

I am very grateful to Fr Bill Van de camp, the Catholic Education Office Ballarat and St Patrick's Port Fairy staff and school community for providing me with the opportunity to undertake a period of enrichment leave.

My enrichment leave program consisted of the following:

1. Visiting Catholic sites in Spain and Portugal
2. Walking the Portuguese Coastal Route of the Camino de Santiago, from Porto to Santiago de Compostela
3. Visiting to our sister school in Péronne, France
4. Attending the International Conference on Excellence in Education, Creativity and Challenge, presented by The International Centre for Innovation in Education (ICIE), held in Paris.

The visits to Catholic sites included the Sagrada de Familia in Barcelona, Montserrat Monastery and Cathedrals in Valencia, Granada, Madrid, Seville, Lisbon and Porto. I attended Mass in Barcelona, Granada and Porto and even though they were celebrated in Spanish or Portuguese, the basic rites were very familiar. The practices sometimes took on a different form as I discovered when I knelt during the consecration and everyone else remained standing. The members of the congregation around me very quickly identified that I was a foreigner! It was also interesting to note that the rosary took place before every Mass I attended. This is a practice that is not common in our Australian context.



The walk along the Portuguese Coastal Route of the Camino de Santiago, from Porto in Portugal to the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela in Spain, was the highlight of my time away. We walked an average of 24 kms a day for thirteen days, passing through a variety of landscapes that included rugged coasts, pristine rivers, narrow mountain tracks, cobblestone paths, eucalypt forests, market gardens, farming areas, small villages and large cities. The Camino de Santiago Portuguese route was followed by pilgrims from western lands and those who arrived in Portuguese ports from overseas countries and who sought to get to Compostela following this coastal way. Legend has it that the bones of the apostle St James were brought by boat from Jerusalem to northern Spain and are buried under the site of what is now the city of Santiago de Compostela. People have walked the various routes of the Camino de Santiago for over one thousand years and the concept of the pilgrimage on foot was largely a necessity for poorer pilgrims in medieval times as few could afford to go by horseback. As a modern day pilgrim, the walking and the simplicity of the daily routine provided me with the opportunity to slow down and take a much gentler pace for a few weeks. Having nothing to think about each day other than putting one foot in front of the other, certainly provided some clear headspace that allowed for much personal reflection. Some days were more challenging than others (walking 34 kms in 35 degree heat!), but completing the walk provided a real sense of both physical and mental achievement.





The Portuguese Camino route is not as well populated as other routes and some days, we only came into contact with a handful of other walkers. The camaraderie amongst the walkers is a wonderful experience though, and we met people from a variety of nationalities, all with their own motivations for undertaking the experience. There were people of all ages, some walking on their own, some walking with friends or family, some walking with people they had just met along the way, some with very strong religious convictions and others with none. The common factor amongst all walkers however was kindness, generosity and a welcoming manner. The end of the journey at the square in front of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela was a very moving experience as we witnessed pilgrims converge from all the different routes. There were shouts of joy as well as tears of relief and pain and a real sense of fulfilment.



On the day we completed the walk, we also attended the daily pilgrim Mass held in the Cathedral. Participating in this celebration of the end of the journey with the hundreds of other pilgrims who also finished on the same day, was a very emotional experience. For me, the Camino de Santiago was a very spiritual journey. I had the time and space to reflect on my personal and professional life to date and fully realise the multitude of ways I have been richly blessed. I finished with a deep and profound sense of gratitude for what I have, for what I have been able to experience and for the people I have encountered along the way who have all added to the fabric of my journey in some way.

The third part of my leave was a visit to our sister school, Ecole Primaire La Chapelette in Péronne, France. This sister school link was established through the Anzac Centenary School Link Program (ACSLP). The journey to Péronne was a one hour ride on a fast train and then a 20 minute car ride to the school. Unfortunately on the day I visited, most of the classes were on an excursion, so I only managed to visit and work with one class. The children in this class were very keen to see some photos I took with me of our school and could readily tell me who their pen pals were. We also took part in an AFL skills clinic as part of the visit and the children were fascinated by the shape of the ball and the fact that it didn't bounce the way they expected. They were very keen to continue to develop the sister school relationship.



After our time at the school, we also visited the Historial de la Grande Guerre Museum. This museum is dedicated to World War 1 artefacts and contains a special room devoted to the Australian soldiers who fought in and around that area. It was very moving to read some of the stories contained there and provided me with an appreciation of how our ANZAC history is honoured still by schools and communities in France.

The final part of my leave was attendance at the International Conference on Excellence in Education, presented by The International Centre for Innovation in Education and held in Paris. I attended workshops and lectures on a range of topics including:

- Enhancing Creative Productivity
- Building Resilience
- Inspiring to Create
- Using Field Based Learning to Improve Student Engagement and Teacher Professional Development
- Meaningful Teaching and Learning Activities
- Project Based Learning

As a very grateful recipient of this period of enrichment leave, I returned to school revitalised in both mind and body. Time to reflect, rest and ponder my role as a spiritual and educational leader at St Patrick's and in Catholic education within the Diocese of Ballarat has left me better informed and educated to lead and set an example of learning and a faith filled life.

Sue Paulka – Principal

