cosgriff looked at *Social Justice*, *Parish Pastoral Councils* and *Personal Prayer* respectively. We also welcomed the presence of Amanda Smith from the Diocesan Pastoral Ministry Office who came to support the day. The Diocese of Ballarat Foundation contributed to the cost of facilitators.



Back row,  
L- R  
Peter Hudson,  
Fr Mick  
McKinnon and  
Don Walkley

Front row,  
L- R  
Moira Cosgriff,  
Amanda Smith,  
Sr Marion  
McDonald and  
Rose Marie  
Prosser

The planning group was both delighted and thankful that over eighty people registered for various sessions during the day and these people came from the following Parishes of Mildura/Irymple, Merbein, Red Cliffs, Robinvale and Ouyen. This is also an opportunity to sincerely thank St Joseph's College for the use of the Mercy Theatre complex as well as catering support.

What happens now? The small planning group intends to continue to meet every two or three months on Sundays, and at different Parishes, in order to keep addressing relevant issues of this area and hopefully plan for a similar conference in 2016.

*Luke Guthrie - Parishioner*

Michael Duck, also a parishioner offered this reflection and comments from the day:

*Keynote speech excellent, free running and unrestrained.*

*Jesus invited going outside the box of the Torah. All are welcome in the Kingdom. Jesus respected and liberated them.*

*Pope Francis is doing this. It is up to us to act.*

*Who or what is a minister of the Gospel? All of us.*

*Consider the Gospels in terms of Logos and Mythos, with full appreciation of the former.*

*The Bible is an old book.*

*Christians come from a living faith, Judaism. But while people asked Rabbis for permission to follow them, Jesus called people.*

*Paul, who wrote the first of the New Testament scriptures, saw that Jesus was experienced in the Christian community.*

*After the destruction of the Temple, Christians were expelled from the synagogues, and the Gospels were written, long after the Resurrection, and influenced by post-resurrection thought.*

*With Constantine's adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire in the fourth century, the institution became more important than the message.*

Michael mentioned that the Prayer workshop was an experience of history and practice with breathing exercises, relaxation, mindfulness, meditation (contemplation), massage, reflection in walking, stilling the mind, sacred reading, journal of feeling and thought, Mandala. There was enthusiastic participation.



The Social Justice workshop touched on the *Rerum Novarum* which was promulgated by Leo XIII. It was referred to by Mr Justice Higgins in the Harvester Judgment of 1911, establishing the concept of a Basic Wage in Australia and the World. Also discussed was that Catholic Social Services co-ordinates the work of many Catholic bodies in Melbourne. The underlying causes of poverty and distress mean an unending and sometimes dispiriting continuity of problems. Michael remarked that it would have been rewarding to discuss *Laudato Si* as a welcome contemporary development and invitation to Social Justice but has no doubt that discussion will be one of the outcomes of the Gathering.

The music for the gathering was conventional and contemporary and came from a welcome group of young Tongans.