



As just one of the opening year Masses throughout the Diocese, over six hundred Secondary and Primary teachers from the Central Zone, gathered at St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat to celebrate the 2016 school year. As a way of highlighting the *Jubilee Year of Mercy*, the teachers gathered in St Patrick's Hall prior to the Mass and then processed into the Cathedral through the Door of Mercy.

Fr Justin Driscoll (Vicar General for the Diocese) presided over the gathered Assembly who participated in the Eucharist with scripture, prayer and song. Frs Adrian McInerney, James Kerr, Anthony Nagothu SDB and Sajan Ezhunnootil were also in attendance.

Fr Justin's homily outlined to all present that *"the two major challenges facing the world are the two major challenges facing Australians and they have to do with kindness to strangers and care for the natural world"*. He reminded the Assembly that *"as those engaged in Catholic education, the mission to educate towards a particular stance is an important one and equally important is the way in which it is undertaken"*. School staffs have a responsibility to the students they teach and the wider school and church community especially in this Year of Mercy. Fr Justin desired for all that *"Catholic education in the central zone of the*



Diocese of Ballarat in 2016 be one of mercy, of those who seek to go out to sow, as missionaries of mercy with what Pope Francis dreams of as 'a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything'."



Each school and college from the Central Zone was presented with a candle and set of ribbons – the candle to be used during staff prayer and gatherings and the ribbons to be placed on the school fences in support of those who were victims of abuse. The Liturgy ended with all reciting the prayer for the Year of Mercy.

Our thanks go to the Central Zone Principal network who prepared the celebration and to all who ministered to the Assembly through scripture and song.

Dr Susan Crowe

[Fr Justin's homily can be read here:](#)

**[Opening year Mass for staff of Central zone Catholic Schools
St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat on Wednesday, January 27 2016](#)**

Yesterday, Australia Day, I found myself wondering at the way in which we sought to mark our identity as Australians – particularly with displays of patriotism that border on jingoistic and banal. Writing in Eureka Street last week, Fatima Measham, recognised that in the last couple of weeks of January, as non-tourists buy all manner of Australiana, an old adage often comes to mind: 'There is nothing more Australian than debating what it means to be Australian.'

No doubt this will continue to be the cause for much debate and this is a healthy thing and thank God it is a feature of our robust democracy. It also says that our identity is not something that is fixed and static, but dynamic and evolving. There are those who remind us that it is as global citizens that we need to have such lively dialogue about who we are, suggesting that the two major challenges facing the world are the two major challenges facing Australians and they have to do with kindness to strangers and care for the natural world. Care for the environment, the resolution of violent conflict and the responsibility of well-endowed individuals and nations to the marginalised of our world will increasingly become conditions for decent human living anywhere in the world.

As Catholics we have a particular stance on both of these issues and we have a contribution to make the dialogue that happens around both kindness to strangers and care for the natural world and if the dialogue isn't happening then we have a responsibility to find some dialogue partners! As those engaged in Catholic education, the mission to educate towards a particular stance is an important one and equally important is the way in which it is undertaken. At whatever age we find ourselves now, from young graduates to those in their final years of education, the world in which we live is different from the one in which our own

schooling was undertaken. So too the culture in which we are immersed. Our mission in Catholic education, demands that we know this culture, that we be willing to enter into genuine dialogue, that we seek to engage from the perspective of the Christian tradition in which we also need to be immersed – we know this process as recontextualising and the parable of the sower provides us with the paradigm for such a mission, of an intentional, explicit process of seeking to sow the Word of God so that it might take root in the lives of those we encounter and that the process of encounter might transform us in the doing.

As those engaged in the mission of Catholic education, we might consider three key questions during this Year of Mercy:

- What door do we hope Mercy will open in the coming year?
- What threshold does Mercy need to cross?
- What door of Mercy can you open?

Pope Francis said ‘My hope, as we open Doors of Mercy around the world to inaugurate the Jubilee Year, is that by crossing the threshold of these doors, we will find the strength to embrace God’s mercy and to dedicate ourselves anew to being merciful with others as the God of Mercy is with us.’

We are always writing a new chapter in the faith story – that’s the adventure of the Christian tradition – may the chapter for Catholic education in the central zone of the Diocese of Ballarat in 2016 be one of mercy, of those who seek to go out sow, as missionaries of mercy with what Pope Francis dreams of as “a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything.”

As Oscar Romero’s reflection says

This is what we are about:

We plant seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfilment.

*Fr Justin Driscoll
January 2016*