

*National Families Week 2017 was held from May 15 – May 21, 2017 (coinciding with the United Nations International Day of Families on May 15). The aim of National Families Week 2017 is to celebrate the vital role that families play in Australian society. The theme 'Stronger Families, Stronger Communities' has been embraced as an enduring theme for National Families Week as it encapsulates the important role families play as the central building block of our communities. Community wellbeing is enhanced by family wellbeing. National Families Week was a time to celebrate the meaning of family and to make the most of family life. It was a time to reflect on the critical role that families play in teaching, supporting and nurturing children, especially as they grow. Each year, over a hundred thousand people and hundreds of organisations celebrate National Families Week – Australia's annual celebration of families.*

*As part of National Families Week, people from around the diocese offered a reflection on their own families which can be read below:*

### **SAM BRADY (NANDALY)**

G'day, my name is Sam Brady, I am a farmer in the Victorian Mallee, married to my wife Jo. We have six children, three girls and three boys and yes, the Brady Bunch. They are Bridie, Carmen, Joseph, Matt, Mikey and Gabby. All are married and between them, we have thirteen grandchildren and one on the way due in September.

Our family is the strongest and most important part of our lives. We have a strong Christian belief that I believe has helped us through some trying times in the past eight years. Having a very loving and tight family has helped us to get on in life with meaning.

My wife, Jo was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma about eight years ago and underwent chemotherapy, had a tumour removed from her spine and underwent stem cell treatment. At the time of being diagnosed, Jo was given three years at most which in itself was a huge shock to us all. This was in May of that year. Jo is now in remission and doing well now with the monthly appointments in Melbourne. That same year in December I was diagnosed with cancer and since have had my left kidney removed, colon part removed, small intestine removed and a big tumour removed from within my stomach. This all happened over six years ago or thereabouts.



Sam and Jo Brady with the communities of St Joseph's Nandaly and Our Lady's Mittyack

Therefore, where I am getting to with this is that without the love and support of a loving family, relatives and friends life might have been much different.

Our children, without them, well I do not know but they have always been there at every beck and call. Numerous phone calls, visits, food and just a "G'day, how's thing's going?" Prayers and support from our Catholic Parish, St Mary's Sea Lake makes life much more brighter when things seem to be struggling.

Jo and I are doing well and as I write now, Jo is cooking scones, cakes, etc for the Biggest Morning Tea to be in the Nandaly Hall, a big fundraiser for cancer research.

We both believe strongly in a loving family, close friends and to maintain an outlook on life that help and keep strong families and communities together in good times and hard times.

#### **KATE LAWRY (BALLARAT NORTH)**



My family is delicious though the sum of the ingredients for our particular family are not of our choosing. My husband died when the boys were young and this made for a lot of tough times and a different path to growing up than for most of our family and friends, though they were very much there to support us.

In asking my adult children what they think is important about 'family' now, my middle child immediately quipped in with 'They're work Mum!' and I thought how spot on he is. Families are a gift but to be a part of one means you have to work at nurturing it to keep it evolving - encompassing the joys, the ordinariness of most days and moving through the difficulties that being in family necessitates. Pope Francis says, 'That family is

the salt of the earth and the light of the world; it is the leaven of society as a whole." Family for me is about relationship and the well-being of all its members and as such is the building block for being in community. It teaches all members how to love, accept and enable each other in spite of differences. This is the backbone to learning to be in community, accepting of and working with the strengths and vulnerabilities that are a part of each family member's uniqueness. Encouraging unity is not smooth sailing but if the cornerstone of society is family, then like communities that prosper through healthy dialogue, effort and acceptance of diversity, families require that kind of attention too. They also benefit from a large dose of humour!

Even when we were at our busiest, we made sure that Friday nights were family nights and celebrated the working week's end with homemade pizzas, shiraz and a family movie. Whilst my sons are now in various stages of leaving home, we still cherish an evening like this and commit to it. We relax and laugh, annoy each other, argue and agree about the merits of plot and particularly about 'what Mum doesn't get!' and simply get on with being the flavour of our family.

#### **MICHAEL MCKENZIE (CAMPERDOWN)**

I go to bed most nights and follow a simple regime in my mind; one my wife Kim got me doing many years ago and that is thanking the Lord for the three things I am most grateful for that day. More often than not my family is mentioned somewhere in those three things as my reality is they are the centre of my life. My family consists of my wife Kim and my six children; Monique (23), Toby (21), Martinique (18), Demby (16), Madidi (11) and Matea (7) and

with a larger family than the average these days and with two children in the workforce, one at University, one in year 11 at secondary school at Mercy Regional College and two at primary school at St Patrick's Camperdown, there is always something happening.

The theme for National Families Week is "Stronger Families, Stronger Communities", and I could not agree more. As the principal at St Patrick's School Camperdown, I often tell my staff, families and students that there is nothing more important than family and that the most important of our decisions we make on a daily basis, should revolve around what is best for our families.



So for me, what is our family doing to create a 'stronger family and stronger community.' The important thing for my family is to try to maintain the little things that make us a family. Family meals which we can share together, meaningful communication with those children who are away from home (and those still at home!), regular involvement in activities which we can do together and making or allowing the time required in our busy world to be a family.

By attending to these things, it has allowed our family to be a part of community groups bigger than ourselves. Giving of time to our church, a range of community groups and sporting/dance groups is a part of who we are and a way to continue to build relationships both within our family and with our community.

We live in a world where we try to cram things into every minute. This can create a busy lifestyle and with this, a lack of time for the more important things, such as maintaining family. We are like all families and are constantly working hard to maintain our family values on a daily basis.

On reflection, during National Families Week, even though I think about, and am grateful for, so many of the things they do; I know I fall into the trap of taking my family for granted. I don't verbalise my love often enough, I don't let them know that the things that they do on a daily basis make me so proud and at times I put other less important things ahead of my family. It is something that I need to keep working on as a father; however, I also know that my family are also the ones who keep me grounded and bring my focus back to the most important thing - family.

For my family I am extremely grateful.