Catholic schools in the Diocese of Ballarat began the 2012 school year on Wednesday, February 1st with a Beginning of the School Year Mass in both Ballarat and Warrnambool. St Patrick’s Cathedral, Ballarat was packed with over 500 staff members from all primary and secondary schools in the Central region for Mass celebrated by Fr. Barry Ryan, Vicar General. Fr. Ryan’s Homily can be read at the end of this report.

The Mass in St Joseph’s Church, Warrnambool was celebrated by Bishop Peter Connors, who acknowledged the valuable role teachers play in developing young people for the modern world. Bishop Connors’ Homily can be read at the end of this report. Approximately 500 staff members from St Joseph’s Primary; St Pius X Primary; OLHC Primary, Warrnambool East; St John’s Primary, Dennington; St Patrick’s Primary, Koroit; St Patrick’s Primary, Port Fairy and Emmanuel College were in attendance.

The new Director of Catholic Education, Ms Audrey Brown commenced her appointment on January 16th and was formally blessed at the commencement of today’s Mass in St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Audrey grew up in the Western District and was educated at Heywood, Portland and Warrnambool and feels very much at home in the Diocese of Ballarat.

Audrey welcomed students, teachers and parents to the new school year, wished them well in their endeavours and encouraged them to enjoy the year. Ms Brown commented that the presence of all at the Mass was a sign of service and commitment of all in Catholic education and thanked them for the great work being done in education communities across the Diocese.

The Ballarat Diocese extends from the Murray to the Sea, with 53 primary schools and 11 secondary schools, providing education for 17,000 students, an increase from previous years. This year we welcome new principals at St Michael’s Primary School, Daylesford; St Mary’s Primary School, Donald; St Patrick’s Primary School, Stawell and St Paul’s Primary School, Mildura

Ms Brown congratulated schools on their achievements in 2011 and assured parents that all schools would continue to strive for excellence in 2012. Her first Newsletter to School Communities follows below:

31 January 2012

Principals and Canonical Administrators
Catholic Education Office Staff

Dear Colleagues

Welcome to 2012!
I am thrilled to offer you a very warm welcome to the 2012 school year. It is a privilege to be taking up the role of Director of Catholic Education in this Year of Grace – a time for discerning the presence of Christ in our communities and our world, of naming and celebrating this presence and of giving witness to our relationship with Christ so that all in our school communities might know God’s gracious presence. Catholic schools are so beautifully placed to awaken students, staff and families to the spiritual and religious dimensions of their lives – a task which is both important and joyous. May your school community be a place of welcome, of celebration and of transformation in 2012.
Sincere thanks to the many colleagues who have been in touch since last October to congratulate me on my appointment and to welcome me back to the Diocese of Ballarat. Philip Howe (my husband) and I have enjoyed the genuine warmth of the diocesan welcome and are settled in our new home in East Ballarat.

**New Faces...**

Our prayers and good wishes are with the following leaders as they take up new appointments or responsibilities in 2012:

**Principals**
- Mr Daniel Gooch – St Mary’s Primary School, Donald
- Mr Michael O’Riley – St Patrick’s Primary School, Stawell (2012 school year)
- Ms Carmel McCormick – St Paul’s Primary School, Mildura (2012 school year)
- Mr Chris Pollard – St Michael’s Primary School, Daylesford (2012 school year)

**Catholic Education Office (CEO) Staff**
- Carole Wilkinson – School Officer: Student Support (Ballarat Office)
- Sarah McDonald – Speech Pathologist (Horsham Service Centre)
- Jillian Hogbin – Visiting Teacher (0.4 Ballarat Office)

**Please keep in your prayers:**
- David Baxter (Principal on leave from St Michael’s School, Daylesford) and Corrie Conway Weel (former Principal of St Paul’s School, Mildura) who are battling illness.
- Mark (Principal of St Patrick’s School, Nhill) and Lauren Gibson following the tragic loss of Darcy Mark, who was stillborn at 24 weeks.
- Mary Lovelock (Assistant Director, CEO) on the death of her mother, Joyce Angel on 17 January. May each one be comforted in the knowledge of our prayerful support.

**Leadership Planning Day**

Last week, the CEO Executive and Educational Consultants gathered for the first of many leadership planning days. This was an important day for us all, but particularly for me as incoming Director. There is no doubt that I have “inherited” a diverse, committed and talented CEO staff and a diocesan school “system” of schools that are predominantly flourishing. Building on these foundations is an exciting prospect.

Our leadership planning time together focused on:
- Our own formation as leaders in Catholic education. Building our own capacity is, of course, an ongoing commitment.
- Articulating an emerging re-visioning of our work as a Diocesan Education Team (DET). Ensuring that we are “On the same page” is an important element of our shared responsibility.
- Unpacking the commendations and recommendations from the March 2011 Report on the Review of Organisational Structure and Processes. It is evident that much has already been achieved in response to this review of the CEO prior to 2012, that several recommendations need further research or thought and that some immediate priorities provide a logical starting point.
- Setting immediate priorities for the work of the CEO and DET in 2012. It is important to continue embedding good practices and to ensure that several established initiatives are not overlooked or abandoned.
- Planning a process for consultation and dialogue with CEO staff, principals and canonical administrators so that the renewed vision and strategic directions for the CEO are enhanced, known and shared. This work will provide the skeleton for our strategic plan 2012-14.

It was quite a big day now that I look back on it and a valuable process to begin my induction into the blessings and challenges of our diocesan education community.

**Diary Claimers**

Invitations will soon be issued for you to attend the following events. Please prioritise the time in your diaries, both as an opportunity for collegial sharing and because these events are made so much richer by the involvement of all.

1. **Catholic Education Week Celebrations**– Mass at St Patrick’s Cathedral on Friday 16 March, followed by the Art Show, Principal Briefing and 30 Year Celebration. I will be commissioned as
Director of Catholic Education at the Mass, so would value your presence for that important official start to my ministry.

2. **Governance Forum** for Principals and Canonical Administrators— in Ballarat on 27 March. Governance of our schools has been identified as a priority area for the Ballarat Diocesan Schools Advisory Council, so this forum aims to clarify through professional learning, dialogue and consultation the key principles that should underpin school governance in our diocese and the areas of responsibility for governors. I imagine that it will be some time before we discern the structures that might best enable those principles to be honoured and the responsibilities exercised across such a diverse community of schools.

**CEO Staff Update**
Jeanette Morris (Education Officer: Indigenous Education) is on leave from the CEO until March. Contact Leigh Mitchell (Assistant Director) in her absence.

**School visits**
I received a warm welcome from Fr Michael McKinnon and the Mildura/Merbein/Red Cliffs Principals when I visited there late last year (thanks to them all!) and hope to be able to prioritise in my diary visits to all schools and conversations with all principals and canonical administrators in coming months. The strength of our education community is really in our school staffs, so I will also take the opportunity for a cuppa or lunch with staff whenever possible as I travel to different schools. Please contact Cathy Dunbar if there is a particular time which you would like me to schedule a visit and she will work miracles with my diary to see if that time can be arranged. Otherwise, presume that Cathy will be in touch in due course to book me in.

Finally, after this very long missive, I do wish you and your school community every blessing as you begin this new school year. Leadership of a school is a privilege, a blessing and sometimes a challenge and requires much courage. May the presence of the risen Christ in your life enable you to lead with the courage that is required; and when it appears that your courage is waning “hold on for the next supply!” (Thomas Merton).

With every blessing.

*Audrey Brown*
DIRECTOR

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For further information.

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HOMILY FOR THE OPENING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR MASS 2012
ST PATRICK’S CATHEDRAL, BALLARAT

-BARRY T. RYAN

I am delighted to greet you, you who are involved in primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Ballarat. I, with Frs. Adrian McInerney and Justin Driscoll, come to celebrate with you in this Mass that marks the beginning of the year 2012. I congratulate you on the very special role you play in the lives of your students and on the ripple effect that flows out to an ever widening community. Yours indeed is a noble calling. As the Matthean Jesus tells us in today’s gospel, ‘You are the light of the world.’

Many years ago, in the USA, on a four-hour bus trip from Washington to New York, I found myself sitting beside Hans Furth, a distinguished professor of psychology from the Catholic University of America. Hans Furth was regarded as the English speaking world’s expert on Jean Piaget, the famous Swiss psychologist and expert in the education of children, well known to you in your studies. I learnt much on that journey, including the knowledge that four hours is a long time when you are beside one who is so passionate about education and wants to share all he knows on the one trip.

Hans Furth told me that, for Piaget, the most important task of education is to teach the children to think. I learnt that Hans Furth detested fundamentalism in all its forms— the unthinking acceptance of knowledge without reference to its context. Fundamentalism closes the mind and is a danger lying in wait for us in our teaching of Scripture and Church Doctrine.

On a lighter side, Furth’s comments remind me of the notice outside a certain church announcing the sermons for the next Sunday: ‘In the morning, the sermon will be Jesus Walking on the Water, and in the afternoon, Searching for Jesus.’ Fundamentalism can penetrate the minds of us all. I think we need to be aware of this as we hand on our rich and symbolic tradition.

The other day, I was talking with a parishioner who said, ‘Why do we read the Old Testament at Mass? It doesn’t mean a thing to me.’ I found this difficult to answer even though it was not the first time I had heard that question. I was reminded of something that Virginia Woolf wrote in 1938, words to this effect: ‘I am glad the Church doesn’t use Shakespeare in its liturgy. They would have ruined that as they have ruined the bible.’ She was referring to the short grabs we use, often out of context. Perhaps my parishioner’s question and Virginia Woolf’s comment point to a disconnect between the experience of the ordinary person and the Church’s presentation of its message. Because of this sort of disconnect, the richness that our Tradition can bring to the world is largely hidden from view. There seems to be a break between our past and our present that may be hindering us from setting goals for the future.

The Second Vatican Council in 1962-65 was convened because the Church seemed irrelevant and out of touch with the contemporary world. It seemed irrelevant to many partly because we had neglected our past. The horrors of the concentration camps in World War II, with the extermination of millions of Jews, racked the consciences of the thinkers
within the Church. Had our past attitudes towards the Jewish people, whom for centuries we had labelled as Christ-killers, laid a foundation for those terrible events? Some few of you may remember our Good Friday prayers for the ‘perfidious Jews’. Did those prayers add fuel to the fire of prejudice and hatred?

Vatican II charged us urgently to go back to the sources of our faith and the inspiration of our early days as Church: return to the Scriptures; go back to the formulations that emerged as the Church defined itself and its faith; look again at the early Councils of the Church; always remember the context.

If we go back and pay regard and respect for the Old Testament, we will see that the stories of our past are important for today. Note what the gospel has Jesus say to us today: ‘You are the Light of the world’. It goes on to remind us that he did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to bring them to completion. Clearly those ancient Hebrew texts remain important for us today. They must, however, be read critically. Remember that the writings of the OT were compiled when the people of Israel were coming to a new understanding of life and a new realisation that when they found themselves in trouble, it was not God who was punishing them. Their troubles came, rather, as a consequence of the way they lived.

Today we live in a world that is troubled and in need of healing if we are to look to the future with confidence. We see war abroad, road rage and violence at home. We see denial of climate change in some, and hesitation to address it in others. We see a looming global food crisis, water shortages, and the effects of poisonous chemicals in the food chain. Like the people of old, we need to face the fact that our actions have consequences. We still need to listen to the prophets of Israel.

Vatican II also told us to listen and to dialogue. In order to do this, we must accept the importance of story. If we can listen to each other’s stories, then we hear their past. In our listening, they are healed and encouraged. That goes too for you and your colleagues at work, as well as your students.

We are listening today to a Church in crisis. We need to connect our stories with the Story of the Church. When we come to understand that myth, metaphor and symbol are part of every story, then we will see the richness of our biblical tradition, including the Old Testament, and see the connection between our lives as educators and the healing and hope we bring to the students.

You have the faith and the hope. You are so generous and good in yourselves that you can face the challenge. You can bring into harmony the past, the present, and future of our Catholic story. I, with all the priests of Ballarat, wish you every blessing.
I owe a debt of gratitude to the Federal Government for making certain that I visited almost every school in the Diocese in 2011. It was a privilege and a joy for me to preside at the Blessings of new facilities which ensure that our schools are in first class condition and provide a sense of community for all who use them and all who visit them.

On a few occasions at these official openings and blessings, Mr Chris Robarts, the Consultant for the Northern Zone, gave a brief outline on the story of Catholic Education in our Diocese and indeed around Australia. He reminded the students, teachers and the parents and friends that it was the Bishops of Australia back in 1872 who insisted that Catholic Education in the true sense of the term would be provided for every child who had been baptised. They were prepared to forego government funding if the style of education was to be secular even if free and compulsory.

Today we inherit and celebrate a tradition that was established by the determination of bishops, priests and parents of the next one hundred years. But it would not have happened where it not for the heroic commitment and the generosity of hundreds of men and women who had consecrated their lives to God in the service of the Gospel.

The story continues in 2012 when the Catholic Church in Australia will observe a year of renewal, given the title of a year of Grace, a time for us to focus our attention on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Risen Lord and Saviour. The observance will commence on Pentecost Sunday and I encourage you to co-operate with the programme that will be developed in our Diocese under the leadership of Father Kevin Lenehan.

Pope Benedict XVI has asked the whole Catholic Church to celebrate a Year of Faith which will commence in October this year on the fiftieth anniversary of the commencement of the II Vatican Council. It will be a blessed opportunity to study and absorb the whole message that was proclaimed in the teachings of the Council under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As teachers you know that you are entrusted with the development of the God-given gifts that endow the young people who come to your schools. Their parents rejoiced when they were born and looked for signs of growth during those early years when they cared for them with love and devotion. Now you are privileged to co-operate with them in the process of education, the development of the whole human personality and the ability to live a meaningful life in the world. You value your profession and you rejoice in watching your students grow.
The parents of the students who come into your schools asked for them to be baptised into Christ. They promised to bring them up in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. They signed their foreheads with the mark of the cross as a pledge that they would assist them to take on the mind and the heart of Jesus Christ. They were also given a lighted candle to indicate that their child was now a disciple of Jesus Christ, called to radiate the light of Christ to the world.

It was an event that took place not long after they were born, and like the gift of life, so their new life in Christ has to be developed, protected and nourished. Today you are accepting the responsibility to assist the parents in the task of forming the next generation of Light bearers in the world. And that of course is the reason why our schools claim the title of Catholic.

Our short Gospel reading comes at the end of the teaching of Jesus as to how his disciples are to find true and lasting meaning in their lives. They are truly fortunate and blessed when they are poor in spirit, when they hunger and thirst for justice, when they are merciful and work for peace. He also warned them they would be persecuted and ridiculed in the cause of justice.

The reign of God that Jesus came to proclaim was not a personal private religion. Jesus wanted his disciples to be a light for the world. A light is not of much value in itself. The purpose of a light is to let things be seen as they are. You and your parents want your students to become a beacon for a darkened world, a world that has become secular and materialistic. They are not to draw attention to themselves but to lead people to the knowledge and praise of God who has called them to be the light of the world.

Jesus belonged to a tradition where the city of Jerusalem was a light for all people to see. When the temple was lit up, particularly on the occasion of the great Jewish feasts, Jerusalem was indeed “the light of the world”. That image lives on in the schools to which you bring your professional training, your commitment and your love for the children who come under your influence. You would wish your school to be a beacon for your parishes and your towns.

For the coming forty weeks, you and your students are a community that is called to live by the teachings of Jesus Christ, where the values of the Gospel shine forth every day and in every event for all to see. If I may mix the metaphor a little, your school can be a powerhouse for good living by those who come in contact with your schools, be they visitors, parents or observers.

Today I salute you and thank you for being my co-operators, my fellow workers in the task of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. Like the Church Leader who wrote to the little community of Christ’s chosen disciples in the city of Colossae, I too pray that you will be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, that you will lead lives worthy of the Lord as you bear fruit in every good work. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while giving thanks to God.