



CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
of
BALLARAT



News around the Diocese

OUR DIOCESAN COMMUNITY

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OUR DIOCESAN COMMUNITY (ODC)

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The next ODC will be in July 2026.

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Sharers in Christ's Anointing

(Isaiah 61:1-3,6,8-9; Psalm 88;
Apocalypse 1:5-8; Luke 4:16-21)



I was baptised exactly two weeks after I was born. My young parents, still in their twenties, presented their third child to the parish priest at 3.00pm on Sunday 27th September 1959. Two other families were also presenting their newly born infants for baptism. During that ceremony I was anointed with the Oil of Catechumens and with the Chrism, which together with the Oil of the Sick, would have been blessed by the Archbishop of Hobart during the Holy Week ceremonies earlier that year.

My mother often recalled that the parish priest got impatient with her because she fumbled when trying to undo my vest so I could be anointed with the Oil of Catechumens. It just goes to show that the impatience or irritation of priests doesn't affect the power and effectiveness of God's anointing!

During my life I have been anointed with the Oil of Catechumens only that one time. On a handful of occasions have I received the Anointing of the Sick. Four times I have been anointed with the Sacred Chrism: on my forehead at my Baptism and when I was Confirmed, on my hands at my Ordination to ministerial priesthood, and (well and truly, I might say) on my head last week at the Episcopal Ordination.

As we gather to renew our commitment as the priestly people of God: laity, religious, priests and bishops, and as we bless the oils for sacramental anointing throughout our local Church, I invite you to ponder your own anointings, both sacramentally and in the many ways you have received anointing in Christ, through the service of others. I also invite you to be confident about the many ways you have brought Christ's anointing to others.

We use oils and ointments all the time, to heal, to protect and to strengthen. We use the oils we are about to bless to heal, to protect and to strengthen in the name of Christ. We are sharers in Christ's

anointing and, in a few moments, we are going to commit ourselves anew to share this anointing with all our sisters and brothers – not simply with the sacramental use of the oils, but also as we share ourselves in the service of all people. As we have been anointed in Christ, so each of us is missioned to anoint in the name of Christ and to make known the fullness of life that is God’s desire for us.

We gathered as the priestly people of God. By taking up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah when he went to the synagogue in Nazara, where he had been brought up, Jesus teaches us what it means to be a priestly people. By virtue of our baptism, incorporated into Christ by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we, each one of us, are called and commissioned to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour (Luke 4:18-19).

So how do we do this? In a sense, more of the same. More of the same courage, generosity and compassion with which you have already imitated Christ in all the different ways you have given of yourselves in serving your neighbour, especially those who are in need. But as

we renew our commitment, we pray that the Spirit of the Lord will deepen the anointing, so that even more, we will, like Jesus our Christ, pour out our lives for others so that all may have life and have it to the full (cf. John 10:10).

It matters not whether we are lay faithful or consecrated religious or ministerial priests or bishops. What matters is that we are all sharers in Christ’s anointing, and we are all called to give of ourselves as an anointing in the name of Christ Jesus!

Renewed in this anointing and renewing this anointing as we live out our particular vocations with faithfulness and love, we know the healing, protection and strengthening we need to celebrate the mysteries of our faith in the days ahead, and to live fully this anointing as we continue to journey together as the priestly people of God in the Diocese of Ballarat.

To our Christ, then, be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen! (Apocalypse 1:6)

*Bishop Mark’s Homily - Mass of The Holy Oils
St Patrick’s Cathedral, Ballarat
31st March 2026*

OLHC East Warrnambool Church celebrates

Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Warrnambool East, part of the South West Coast Parish serves as more than a religious building; it represents faith, identity, and a shared spiritual experience, embodying a community of faith and love. During the Jubilee year of Pilgrims of Hope, the congregation assembled to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the church’s opening and dedication. On November 8, 2025 Bishop Paul, along with Fr John Fitzgerald, Fr Matthew Restall and Fr Lawrence O’Toole, joined the community in a celebration to mark this significant event.

The day began in the afternoon with THE indispensable cuppa and chat, and the abundance of food was heaven sent. People travelled from all over the state to be there that afternoon. The foyer and the meeting room were full of displays showing the highlights of the past 50 years, while a PowerPoint flicked through old and new photos. The adjacent primary school ran a contest to design the front cover of a book to compliment this occasion.

The celebration continued later with the Saturday Vigil Mass, celebrated by Bishop Paul and concelebrants Fr John, Fr Matt and Fr Lawrie. In Bishop Paul’s opening remarks, he states ‘by happy coincidence, this is also the Feast of the Dedication of a famous church in Rome – the Basilica of St John Lateran. So as we give thanks for the blessings of these fifty years here in Warrnambool East, we’re united with people around the world. The Mass was an enthusiastic celebration of the rich journey of the Our Lady Help of Christians community. To deepen the celebration, a song that was heard fifty years ago at the dedication was sung, and honouring all generations that have helped nurture and grow the church and the community, we pray that God will continue to bless us as we gather and we also pray that God will continue to build us up as a community, so we ourselves will be a temple where God lives.

After the Jubilee Mass, once again people gathered to talk and share their personal story over a cuppa, at which time commemorative bookmarks and a booklet tracing the symbols and early history of the community – with some surprising and interesting facts about the church – were freely distributed.

Our journey has had many challenges - in our parish, the diocese and globally, - but also many more blessings for which we are grateful. As we move forward to our next chapter within the greater Star of the Sea Parish, South West Coast, we ask God to continue to guide and bless us as a parish family in the years ahead. We would like to thank all parishioners and priests and the whole community for their tireless efforts over the past fifty years.

Dion Bartlett



ALL SET TO GARDEN

As you look behind St Mary's Primary School Warracknabeal, you can see just how much progress has been made, and it's exciting to share how quickly the garden project is coming to life.

Thanks to Bec for connecting us with the team at Cyclone, we are already seeing the benefits of a very generous donation of garden tools. From rakes and shovels to gloves, small wheelbarrows, and more, we have made a fantastic start. While there is still more to come, this donation has given the project real momentum.

The veggie patch area is taking shape, thanks to the hard work of Kyle and his helpers who cleared the space, levelled the ground and removed rubbish. We are also incredibly grateful to Corey for supplying fencing materials and to Ben for helping install the back fence, creating a secure and defined garden space. The progress continued when Ben from Warrack Concrete delivered gravel that will soon become walking paths leading to the running track and sports shed, as well as forming a solid foundation for our raised garden beds.



Inside the classroom, the excitement continues with the arrival of our new worm farm and compost system, now delivered to the 5/6 class. This addition will play an important role in supporting the garden while enriching hands-on learning for our students. You can truly feel the strength of community behind this project. Thank you to everyone who has generously given their time, resources, and support - together, you are helping turn this garden vision into a thriving reality.

Kristy (Parent Club President)



Walking Together in Faith, Compassion and Creativity

Students at St Thomas More Catholic Primary School Alfredton have much to celebrate, with recent experiences highlighting both their commitment to faith-in-action and their creative talents.

Recently, students took part in the K's for Caritas event, engaging in the powerful experience of "walking in someone else's shoes" as part of their Lenten learning and reflection. This meaningful activity encouraged students to deepen their understanding of empathy, service and solidarity, while reflecting on how they can support others during the Lenten season.

As the school community continued its Lenten journey, Project Compassion fundraising efforts remained strong. Initiatives such as Crazy Sock Day, Casual Clothes Day, K's for Caritas, and weekly Zooper Dooper sales helped students make a meaningful contribution to supporting people in need around the world.

Adding to this wonderful period of celebration, the much-loved snail sculpture Glow-Joe, created by the students, was awarded the People's Choice Award at this year's Ballarat Begonia Festival. Glow-Joe captured the hearts of festival-goers, receiving an impressive 311 of the 600 votes cast, a testament to the creativity, effort and strong sense of community behind the project.

Congratulations to all students involved and sincere thanks to the school's amazing community for their ongoing support in bringing these meaningful experiences and achievements to life.

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications
[Photos sourced from Facebook Page of St Thomas More]





Spotlight on St Augustine's

St Augustine's Parish Maryborough is on the land of the Dja Dja Wurrung people who have made this their home for thousands of years. Our parish includes most of the Central Goldfields Shire, while Avoca and the western part of our parish are embedded within the beautiful scenery and popular wineries of Pyrenees Shire. We were part of Castlemaine Parish from 1854 till a parish was created in our own right in 1860. Like many parishes in our diocese, our geographical boundaries have changed over the years; most notably when in 1865, our northern part was carved off to create Inglewood parish. In 1978 we regained Bealiba, Dunolly and Tarnagulla when Inglewood itself was handballed from the Ballarat diocese to Sandhurst. Apart from our main centre, Maryborough, we consist of small towns and agriculture, mainly cropping and grazing. We are also a tourist magnet for those attracted by our goldfields past, wineries and historic streets and buildings including our unique railway station.



In January 1902, four Brigidine Sisters arrived from Ararat to take on Catholic education in our parish. This has since evolved into St Augustine's Primary School and (from St Joseph's Secondary School) Highview College, the world's first ecumenical school when it commenced in 1974. Our parish greatly benefited from the Brigidines in faith, education and pastoral care. Their 114 years of committed personal presence ended with the death of our beloved pastoral associate Sr Barbara May in 2016. St Augustine's School continues to thrive, with a current enrolment of 275 students, and acknowledges those who laid the foundations for who we are today, with each classroom named after a Brigidine sister. Highlights for our parish and school each year include our popular Deb Balls and participation in EBT (Energy Breakthrough) each November. These attract thousands of students from scores of schools across our state.



In the 1970's and early 1980's we were blessed with the leadership of Fr Pat Flanagan who returned as a very active retired priest for four years until entering aged care last year. Frags rejuvenated our RCIA program that now welcomes/baptises several adults each year. We are also deeply grateful for the fine contribution of Redemptorist priests Joseph Tuyen in 2015 and Mark Chia in 2019, deacon Matthew Restall in 2022 and seminarian Simon Zakari in 2025. Along with those whose families have been here for generations, our parish is now benefitting from a steady stream of new arrivals for work and retirement, including an energetic Filipino community and others from overseas, who are helping turn our parish into a vibrant multicultural place in which to live, worship and look forward to all that God continues to bless us with.

Fr John Monaghan - Parish Priest

Secondary Youth Leadership Conference

A group of sixteen current and aspiring young leaders from Years 9 to 12 at St Joseph's College Mildura attended the 2026 Youth Leadership Academy Australia (YLAA) Secondary Youth Leadership Conference in Adelaide on Tuesday, March 3, 2026.

This engaging and immersive conference equips, educates, and empowers young people to lead their schools and communities. Students participated in workshops about defining leadership, communicating as a leader, creating change, and developing student voice and agency. They also learned strategies and tools that they can adapt and use on any number of leadership pathways.

After the conference, students had fun working together in teams at Tree Climb Adelaide. They also discovered how Haigh Chocolates leads ethical business practices during a visit to the company's flagship factory. As an added bit

of luck, some tasty treats were taken away, along with knowledge that would sustain the students in the years to come.

I look forward to seeing this group of current and future leaders grow and develop their skills.

Mr Greg Kluske - College Principal



Honoured on retirement



Bernadette Lynch who is a long-standing and deeply respected contributor to Catholic life in the Ballarat Diocese and is recognised for her decades of commitment to parish communities, religious education and the mission of the Church retired at the end of 2025.

Well known in both the Wendouree and Redan (now the South West Ballarat) parishes, Bernadette has spent many years supporting faith formation, guiding parish initiatives and offering pastoral care with what colleagues describe as her “love, kindness and Gospel spirit.”

Her involvement across the diocese has been extensive. As a Religious Education Advisor in the Diocesan Religious Education Centre, Bernadette played an integral role in the development of ‘Awakenings’, the religious education curriculum designed specifically for schools in the Ballarat Diocese. She was also a key member of the Inter-diocesan Coordinating Group that shaped the program. Religious Education Leaders consistently valued her approachable, enthusiastic and knowledgeable support.

Her parish work has been equally significant. In Wendouree, Bernadette served on the Parish Leadership Steering Group, which helped discern the need for an OLHC Parish Interim Coordinating Team. Bernadette has also long contributed to the diocesan parish-based

Sacramental Program. Through the ‘Let the Children Come’ program, she assisted families preparing children for the Sacraments of Initiation and was part of the team that reviewed diocesan policy and catechetical resources.

In the South West Ballarat Parish, where she worked as parish co-ordinator for years, Bernadette is known for her strong sense of community and pastoral presence. She participated actively in the life of the parish, supporting families, parish groups and key ministries.

Beyond retirement from her parish and education roles, Bernadette is a valued member of the Our Diocesan Community Editorial Board, where her insights and experience help shape the storytelling and communication of the wider diocese and has also recently accepted a position on the Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Ltd Board. These will keep her busy in her retirement.

Those who have worked with her describe Bernadette as compassionate, deeply committed to her faith and gifted in encouraging participation and discernment within parish life. Her ability to listen, reflect and bring people together has shaped countless conversations and initiatives throughout the diocese.

“Bernadette is someone who lives the Gospel every day,” one colleague said. “Her kindness, her sense of community and her openness to the Spirit are evident in everything she does.”

On Thursday, December 18, 2025, a Thanksgiving Mass was held at St Aloysius Church Redan with Fr Con Bagaoisan, Fr Eladio Lizado and Fr Eugene McKinnon concelebrating. The Mass was followed by a morning tea in the Parish Office. These celebrations provided an opportunity for everyone to come together in appreciation of Bernadette’s contributions to our parish as we celebrated and farewelled her.

Bernadette officially marked the conclusion of her service and time in the Parish at the Redan Christmas Eve Mass. Bernadette was presented with a certificate from the Bishop (thank you for your work... it was lovely) and two roses for her garden. This presentation marked the conclusion of her time with us and her dedicated tenure as Parish Coordinator.

“STEPPING UP”

The Year 8 Father (or Male Mentor) and Son Evening at St Patrick’s College Ballarat was held recently — and what a special night it was for all involved! The Performing Arts Centre was filled with meaningful conversation, laughter and shared moments of joy as our boys and the important men in their lives came together to reflect on what it means to “step up” as good men. Expertly facilitated by Bill Jennings, founder of ‘Time & Space for Stepping up’, the evening created exactly what it promised — time and space for connection, guidance and affirmation. The best role models are indeed close to home. Thank you to all the fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers and mentors who made the night so memorable.



Katie Spurgo - St Patrick’s College Ballarat

FAREWELL TO MONICA

The community of St James' Parish School, Sebastopol offered a very special farewell to Monica Broemmer who retired after 26 years of dedicated service.

Since joining the community in 1999, Monica has made a lasting difference in the lives of many students, families, and colleagues. Her commitment to learning and her genuine care for others have helped generations of students grow and succeed.

Over the years, Monica has taught with creativity, dedication, and compassion—leaving an enduring mark on all who have had the privilege of learning from her. Monica has contributed to many areas of school life, particularly through her work in speech articulation and support for students with additional learning needs. Her efforts have helped students find confidence in their learning and reach their full potential.

Colleagues describe her as someone who always has time for others with a gift for brightening even the busiest of days. She has truly gone above and beyond for our school community in every way. Comments from students included “You are so calm and kind. You brighten everyday” - Judd Year 5 and “You are so friendly and I just love being around you. We will miss you” - Gracie Year 5



We will deeply miss her warmth, wisdom and steady presence in our staffroom. As Monica embarks on this next chapter, we extend our heartfelt thanks and best wishes. Her legacy will continue to live on in the lessons she has taught, the values she has modelled, and the lives she has touched. On behalf of the students, staff, and families of St James' Parish School, we thank Monica for 26 years of dedication and care, and we wish her all the very best for her exciting new stage of life. Thank you, Monica—you will always be part of the St James' family.

Viv McLoughlin - Deputy Principal/Learning Diversity Leader

Celebrating Jubilees

Mass to acknowledge the clergy who celebrate a Jubilee of Ordination in 2025 was held on Tuesday, October 28, 2025 at St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat at 5.00pm. Bishop Paul Bird CSsR was the Main Celebrant and those celebrating Jubilees were invited to concelebrate the Mass. 2025 Jubilarians were: Fr Pat Flanagan – 65 years; Bishop Paul Bird – 50 years; Fr Eugene McKinnon – 50 years; Fr Wally Tudor – 50 years.

Proceedings began with an Acknowledgement of Country and all welcomed by Dr Peter Morris.

The music was led by Choir Conductor Roger Hillman and Organist for the Mass was Geoff Martin. Members of the choir were from the parishes of the greater Ballarat area. Mitch Leviston, as Cantor, lifted the Cathedral with his voice, guiding the congregation in song and prayer. The music chosen was fitting for the celebration, reflecting the joy of the occasion. The congregation joined wholeheartedly in the singing, adding to the spirit of unity and celebration.

Joining the diocesan clergy jubilarians in con-celebrating the Mass were friends of Fr Eugene McKinnon, also celebrating their golden jubilees of ordination, Fr Michael Delaney (Archdiocese of Hobart) and Fr Michael Morley (Diocese of Sandhurst). Bishop Paul offered the following words of welcome, “Welcome, everyone, as we gather for this Mass. This evening we pray particularly for those celebrating notable anniversaries of priestly ordination this

year. Fr Pat Flanagan is celebrating his 65th anniversary of ordination. Fr Eugene McKinnon, Fr Wally Tudor, Fr Michael Delaney, Fr Michael Morley and I are celebrating our Golden Jubilees of ordination. Thank you all for joining with us in this Eucharist as we give thanks for the ministry of each of our jubilarians through the years and pray for continued blessings in the years ahead”.



Anne Tudor proclaimed the First Reading and Allan McKinnon the Prayer of the Faithful. Fr Wally Tudor proclaimed the Gospel and offered the Homily. Friends of the Sisters of Nazareth bought forward the gifts.

At the end of Mass, Bishop Paul prayed a Blessing for the Jubilarians and all in attendance joined in song to share the blessing, “May God Bless You and Keep You.”

We give thanks to those who celebrate a Jubilee this year and to all those who serve in our diocese.

Following Mass, clergy gathered to share a meal and continued the celebrations.

The retirement of Bishop Paul Bird CSsR

The Catholic Diocese of Ballarat marked the conclusion of a distinguished chapter of leadership, pastoral care and dedicated service to the community with a Mass of Thanksgiving on March 2, 2026 for Bishop Paul Bird as he retired as Bishop of Ballarat. Bishop Paul has served as the Bishop of Ballarat since 2012.

When bishops turn 75, they are requested to offer their resignations to the Pope. Bishop Paul turned 75 in 2024 and offered his resignation but was asked to stay on till a successor could be found. On January 7, 2026, Pope Leo appointed Fr Mark Freeman to be the new Bishop of Ballarat. At the same time, Pope Leo appointed Bishop Paul as Apostolic Administrator, to care for the diocese until Bishop-Elect Mark was ordained and installed as the ninth Bishop of Ballarat on March 19.



Bishop Paul has been defined by his steadfast commitment to spiritual leadership, community outreach and the strengthening of parish life across the region. Throughout his years of service, Bishop Paul has been widely respected for his warm pastoral presence, thoughtful guidance and unwavering dedication to fostering a sense of unity and hope within the Church.

The Mass of Thanksgiving was held at St Patrick's Cathedral, with around three hundred people in attendance including priests of the diocese, Redemptorist priests and people from many of the parishes around the diocese, as well as those watching the livestream, all joining together to wish Bishop Paul the best for his retirement.

Bishop Paul expressed deep gratitude to the people of the diocese and for the privilege of serving them. Bishop Paul said, "As I draw towards the end of my service as Bishop of Ballarat, I'm glad of this opportunity to give thanks for the years I've spent in this role and I'm grateful to you all for joining me in the Eucharist, our great prayer of thanks. I give thanks to God for the blessings of my time as Bishop of Ballarat and I give thanks to each one of you – those here in the cathedral and those joining us online. I thank you for the support you have given me in this ministry,"

Bishop Paul led the diocese through the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Responses to Child Abuse and then through several hearings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse. These were particularly difficult years – for those who had suffered abuse, for their families, for parishes and schools and for the whole community.

During the celebration, there was recognition of the Bishop, on behalf of the Laity, on behalf of the Religious of the Diocese and on behalf of the Clergy of the Diocese.

Noeline Hogan, East Wimmera Parish, on behalf of the Laity said, "we are grateful for your unwavering dedication and support as you enabled the amalgamation of parishes and encouraged the different communities to work together. Your counsel has inspired the leaders in our parishes, and your example has embodied servant leadership at its finest, as was demonstrated through the Diocesan Assembly held in 2024. You have enabled people to follow their passions and encouraged individuals to become involved in parish and liturgical life."

Sr Marie Davey rsm, on behalf of the Religious, stated that "for the past fourteen years you were teacher and faith leader to those who live in the Diocese of Ballarat. As our Bishop you met the needs of both the local parish communities, and also those who live in religious communities. Your empathy and understanding of people has been greatly enhanced by





your years as a Redemptorist leader.” Fr Marcello Colasante, Vicar General, continued “We pay tribute to Bishop Paul, with a sense of great gratitude as the priests of the diocese. It is often said we are given particular leaders at a particular time in history, and in the history of our diocese, none better than Bishop Paul came to us, giving his life for us, and we extend heartfelt gratitude, and wish him all the best, as life is different for him, as it goes forward.”

A poignant moment at the end of the celebration was when all were invited to stand and give Bishop Paul a blessing by singing “May God Bless and Keep You”. Following Mass, all were invited to share supper with Bishop Paul in the hall. We wish Bishop Paul all the best in his retirement.

Bishop Paul's homily:

Whenever we come to Mass we offer prayers of thanksgiving. However, the theme of thanksgiving is particularly strong in our celebration this evening. As I draw towards the end of my service as Bishop of Ballarat, I'm glad of this opportunity to give thanks for the years I've spent in this role and I'm grateful to you all for joining me in the Eucharist, our great prayer of thanks. I give thanks to God for the blessings of my time as Bishop of Ballarat and I give thanks to each one of you – those here in the cathedral and those joining us online. I thank you for the support you have given me in this ministry.



In some ways it doesn't seem so long since we gathered here in this cathedral for my ordination as bishop. The memory of that ceremony is still vivid for me. One part of the ordination of a bishop is an anointing with chrism. The perfumed oil is poured on the new bishop's head. I remember that Archbishop Denis Hart poured quite a lot of oil on my head and some ran down into my eyes and I was blinking for a while to clear my eyes. I also remember Bishop Peter Connors handing me the crosier and then Archbishop Hart and Bishop Connors leading me to the bishop's chair. In a sense it seems as though it was only the other day. And yet, much has happened since then. We have been through a good deal from that day in 2012 till this evening in 2026.



These have been significant years for me and for people throughout our diocese. This came home to me recently when I was visiting Damascus College. I was speaking with some of the students from Year 12 and I mentioned that I had started as Bishop of Ballarat in 2012. One of the students said, “In 2012 I was only four years old.” I feel privileged to have been bishop since that young girl was four, through all her years in primary school and through her secondary years until now she is in her final year of secondary school. I give thanks for the blessings in her life as she has grown from being a little girl to being a young woman. I give thanks for the blessings in the lives of people throughout our diocese through these years. I give thanks that I have had the opportunity to serve as bishop throughout this time.

In earlier years, I was involved with the Australasian Catholic Press Association. When I was appointed bishop, members of the Press Association sent me a card with good wishes for the new role. On the front of the card was one of the slogans used in England during the Second World War. The card said, “Keep calm and carry on.” This was helpful advice for people coping with the stress of war. It's also good advice in times of stress in the life of a bishop. “Keep calm and carry on.”

Within a few months of my arrival in Ballarat, Bishop Peter Connors and I appeared before the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Responses to Child Abuse. In the following years, the diocese was involved in several hearings of the Royal

Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse. These were particularly stressful years – for those who had suffered abuse, for their families, for parishes and schools and for the whole community. I thank the many people who helped us through those years. I am especially grateful to those who worked closely with me in responding to the issues as they arose. We learnt painful but important lessons through those years. As a diocesan community we have provided support to those who suffered abuse. We have also put in place policies and practices that keep children safe today and we realise that we must all continue to be vigilant so that our community can be a safe place for everyone.

A few weeks ago, Fr Mark Freeman and I went along to the studio of radio station 3BA. We were invited to speak about my retirement as bishop and Fr Mark's coming ordination as the new Bishop of Ballarat. The interviewer asked me whether I would like to mention any highlights of my time as bishop.

The first highlight that came to my mind was a very rich experience on one day last year. It was the Sunday before Christmas. In the morning, I celebrated the 8.00am Mass at the Cathedral. Celebrating Mass around the diocese has been a regular highlight for me, whether it has been a Mass in the cathedral or a Mass in one of our little country churches. Celebrating Masses with our local communities has been a joy for me as bishop. That Sunday before Christmas I celebrated the 8.00 am Mass in the Cathedral. Later that morning I went to the Jewish Synagogue. It was the Sunday after the shooting in Bondi, and I had been invited to attend a memorial service at the Ballarat synagogue. On behalf of our Catholic community, I expressed our sympathies to the Jewish community in Ballarat and beyond. We remembered the people in Bondi who had been celebrating the Jewish feast of Hanukah. We prayed that God's light would continue to shine even through days of darkness. That was the memorial service on the Sunday morning. That evening, I went along to the Anglican Cathedral to join in the service of lessons and carols in preparation for Christmas.



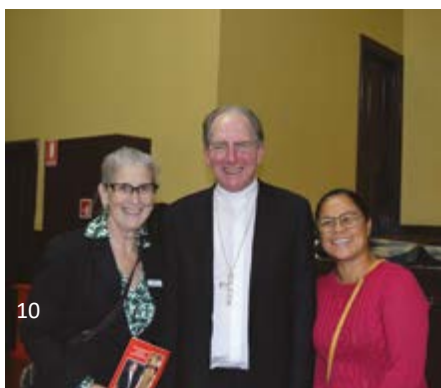
That Sunday before Christmas was unusual in that I attended three different kinds of service on one day - services at our Catholic Cathedral and at the synagogue and at the Anglican cathedral. And yet, it highlighted what is a regular element of a bishop's role – being engaged with our Catholic community and representing the Catholic community as we engage with the wider community.

When I was asked about highlights of my time as bishop I also thought of my visits to schools around the diocese. It has been a joy to visit school communities and speak with students in their classrooms. The conversations are often surprising. As an example, I recall one student asking a question about the Swiss Guards. The question was: Why do the Swiss Guards wear pyjamas? The student had seen photos of the Swiss Guards in their colourful uniforms and to him they looked like pyjamas. So, the question, why do the Swiss Guards wear pyjamas? As a response, I said that while they might look like pyjamas, they were actually old-style dress uniforms that soldiers would wear on special occasions. Later on, I thought of another answer that I could have given. I could have said that the Swiss Guards' job is to guard the Pope and they have to be on call 24 hours a day. Maybe they wear pyjamas because they haven't got time to change. I have enjoyed my visits to schools and colleges.

When you are appointed bishop, one of the things you need to do is choose a motto. The motto I chose was "Peace be with you". We heard the theme of peace in our Scripture readings this evening. St Paul wrote to the people in Colossae: "May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts". The gospel referred to Jesus meeting his disciples following his resurrection. After Jesus had been arrested and put to death, his disciples were fearful for their own safety. The risen Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them "Peace be with you". The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, "Peace be with you". I hope I have been able to share something of the joy and peace of Christ with you in my years as Bishop of Ballarat. We recognise that there have been challenging times, but we can also give thanks that we have been able to support one another through our faith in Christ.

In the Book of Nehemiah we read, "The joy of the Lord is your strength". May the joy of the Lord continue to be our strength and may the peace of the Lord reign in our hearts. May the joy and peace of Christ be with us all in the days and years ahead.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR



An Easter Fable

It was Easter, and everything had been prepared for the Vigil — including lighting the fire in the brazier. The brazier had been borrowed from a parishioner. As the fire took hold, a general unease spread through the congregation as an unexpected element entered the liturgy: the unmistakable smell of meat being cooked on a barbecue. Clearly, the brazier was leading a double life — barbecue by day, liturgical accessory by night.

The silence was broken by a small child who asked, “Is he going to have a sausage, Mummy?” In that innocent question, the tension of the moment was perfectly named: had they gathered for a sausage sizzle or for a liturgy? There were tut-tuts from the pious and chuckles from the rest. The celebrant felt a flicker of unease but carried on regardless. In all liturgy we bring with us the reality of our daily lives.

With the minor symbols completed, the Paschal candle was lit from the fire in the brazier — the symbol of Christ, Light of the World.

The celebrant proclaimed, “Christ our Light,” and began the procession into the darkness of the church. Again, “Christ our Light,” as the Paschal candle was carried inside, the parishioners following. As they entered, each person lit their own candle from the Paschal flame, and the celebrant watched as the light gradually took hold. For the first time, he noticed that when each candle was lit, the first thing he saw was the beautiful face of the person holding it.

In those faces he saw people who were celebrating and people who were grieving — they were there with their ‘joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties’¹ — and he knew that he loved them.

They carried within them the light symbolised by the candle: the light of the risen Christ. Together, that light burned strongly. By their presence and their prayerfulness, it was clear they had come not for a sausage sizzle, but to celebrate their faith and to proclaim Christ risen and to carry his light to the world.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Fr Adrian McInerney

1. Gaudium et Spes



CELEBRATING HARMONY

Celebrating Cultural Diversity Week is always a joyful week that is particularly close to the heart of the small community at St Mary’s School Robinvale, a place which people from all over the world have chosen to make their home. All have been working hard to create some amazing displays sharing information about the many and varied countries that our staff and students come. They are a wonderful acknowledgement of our incredible culturally diverse community.

A culmination of the week was Harmony Day celebrations where our students came together to create a powerful visual display — forming the word HARMONY on the oval. This was a wonderful representation of our school community, to which every student belongs and in which each plays a part. Our choir did a fantastic job leading us in singing ‘I Am Australian’, adding a special and meaningful touch to the occasion. A big thank you to all our students and staff for working together to make this possible, and to Ben Parker from GWaD Aerial Mapping for capturing this memorable moment. We look forward to sharing more footage of our students creating the word on our school website.

Lisa Zappia - Administration Officer





International Women's Day

On Friday morning, March 6, 2026, the community of Loreto College Ballarat proudly gathered to celebrate International Women's Day with the annual Women in Time – Inspiring Alumni induction. This special occasion recognises the remarkable and diverse achievements within our alumni community, highlighting stories that inspire today's students just as the Loreto Sisters have inspired generations before them.

In 2026, we were delighted to welcome two exceptional past pupils into the Women in Time community, each recognised for their contributions in different fields, yet united by a shared passion for the arts and cultural understanding.

Genevieve Lacey (Class of 1990) – Arts & Cultural Excellence: Genevieve was honoured for her extraordinary contribution to music and the arts as an internationally acclaimed recorder virtuoso, musician and artist. Throughout her career, Genevieve has performed and collaborated with leading artists and organisations around the world. She is widely respected not only for her exceptional musicianship, but also for her commitment to championing creativity and demonstrating the powerful role the arts can play in enriching communities.

Dr Catherine Gay (Class of 2014) – Young Achiever: Dr Catherine was recognised for her dedication to history and cultural heritage. Catherine's passion for art and history has led her to pursue doctoral research that explores the overlooked stories of Indigenous and settler girls and young women during Australia's colonial period. Through her work, she is helping to uncover and share perspectives that have long been absent from traditional historical narratives.

Although their careers have taken them into different fields, Genevieve and Catherine's reflections beautifully complemented one another. Both speakers shared insights into their professional journeys, the importance of creativity and cultural understanding, and the impact of their Loreto education in shaping their paths. They also spoke warmly about the strong sense of community that supported them during their time at Loreto and continues to connect them long after graduation.

The morning also included the presentation of the Women in Time – Student Award. This year's recipient, senior student Idaho, was recognised for demonstrating the qualities and potential to embody Mary Ward's vision. The award celebrates a student who shows great promise and encourages them to continue their path of leadership and service. Idaho's achievements reflect not only academic excellence, but also leadership, compassion and a strong commitment to community.

It was a wonderful morning as past pupils, families, staff and students from all year levels came together to celebrate these inspiring journeys. Initiatives such as Women in Time remind us of the powerful legacy of the Loreto community and the many ways its graduates continue to make meaningful contributions to the world.

*Jayde Harrington - Development Officer (Loreto College)
Pictured: Genevieve Lacey, Idaho, Christine Shaw (Principal), Dr Catherine Gay*

NANDALY NEWS

St Joseph's Catholic Church Nandaly enjoyed a fairly quiet year in 2025 - until November arrived, bringing a flurry of activity for our little church and its parishioners. Our parish, now known as Holy Family Parish, Northeast Mallee, had the pleasure of hosting Sr Rosemary Drum MGL and Sr Kathryn Kinsley MGL from the Missionaries of God. They were with us to lead a retreat titled 'Hope Does Not Disappoint', and during their time here they also worked with the children preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.



St Joseph's celebrates Mass at 5.00pm every second Sunday of the month, and Srs Rosie and Kathryn were able to travel across from Swan Hill with Fr James to join us for this celebration.

An unexpected bonus for our parishioners was that Sr Rosie brought her guitar, blessing us with live music. Together, Srs Rosie and Kathryn led a beautiful entrance hymn and closing hymn, their wonderful voices adding something truly special to the liturgy. We are sure Fr James appreciated their singing just as much as the congregation did. During the Mass, Sr Kathryn delivered the homily, sharing an engaging insight into her childhood in Sydney, her call to religious life, and her commitment to serving God through the Missionaries of God. As the Mass fell shortly after All Souls' Day, those in attendance were invited to light a candle in memory of family and friends who have gone before us - always a heartfelt and meaningful moment.

At the beginning of Mass, we offered sheaves of wheat in honour of the upcoming harvest—giving thanks to God for what we are about to receive and praying for a safe season. A pre-harvest prayer was read, seeking guidance and protection for workers, carers, and all involved. The sheaves were placed on the altar, and later they formed the base for our nativity scene.

As we only have one Mass each month, we took the opportunity to make this our Christmas Mass, followed by a Christmas meal generously hosted by the Brady family. Before the meal, Sam Brady offered thanks to Srs Rosie and Kathryn for visiting St Joseph's and for their contribution to our special celebration. We also extended our gratitude and Christmas wishes to Fr James, thanking him for his dedication to our parish. With his upcoming three-month sabbatical in Rome—studying at the Institute of Continuing Theology Education—we wished him safe travels. Fr James has expressed his hope to meet Pope Leo while in Rome... good luck with that, Fr James! We also extend our thanks to the visiting clergy who will celebrate Mass with us while Fr James is away.

Finally, a very special note: on October 11, 2026, St Joseph's Church will celebrate its 100-year anniversary. We would be grateful for any photos, documents, or historical information you may have to help commemorate this wonderful milestone. Please contact northeastmallee@ballarat.catholic.org.au if you can contribute.

We would like to thank all the visiting clergy who are coming to our parish to celebrate Masses while Fr James is away.

Sam Brady - Nandaly

ADVENT LITURGY

On Friday, November 28, St Mary's Primary School Swan Hill Year 1 students, together with Parish Priest Fr James Kerr, led the whole school in an Advent liturgy. The students were amazing, sharing prayers, readings and reflections that reminded us all about the special season of Advent and the hope we feel as we wait for Jesus' birth. The children spoke clearly, listened carefully and showed great reverence throughout the liturgy.

It certainly felt like Christmas was just around the corner after this liturgy, with children dressed in their favourite Christmas colours.

A huge thank you to their teachers for helping them prepare and to our families for coming along to join in our special celebration and supporting our casual dress day.

We raised over \$500 to purchase presents for the parish Christmas tree. These gifts will be delivered to St Vincent de Paul to help support families in need over Christmas. It was a beautiful start to our Advent journey!

Kate Quin (Principal) and Belinda Davies (RE Leader)



Australian Catholic Youth Festival



The Australian Catholic Youth Festival is a national gathering of Catholic young people established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The ACYF was held in Melbourne from November 30 – December 2. There were around fifty pilgrims from schools and parishes across the Ballarat diocese attending the festival, with an overall attendance of around 6,000.

The Festival began on Sunday, November 30 at St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne at 2.30pm with the Official Welcome and prayer led by the Catholic Bishops

of Australia. The World Youth Day Cross and Icon was then carried out of the Cathedral to take pride of place in the pilgrim walk procession. At 3.00pm the Pilgrimage Walk began, with the Cross and Icon being processed through the heart of Melbourne to the Festival venue (Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre).

Reflection on ACYF from Dimah:

ACYF has been such a wonderful experience. The talks, exhibitions, and activities helped reveal different aspects of myself and my relationship with God and my relationship with others. One moment that stood out to me was during the service on the first day, when the World Youth Day cross was brought to the front next to the altar and then raised upright. At that moment, I was struck by the similarities between the cross raised before the church and the cross raised on Calvary. That moment is a reminder to me of what I'm worth, and what God was willing to endure for me. I hope that it also reminds others that the cross did not bring about God's love for us, but rather displayed God's merciful love in all its Glory.

A second thing I really enjoyed at the ACYF was the quiet time in front of the Blessed Sacrament and the World Youth Day Cross. Before this, I was anxious and worried about many things: my future, my past, and the time in between. It was in the silence that Jesus spoke the reassurance in my heart, "all will be well, I am with you always, I will take care of it", and this consolation gave me courage, knowing that when I mess up in the future (and I probably will), God will not leave me in my mess.

I'm also very grateful for the time I spent hanging out with the pilgrims from the Ballarat Diocese outside the venue and in the hotel. At the end of the day, we played games as a group, joked around, and went out to dinner together. I think this has definitely brought the group closer together. Before this, we knew each other, but were not really friends. While it is sad that I may not see some of them in the near future, I'm grateful for the short time we shared playing games and joking around.

I originally was unsure if I should attend the ACYF. I went back and forth on the decision, and I booked the ticket last minute. I thought it would be a fun experience, hanging out with friends, and listening to talks that could be interesting. I did not know what to expect. Despite this, I was able to encounter God in a profound and comforting way, as the GOD of Mercy and Compassion. The God who comes to us as we are, who meets with us where we are, and does not expect us to climb the ladder of perfection to see him. I hope I live this message out in my life, and being a testimony of it to the world, so that through my life, more would come to him, who is Life itself. I'm very excited about the 2028 ACYF in Sydney, and while I may not be able to bring 100 friends with me, I hope to bring at least one so they can have this wonderful experience.



I was also lucky to be invited to a dinner with the Bishops of Australia in attendance at the ACYF. Two young people were invited from each diocese and I attended this special encounter with Bishop Paul and with Elizabeth from Mildura. The dinner with the Bishops was a very new and interesting experience for me. I intended to get to know the people leading the church, and because of the dinner, I was not only able to do that but also meet and learn more about the young Catholics in the church community, the people Christ has called his own. I feel very blessed to have had that opportunity. Bishop Paul was a very gracious host, and it was great to attend and talk with Elizabeth. I hope that this experience will help me grow more in the Catholic community and help strengthen my relationship with the Church going forward. ACYF and the dinner have inspired me to become more involved in the church, and I want to try to explore this desire and find opportunities to make it grow.

Central Zone Special Mass

On Tuesday, January 27, 2026 staff from the Catholic Education Central Zone schools gathered at St Patrick's Cathedral for a beautiful Mass to mark the beginning of the 2026 school year.

The Mass was celebrated by Bishop Paul, with Fr Jim McKay and Fr Ed Moloney as concelebrants. In his homily, Bishop Paul reflected on this year's Catholic Education theme, "Peace be with you all", (Romans 15:33), reminding us of the hope, unity and mission that guide our work in Catholic education. Bishop Paul said, "As we start a new school year, we might be anxious about how the year will unfold. We might be unsure whether we'll be able to meet the challenges that the year will bring. In our anxieties, in our uncertainties, the greeting of Jesus can be a source of calm. "Peace be with you". The peace that we're referring to is the peace of Christ, the peace that Jesus came to bring. In the full text from the letter to the Romans, St Paul does not only say, "Peace be with you all." He says, "May the God of peace be with you all". The peace we're referring to is the peace that comes from the God of peace, the peace that comes to us as a gift of God. This is the peace that Jesus offers us. This is the peace we pray for in the Mass and for the whole year."

This year's Mass was particularly special, as it was the last time Bishop Paul lead this annual gathering, commencing his retirement in March. New staff across the zone were warmly blessed as they begin their journey of service this year.

This cherished annual gathering brings together all teaching and non-teaching staff from Catholic schools across the Ballarat Central Zone, supported by our colleagues at DOBCEL. It provides a reflective and inspiring start to the year ahead, grounded in community, faith and the message of peace.

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications



RITE OF ELECTION 2026

The annual Rite of Election was celebrated on Saturday, February 21, 2026 at St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat by Bishop Paul Bird CSsR and assisted by Fr Marcello Colasante, Vicar General and Parish Priest of Wendouree, Creswick and Daylesford.

During the Rite of Election, which is an important step in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) journey, the candidates and catechumens are presented to the local bishop as a sign of their

"election" into the Catholic community. It is at this gathering that those wishing to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation make public their intention to continue their discernment and preparation during the Season of Lent.

Six parishes were represented with catechumens (those yet to be baptised) and five parishes were represented with candidates (those who have already been baptised but have yet to receive the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confirmation), accompanied by their parish delegates, sponsors/godparents, family and fellow parishioners.

Catechumens were presented from the parishes of Ballarat Cathedral, Ballarat East, Daylesford, Gordon, South West Coast and Sunraysia. Candidates were presented from the parishes of Ballarat Cathedral, Ballarat East, Daylesford, Gordon and South West Coast. Following the blessing and dismissal, all present joined Bishop Paul for lunch in the Mary Glowrey Hall.

Thank you to all those involved in the success of the Rite of Election: Maria Noonan as Presenter, Alixina Mack as Reader, Dr Susan Crowe as Cantor, Helen Lee as Organist, choir members from the Cathedral Parish; Parish Delegates; Sponsors of the catechumens and candidates; and Brett Hayward (ACU Ballarat Canteen) for catering. We also acknowledge those who travelled vast distances to attend this important day for all catechumens and candidates.

Thanks must also go to all those involved in the preparation and co-ordination of the RCIA program in parishes.

The journey of discernment for these catechumens and candidates culminated at the Easter Vigil where they received the Sacraments of Initiation and were officially welcomed into the Catholic Church by the local parish community.

Photos supplied by Therese Winter, Fr Justin Driscoll & Dr Susan Crowe



Respect Ballarat: Ballarat Foundation

The Ballarat Foundation in partnership with Respect Victoria, with the support of the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence Ingrid Stitt, has announced the recipients of eleven grants to support the work of Respect Ballarat.

Amongst the recipients of the eleven grants awarded was St Alipius Parish Ballarat East and Parishes of the Ministry District. Their project, **Faith Communities Focusing on Prevention: Building Respectful Communities**, received \$95,600.

This project aims to build capacity by creating opportunities for those in faith communities to reflect on where the drivers of gendered violence might be being perpetuated, and on how they might be a proactive part of prevention, considering prevention of gendered violence in a way that is grounded within their spiritual, theological and community traditions.

This project is auspiced by Catholic Social Services Victoria who will work in collaboration with parishes and the many faith communities of the Greater Ballarat region that will include churches, faith-based schools, social services, health-care agencies of Catholic and all Christian denominations and other faiths.

Our parishes have been part of the Ballarat Prevention of Violence Faith Network that has been meeting over the past eighteen months with members from McAuley Community Services for Women, CatholicCare Victoria, St John of God Hospital Ballarat, St Vincent de Paul Society, Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Ltd, Jesuit Social Services, Anglican Church Australia, the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat and St Alipius Parish (represented by Fr Justin Driscoll).

Bwgcorman Community School Visit

It was a pleasure to welcome students from the Bwgcorman Community School to Mercy Regional College (MRC) Camperdown as part of their leadership camp in our region. Bwgcorman Community School is located on Palm Island, the largest Indigenous community in Queensland, approximately 65km off the coast of Townsville.

During the visit, MRC Middle School Leaders worked alongside Community Leader Adam Dowie to facilitate a range of sessions and team based activities. These provided students with the opportunity to share insights into life in their respective communities, build connections, and develop camaraderie throughout the day.

The visit concluded with a special performance from Bwgcorman students, who proudly showcased traditional dancing.

The experience was of great mutual benefit for both groups of students, and we congratulate everyone involved on the spirit of openness, respect, and leadership shown throughout the visit.

Pat Seal - Deputy Principal



GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT

The Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) Christmas Market at Emmanuel College Warrnambool was a great success, bringing festive cheer to our College community. Thanks to the generosity and support of students and staff, the students proudly raised over \$300 for MacKillop Family Services, with the proceeds presented to Emmanuel College alumni Alana Umbers, MacKillop's Warrnambool-based carer recruitment and development coordinator.

The market offered a delightful range of hand-baked Christmas treats, including honey joys, traditional Christmas cakes, and buttery shortbread, all lovingly prepared by VPC students and staff.

In addition to the baked goods, were beautifully handcrafted wooden Christmas trees and decorations, which were a favourite among buyers. Thank you to everyone who supported the fundraiser - your involvement made the market a heartfelt celebration



of community and giving - this generosity helped make Christmas brighter for vulnerable children and families.

Lauren White - Emmanuel College Warrnambool



Liturgical Music Workshop

Br Michael Herry fms informed and entertained those in attendance at the Liturgical Music Workshop held on Thursday, November 20, 2025 at Our Lady Help of Christians Church, Wendouree.

The workshop began with music and scripture, setting the scene for a reflective and prayerful evening. Participants Laureen Rhodes and Roger Hillman were invited to proclaim the readings.

Bishop Paul then introduced Br Michael to the group. Br Michael was born in Lilydale, Victoria, burial place of the first internationally acclaimed Australian, Nellie Melba. It was from his father who played saxophone in a country dance band that Michael was exposed to the joy of music-making at a very young age and it was in Lilydale, at the local Convent of the Sisters of Mercy, that Michael began piano lessons. After matriculating at Marcellin College (Melbourne) in 1962 Michael entered the Mt Macedon novitiate of the Marist Brothers in Victoria, Australia and in 1965 completed a one year primary teaching registration course. He then taught primary and junior secondary classes for six years before commencing a music degree at Elder Conservatorium of the University of Adelaide, graduating with honours in 1976.

Br Michael is passionate about the interface between music and spirituality/prayer and has been exploring this sacred space through the composition of short scripture-based chants based on the stories and teaching of Jesus as they come to us in the Sunday Gospels.

The workshop began reflectively, with participants invited into a prayerful space through music and meditation. Thereafter the workshop gained pace, showcasing a wide variety of vocal music suitable for liturgical celebrations. Br Michael encouraged full audience participation as he played various Mass settings, psalms, hymns and scripture based chants. Br Michael's friendly and relaxed approach to the evening, and his story telling, enabled all in attendance to participate fully and enthusiastically.

Br Michael showcased the Marist Music website, which provides a large range of liturgical music available for free download. There are audio files to listen to the music and sheet music to download. This website is a valuable resource for those in any music ministry in parishes or schools.

The workshop finished with music and prayer, which was read by Rose Consignado. Words of thanks were expressed to Br Michael for sharing his talents and expertise with the group. The workshop was a very enjoyable evening.

The Diocesan Liturgical Commission thanks Fr Marcello Colasante (Parish Priest) and parishioners of Our Lady Help of Christians, Wendouree for hosting this event. Particular thanks to Sue Searls, Corrie Harbour and Laureen Rhodes for their assistance in setting-up and providing hospitality on the evening. Thanks also to Rose Consignado for the photos.

BISHOP MARK FREEMAN ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AS NINTH BISHOP OF BALLARAT



The Diocese of Ballarat joyfully celebrated the Ordination and Installation of Fr Mark Freeman as the Ninth Bishop of Ballarat on Thursday, March 19, 2026 at St Patrick's Cathedral in Ballarat.

The celebration brought together bishops, clergy, parish representatives, ecumenical guests, civic representatives, and members of the wider community to witness this significant moment in the life of the Church. The ordination and installation were led by Archbishop Peter A Comensoli with Co-Consecrators Archbishop Anthony Ireland of Hobart and Bishop Emeritus of Ballarat Paul Bird CSsR. Concelebrants were Archbishops and Bishops of Australia, Fr Marcello Colasante, Vicar General of Ballarat, Fr Ed Moloney, Administrator of the Cathedral, Priests of the Diocese of Ballarat, Priests of the Archdiocese of Hobart and other visiting Priests from around Australia. In addition to over 500 people packing St Patrick's Cathedral, the ceremony was livestreamed to hundreds of people across the country.

The Ordination Ceremony commenced at 11.00am with a Welcome to Country given by proud Wadawurrung woman, Dr Deanne Gilson, Maria Noonan then welcomed all to the Mass and the Bishop Elect entered to the singing of "Hymn of Cosmic Praise". The music of the ceremony was led by Mr Roger Hillman, St Patrick's Cathedral Parish, along with Organist Mr Geoff Martin, Ballarat East Parish and Flautist Mr Adrian Newman, also from the Ballarat East Parish. They were accompanied by singers from diocesan parishes and Loreto College Ballarat.

The Mass setting for the Ordination was the "Mass of St Francis". The first and second readings were proclaimed by Sr Veronica Lawson RSM, Ballarat East Parish and Paul Clohesy, Principal of Trinity College Colac. Psalm 89, "All the Goodness of the Lord" composed for the Diocese by Roger Hillman was sung by Mariana Vadysinghe. The Rite of Ordination began with the singing of "Veni Creator Spiritus" led by Mitchell Leviston, Ballarat Cathedral Parish with Joe Ewing, South West Coast Parish leading the Litany of Supplication. John and Margaret Millington brought forward the gifts.

In accordance with the traditions of the Church, the ceremony included the laying on of hands, prayers of consecration, and the formal seating of Bishop Freeman in the cathedra, symbolising the beginning of episcopal leadership in the diocese.

"I am deeply humbled by the trust placed in me and grateful for the prayers and support of this community," Bishop Mark said. "Together, we are called to serve with faith, hope, and love, proclaiming compassion, courage and justice in the world."

A lovely moment during the ceremony was the warm and heartfelt welcome extended to Bishop Mark by the many different groups within the diocese. Representatives came forward as a visible sign of the rich diversity and shared life of the diocesan community, each offering their greeting with joy and respect. This gesture highlighted the spirit of unity, collaboration, and mutual support that defines the diocese, and set a gracious tone for Bishop Mark's ministry among the people he is called to serve.

During his address, Bishop Mark spoke words of gratitude and appreciation. He acknowledged and greeted all the People of God in the Ballarat diocese, asking them to teach him how to be their bishop. "Every time I have begun a new appointment, I have said to the community that you are the people whom God has given me to love. As I begin this new ministry among you, I say the same to the whole diocese, people and priests of Ballarat – you are the people whom God has given me to love. As I received this ring during today's Mass, I made that commitment with all my heart."

Bishop Mark acknowledged Bishop Paul Bird, "It is an honour to succeed you as Bishop of Ballarat. It's a vibrant local Church that I have been called to serve as bishop. It has been cared for and guided by a true servant leader. You have set the bar high, and I thank you."

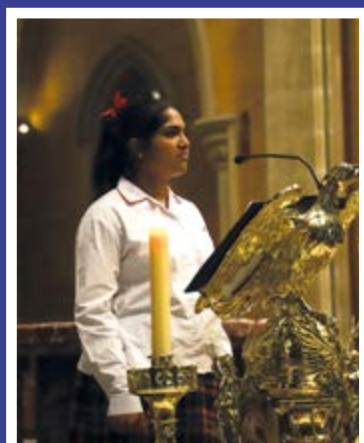


Bishop Mark was born and raised in Tasmania, his journey from a Launceston childhood to episcopal leadership has been shaped by early stirrings of vocation, formative mentors and a lifetime of sacramental ministry across Tasmania.

After completing secondary school, he entered Corpus Christi College in Clayton, Victoria, where he found joy, strong friendships and growing clarity about his vocation. A defining influence was Archbishop Guilford Young, who guided and encouraged him throughout his formation. "He really encouraged people to use their gifts well," Bishop Mark said. He would become the last priest ordained by Archbishop Young.

Bishop Mark has served as Vicar General for both Archbishop Adrian Doyle and Archbishop Julian Porteous, along with being appointed Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Hobart and most recently, before his appointment as Bishop of Ballarat, Archbishop Tony Ireland appointed him Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia. Each of these appointments reflect the trust placed in his pastoral wisdom and administrative ability.

His priesthood has been defined by sacramental ministry - celebrating Masses, baptisms, weddings, First Communion Masses, confirmations, and hearing confessions. He sees these moments as the heart of his vocation. "You are really ministering the presence of Christ," he explains.





Bishop Mark follows Bishop Paul Bird who turned 75 in 2024 and offered his resignation but was asked to stay on until a successor was appointed. On January 7, 2026, Pope Leo appointed Fr Mark Freeman to be the new Bishop of Ballarat.

Bishop Mark's Address

In Faith and Hope and Love (1 Corinthians 13:13)

I want to begin by adding my voice to the acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather and, indeed of all the lands which form what we call the Diocese of Ballarat.

As I join you in the life of this local Church and begin this ministry among you, I humbly acknowledge the people who continue to struggle because they have experienced abuse in their engagement with the Diocese of Ballarat. To victim survivors, your families and the communities so deeply affected by the experience, I pledge my readiness to listen, to learn and to support everything that enables healing and deep peace in your lives.

I wish to acknowledge and greet all the People of God in this diocese, those who were able to be present here in the Cathedral and, in a very special way, all of you who are joining this celebration via livestream. Already, I have experienced your deep faith. I ask you to teach me how to be your bishop. Every time I have begun a new appointment, I have said to the community that you are the people whom God has given me to love. As I begin this new ministry among you, I say the same to the whole diocese, people and priests of Ballarat – You are the people whom God has given me to love. As I received this ring during today's Mass, I made that commitment with all my heart.

As many will know, my episcopal ring is made from the wedding rings of both my parents, George and Mary. They loved me into life. They loved me through life. They taught me what it is to commit yourself in love, to have faith and to live with hope even in the darkest moments. I feel sure that from their place in God's presence, they are watching over me and guiding me to love you all with the same deep love I experienced from them.

Many members of my immediate family are here today. Thank you for the love and support you have given me over the years. You have kept me real and grounded me in life. I'll need you to keep in touch so that I don't get too full of myself. With my family there are many friends who have journeyed with me over the years, especially those who join us today (many also via livestream) from the parishes I have been part of in more recent years, especially Launceston and Bellerive-Lindisfarne. I need you all to keep me grounded and in touch with Christ.

I am humbled and encouraged by the priests who have concelebrated this Ordination Mass - from the Ballarat diocese, from the Archdiocese of Hobart and several priest-friends I have met along the way. Pray for me, challenge me and don't be afraid to call me to order!





Likewise, the presence of so many bishops does me honour. Thank you, Archbishop Comensoli, for ordaining me and for breaking open God’s word for us today. Thank you to our Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Charles Balvo for your presence and for reading the Papal Mandate. Your kindness and assistance since that fateful day when I refused to answer a facetime call from an unknown number, has been very much appreciated. Thanks Archbishop Tony Ireland, one of the co-consecrators today. The few short months we have worked together in Tasmania have given me some good tips about how to be a diocesan bishop. Thank you for your support, especially over the weeks since 18th December. I want to acknowledge and thank Archbishop Porteous for his presence today and to give a call out to my dear friend and mentor, Archbishop Adrian Doyle who is joining us via livestream.



The other co-consecrator is well known to you all, Bishop Paul Bird. I suspect the smile that has been growing for weeks now is still radiant. It is an honour to succeed you as Bishop of Ballarat. It’s a vibrant local Church that I have been called to serve as bishop. It has been cared for and guided by a true servant leader. You have set the bar high, and I thank you. I acknowledge and am honoured by the presence of the other emeritus Bishop of Ballarat, Bishop Peter Connors. We might have to identify you both as “E1” and “E2”.

To all who have prepared for and have participated in the Ordination Mass today, I am deeply grateful. So many have shared their gifts to enable us to give praise and thanks to God so beautifully and worthily: Musicians, cantors and choir members, readers, servers, sacristans, those responsible for the décor and all the other ministries. I will be forever indebted to those of you who have worked so hard behind the scenes to make all this happen today.

Thanks to our ecumenical sisters and brothers who have honoured us with your presence. I look forward to working with you in the years ahead. Thanks to the various civic leaders and representatives. I look forward to participating in the life of the wider community of Ballarat and all the places covered by this diocese.



Necessarily, my words today are of gratitude and appreciation. We are only just getting to know each other. When I was very young, I chose today’s Gospel passage (John 21:15-19) as the gospel for my ordination as a priest. The idealism of that choice has worn off over all these years. These days, I believe I have a realism about what it might mean to allow the Lord to ask, do you love me? Now I am old (or at least older) I willingly stretch out my arms to be led to where I didn’t expect to go. I am willing because I know that I do not take this journey alone. We will journey together, and we will journey with our Christ.

I conclude these remarks by quoting Pope Leo XIV (after all it was his choice that brought us together today!). These words come from his homily for the Jubilee of the Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies



(October 26, 2025): The supreme rule in the Church is love. No one is called to dominate; all are called to serve. No one should impose his or her own ideas; we must all listen to one another. No one is excluded; we are all called to participate. No one possesses the whole truth; we must all humbly seek it and seek it together.

Let's do all this out of love – for our God, for each other and for our neighbour. And let's do it together "in faith and hope and love!"

Background

Bishop Mark Freeman was born in Launceston Tasmania in 1959. He grew up as the third of six children (3 girls, 3 boys) of Mary and George Freeman. Bishop Mark was educated by the Presentation Sisters at St Finn Barr's School, Invermay, and by the Christian Brothers at St Patrick's College, Launceston.

Seminary studies were undertaken at Corpus Christi College, Clayton, Victoria. While in the Seminary, Bishop Mark completed a Bachelor of Theology degree at the Melbourne College of Divinity and a Bachelor of Arts degree at Monash University. He was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Hobart by Archbishop Guilford Young at St Finn Barr's Church, Invermay on August 24, 1984.

He has spent most of his life as a priest working in parishes throughout Tasmania, including 11 years on the Northwest Coast as the Moderator of the new Mersey Leven Parish. Between 2010-2022, he was the Parish Priest of Launceston in Northern Tasmania before being appointed in 2022 as Parish Priest of Bellerive-Lindisfarne on Hobart's Eastern Shore, his last parish in Tasmania. Here, Bishop Mark has worked closely with the staff and students of the three Catholic Primary Schools and also MacKillop Catholic College, Mornington. From 2005 - 2017, Bishop Mark served as Vicar General for both Archbishop Adrian Doyle and his successor Archbishop Julian Porteous. In 2023, he was appointed as Chancellor of the Archdiocese. In December 2025, Archbishop Anthony Ireland appointed Bishop Mark as Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia. Between 1993 and 1996, Bishop Mark spent time in Rome studying Patristics at the Augustinianum, an incorporated institute of the Pontifical Lateran University. On his return to Australia, he was elected by the priests of the Archdiocese to be the Director of Clergy Life and Ministry. He was a member of the National Commission for Clergy Life and Ministry from 2000–2006. For most of that time Mark was the Commission's Chair. In 2007 he was appointed to the Council for Australian Catholic Women. In 2013 he was appointed to the Council for Lay Pastoral Ministry. Since 2012, Bishop Mark presented some 23 Retreats for groups of Clergy around Australia.



Thank you

Dear Diocesan Family,

Some time has passed since the very beautiful Ordination and Installation Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat. I have been overwhelmed by the generosity of your welcome, and I wanted to express my appreciation for that welcome and for the tireless efforts of so many to ensure the splendid celebration that was ours on March 19.

From the time of the announcement that I would be the ninth Bishop of the Diocese of Ballarat, it was very clear in my mind that whatever was done for the Ordination and Installation had to be a celebration of this local Church. I am grateful for all the people from around the diocese who undertook the many ministries required at such a Mass. The readers, servers, singers and musicians all expressed the vibrancy of this local Church that has now become my home.

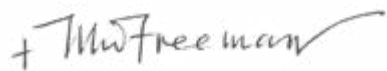
The beauty of the liturgical celebration was enhanced by those who acted as welcomers and ushers, by those who decorated the Cathedral, by those responsible for the livestreaming, by those who co-ordinated the refreshments afterwards. All these efforts have not gone unnoticed. For the rest of my life, I will be grateful.



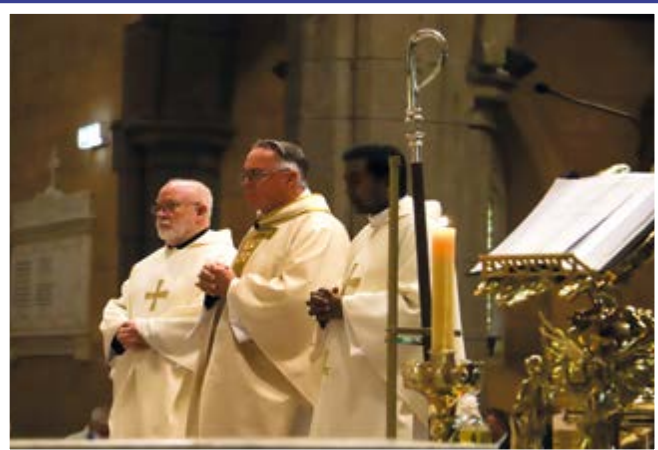
How blessed we were that so many could join in the ceremony via live stream. Literally thousands have viewed the Mass on YouTube. There is a real sense of journeying together into the future with all the good wishes and encouragement I have received. For this too, I am extremely grateful.

Every best wish and blessing to you all and again, thank you! Please pray for me as I will for you. May we continue to grow together in faith and hope and love.

Sincerely,



Mark Freeman - Bishop of Ballarat





SISTERS OF MERCY 180TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

A joyful and reflective Mass was held at Mercy Place Ballarat on Wednesday, January 14, 2026, to celebrate the 180th Anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia on January 8, 1846.

Just five years after the death of Venerable Catherine McAuley, founder of the order in 1831 in Dublin, a faith-filled and courageous group of seven Sisters disembarked from the shores of Fremantle, Western Australia. Led by Mother Ursula Frayne, her companions were Sisters Catherine Gogarty, Anne Xavier Dillon, Ignatia de la Hoyde, Aloysius Kelly, Baptist O’Connell and Evangelista O’Reilly. Known as ‘the walking sisters’ these pioneering women created positive bonds with the local indigenous people and reached out to settlers in need of assistance for health, education, food and social welfare concerns. Challenges and frustrations were often encountered but they persevered with tenacity and integrity. Their legacy continues to inspire and guide today.

In 1857, Mother Ursula Frayne again led the first foundation of Sisters of Mercy to establish a base in Victoria, located in Fitzroy. Along with other Mercy foundations that ventured from Ireland, England and Argentina, over time there grew to be fifty-two autonomous Mercy congregations in Australia – this included the former Ballarat East Congregation of Sisters of Mercy. Today, our local Sisters are now members of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISM PNG) and we are incredibly grateful to have twenty-three Sisters in our community. The current Pastoral Leader of this group is Sr Barbara Broad.



Excitingly, on this occasion Mercy Place was host to Bishop Paul Bird, Fr Justin Driscoll, and our newly announced Bishop-elect Fr Mark Freeman, who concelebrated the Mass and led a magnificent celebration for the Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates and the residents of Mercy Place. Welcome Fr Mark, we are delighted to meet you! The gathering also provided the opportunity to offer our deep gratitude and affection to Bishop Paul Bird who has led our faith community for nearly fourteen years. Thank you Bishop Paul, may you enjoy a healthy and well-deserved retirement!

In true Mercy style, the hospitality and kitchen staff provided a delicious selection of savoury and sweet offerings to accompany ‘a comfortable cuppa’. With fortuitous circumstances in play, it was a truly wonderful celebration that ended up acknowledging several significant milestones. Thank you to all who attended and contributed!

Lucille O’Beirne, Pastoral Carer, Mercy Place Ballarat



Pilgrims of Hope: Transformed through Sacrament & Song



Through the generous support of the Ballarat Diocese and the Star of the Sea, South West Coast Parish, I was privileged to recently attend the Australian Pastoral Musicians Network (APMN) / National Liturgical Council (NLC) National Conference from October 1 – 3, 2025.

The conference encompassed a great range of subjects relevant to music as a core and essential part of the liturgical and sacramental life of our church. I am passionate about music and a church devoid of music is unimaginable to me. We are blessed with a history of music that praises God and lifts hearts and voices to Him and to each other going back to the very beginnings of the church and even beyond to the chosen people of the Old Testament. The conference showed us the many and diverse ways that Catholic Music across the world can be an agent of Hope and Transformation – the conference themes. It also confirmed for me that a pilgrim people need to sing together on the journey.

Fr Ricky Manalo, a Paulist priest, composer, missionary and theologian from the USA spoke inspiringly about the new multicultural face of our parishes and communities and how liturgical song is able to bring people together to share faith and life. I found this topic particularly relevant as we recently formed a Multicultural Choir at Star of the Sea Parish, which has been a wonderful experience thus far. There are challenges however, as we grow more diverse in finding ways to incorporate different cultures and at the same time expressing the unity and oneness we have as the church.

Rita Ferrone, also from the United States, is an independent scholar, writer, and speaker on issues of

liturgy and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church. The adult catechumenate has been a special focus of her work. In her key note addresses, Rita spoke eloquently and passionately about Pilgrimage. She used this metaphor to describe our life and faith journey with all its challenges, joys and sorrows and of the communal nature of pilgrimage – we travel the road together. The liturgy with music and song sustains us on the journey. Rita also spoke of the transformative power of the liturgy and how central liturgy is to the evangelising mission of the church.

Fr Richard Leonard also delivered a keynote address. He is an Australian Jesuit priest, scholar and was director of the Australian Catholic Office for Film & Broadcasting for 22 years. He has lectured on faith and culture all over the world. Richard is a dynamic speaker, moving us from bellyache laughing to tears of deep emotion. His topic was 'Anchored in Hope: Why Alleluia is Our Song'. He shared some of the deep challenges that our church, particularly the Australian church, currently faces but tempered this with many signs and examples of hope.

The Conference Mass was a really beautiful liturgy. Bishop Paul concelebrated with the Archbishop of Adelaide, Patrick O'Regan. We were led by a large and beautiful choir including a young girl with an angelic voice who sang the cantor's parts.

There were a number of breakout sessions and workshops/electives covering a broad range of topics including the role music can play in the synodal church. A personal highlight was re-connecting with someone who was part of the music team at my wedding 40 years ago. She was not a religious sister 40 years ago, but now Anne Marie Obeirne is a Mercy sister and renowned scholar in the field of Environmental Theology. Anne Marie delivered a very interesting address about her role in a committee to advance the case for the church to establish a 'Feast Day of Creation'. It was wonderful to re-connect with Anne Marie and hear of her work and mission. It was also wonderful to connect with musicians, composers and music ministers from all over the country. I have recently completed a Mass setting called 'Mass of Healing and Hope' and I was able to share this with a few people at the conference. I would sincerely like to thank Bishop Paul and Fr John Fitzgerald, the Ballarat Diocese and my parish for supporting me by giving me the opportunity to attend the conference. I hope I am able to share some of my learnings and encourage others involved in music ministry in my parish and in our diocese.

Don Stewart



DEPTH OF PREPARATION

The little faith community of St John the Baptist Beaufort were fortunate over Easter to be able to have Masses on Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. All services were very well attended.

The Church was well prepared both inside and out, there is much preparation and thought that goes into celebrating this special time in our church calendar. A special thank you to our priests also who have facilitated these gatherings.

Bernadette Franc



Walking in Solidarity The BIG Water Walk

Students and staff from St Patrick's School, Nhill, and St Francis Xavier Primary School, Ballarat East, took meaningful steps this Lent through their participation in 'The BIG Water Walk' as part of Project Compassion.

The community at St Patrick's School, Nhill, took part in 'The BIG Water Walk' by walking to Nhill Lake carrying empty buckets, experiencing first hand the daily reality faced by millions of people around the world who must walk long distances to collect water. Following a BBQ lunch at Jaypex Park, students and staff gathered in prayer before filling their buckets and sharing the responsibility of carrying the water back to school. Through this powerful experience, students reflected on the fact that 292 million people worldwide walk long distances each day to access water, deepening their understanding of solidarity and compassion.

Meanwhile, St Francis Xavier Primary School, Ballarat East, also took part in 'Villa's Big Water Walk 2026'. Funds raised through the initiative will contribute towards the purchase of a 25,000-litre water tank, helping to provide

clean and safe drinking water for a community in Tanzania. The school community encouraged everyone to support this important cause, reminding us that every contribution - big or small - can make a lasting difference.

As part of their Lenten journey, students at both schools are walking in solidarity with communities around the world who do not have access to clean water. The BIG Water Walk offers a meaningful opportunity for students to learn about social justice, live out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, and put faith into action.

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications
[Photos sourced from the Facebook Page of St Patrick's School, Nhill and St Francis Xavier Primary School, Ballarat East]



ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEDICATION OF THE CATHEDRAL

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR celebrated Mass on Wednesday, November 19, 2025 for the Anniversary of the Dedication of our diocesan Cathedral, St Patrick's. Fr Ed Moloney, Cathedral Administrator, concelebrated Mass and Simon Zakari, Seminarian, served as Altar Server. The anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral is celebrated as a solemnity in the cathedral itself and as a feast in other churches of the diocese (Ordo 2025, page 6). The Mass for the Dedication of a Church on the Anniversary of the Dedication was used for this celebration and the readings were: First Reading – 1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30 (Let your eyes watch over this house); Second Reading – Ephesians 2:19-22 (All grow into one holy temple in the Lord); and Gospel – John 2:13-22 (He spoke about the temple of his own body).



Included in the rite for the dedication of a church is, "The lighting of the altar, which is followed by the lighting of the church, reminds us that Christ is 'a light to enlighten the nations' (Lk 2:32); his brightness shines out in the Church and through it in the whole human family." (Taken from the Dedication of a Church and Altar Rites). There were many candles lit in various places of the Cathedral for this Mass – a very nice tribute to the Anniversary Mass. The official opening of the church was in 1871 and when the Diocese of Ballarat was formed in 1874, the first Bishop, Dr Michael O'Connor, chose it for his Cathedral. When St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat was finally consecrated in 1891 by Cardinal Moran of Sydney, it was the first Catholic Cathedral consecrated in the Australian Colonies, making it today Australia's oldest consecrated Cathedral. At the end of Mass Bishop Paul thanked all who assisted with the music, ministries and preparation of the Cathedral for the Mass.

Celebrating Inclusion

The International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD) was introduced by the United Nations in 1992 and has been supported by the Australian Government since 1996. Taking place on December 3 each year, this day aims to increase public awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with disability, and to celebrate their achievements and contributions. The theme for 2025 was **Fostering disability inclusive societies for advancing social progress**.

Siena Catholic Primary School Lucas celebrated this day. Shelley Ryan, Principal, writes the following:

We have learned from, listened to, and celebrated the diverse experiences within our Siena community. Living with a disability can involve navigating daily physical, sensory, emotional, and social challenges while also striving for wellbeing, connection, and personal growth. We extend our sincere thanks to Heidi (Freddy and Max's mum, Year 2) and Ashley (Sarah's husband from Performing Arts) for generously sharing their insights and lived experiences with our community at an assembly and at a staff meeting.

We also acknowledge and celebrate the students within our community who are living with a disability. Their presence and voice encourage us to continually reflect on our practices, remove barriers, and implement effective adjustments so that Siena can better support every learner, parent and community member. Their perspectives and wisdom have deepened our collective understanding and strengthened our commitment to inclusion. These experiences remind us of the importance of empathy, understanding, and creating environments where everyone can flourish.

Thank you to Kara and Sarah for coordinating this important learning with Ashley and Heidi, and for leading us in building a school culture where every person feels recognised, valued, and included. Inclusion invites us to imagine what becomes possible when we make room: room for stories, room for different ways of thinking and being, and room for one another. In many ways, it is another call to "stay awake" to God's presence in every person, recognising the Image of God reflected uniquely in each human life.



Siena Catholic Primary School, Lucas



CARITAS NATIONAL GATHERING

Caritas Australia welcomed Diocesan Directors from across the country to its annual national gathering. The three-day event focused on strengthening local partnerships, sharing insights on humanitarian action, and preparing for Project Compassion 2026. Appointed in partnership with their local Archbishop or Bishop, Diocesan Directors play a vital role in animating the vision and mission of Caritas Australia at the community level. They do so by building relationships, promoting education, leading fundraising and advocacy efforts, and connecting with Catholic schools, parishes, and the wider Catholic community.

While opening the event, Caritas Australia CEO Kirsten Sayers highlighted the vital role of Diocesan Directors, saying, "Through our Diocesan Directors, we have localised relationships with communities in every corner of the country. You are the eyes, ears, hands and feet of Caritas Australia – building bridges between Australian communities and those in need overseas. In a world facing record levels of conflict, displacement and hunger, your role has never been more important." The program featured sessions on safeguarding, ethical storytelling, ecological conversion, and building resilient communities, alongside opportunities for collaboration and renewal. Leaders from Caritas Australia's programs and fundraising teams joined Diocesan Directors to explore strategies for deepening engagement with parishes and schools.

The gathering was also graced by Bishop Danny Meagher who shared reflections on Catholic Social Teaching and led the celebration of the Eucharist. Caritas Australia expresses its deep gratitude for Bishop Meagher's presence and spiritual leadership during the event. Jillian Hogbin is the Diocesan Director in the Ballarat Diocese. Jillian can be contacted on caritas@ballarat.catholic.org.au



Communities of Respect and Equality Alliance

DOBCEL is proud to announce our membership with the Communities of Respect and Equality (CoRE) Alliance, standing alongside organisations across our region committed to building safer, more inclusive, and welcoming communities for all.

The CoRE Alliance brings together education providers, community organisations, and leaders who share a strong commitment to preventing violence, promoting gender equality, and fostering cultures grounded in dignity and respect. By joining the Alliance, DOBCEL is strengthening its ongoing work to ensure that every individual within our school communities feels valued, safe, and supported.

At DOBCEL, our schools play a vital role in shaping not only academic outcomes, but also the social and emotional foundations that young people carry into adulthood. Creating environments where respect, inclusion, and belonging are lived values is central to our Catholic mission and identity. Membership with the CoRE Alliance reinforces our commitment to this work and provides opportunities to collaborate, learn, and grow alongside like-minded organisations.

Through this partnership, DOBCEL will continue to support initiatives that challenge harmful attitudes, prevent violence in all its forms, and promote positive, respectful relationships across our school communities. The Alliance also provides a valuable platform for sharing best practice and strengthening regional collaboration to create meaningful and lasting change.

We look forward to working closely with Women's Health Grampians and fellow CoRE Alliance partners as we continue this important work for the benefit of our schools and the wider community.

*Catholic Education Ballarat Communications
Pictured: DOBCEL Executive Team – Tom Sexton (Executive Director), Matthew Byrne (Deputy Director: Catholic Education), and Megan Ioannou (Deputy Director: Stewardship)*



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Young Mercy Links Leadership

The College Captains of Mercy Regional College Camperdown, Joseph, Matilda, and Sonny recently represented the College at the Young Mercy Links Leadership Formation experience. Across the program, they explored what it means to be leaders shaped by the Mercy tradition, learning how values such as compassion, justice, and service can guide their actions and decisions. The experience challenged them to reflect on their own leadership style and to develop a strong sense of Mercy leadership that is grounded in care for others. Joseph, Matilda and Sonny are excited to bring these insights back to our school community, helping to foster a culture of kindness, responsibility, and hope in the way we lead and serve.


Sharon Gillett - Principal



RICH BLESSINGS




One of the richest blessings for the Australian church in the third millennium has been the increased presence of diverse cultural and ethnic groups amongst our parishioners. Members of the body of Christ, from all over the world, now call our parishes home and enrich them with the diversity of their talents, their love of the Catholic faith and their commitment to building community and sharing hospitality.




Sts Anne and Joachim Parish Sunraysia has been a grateful beneficiary of this demographic change, a fact which we celebrated most spectacularly on the Feast of Christ the King, November 23, 2025. Members of our church community gathered for a celebration of culture and faith beginning with the Sunday 5.00pm Mass in Mildura, in which four girls were received into the church through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children.

Four more children also received the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist for the first time and three more the following Sunday. All of these children have come from diverse backgrounds and are reflective of the cultural character of the Sunraysia Parish.



During the Mass we were treated to the musical stylings of not one but four beautiful choirs, our parish choir and the music of our Italian, Tongan and Filipino communities. Our Prayer of the Faithful were prayed in different languages and parishioners attended the day in their cultural dress. We were even visited by a stray dog just before the distribution of communion. All creatures great and small came to worship Christ the King that day!

Following Mass our festivities kicked off in a big way. Parishioners had spent days preparing food for us to share from their cultures, for which we were all very grateful! (Especially the paella cooked up on the presbytery lawn). Activities included traditional Irish dancing, and dances from our Burmese, Tongan and Indian communities, as well as the drawing of our Parish Petrol Raffle. First prize was a \$1000 worth of fuel, won by the Mildura Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society, who will generously put the vouchers to good use, I am sure. I know I speak on behalf of our whole parish when I say I am very thankful to all those who helped make the day a great success.



My hope and prayer is that we, as parishes in the Diocese of Ballarat, continue to make every attempt to make our migrant and refugee communities feel welcome. Culture is not a novelty to be viewed with bewilderment, but rather something to be celebrated and explored. Christ came to bring together all people from every 'nation, race, tribe and language' (Rev 7:9) as scriptures remind us.

During the visit of the Migrant Jubilee Cross to our diocese recently, it was an opportunity to highlight and continue to foster the many gifts and charisms within our communities, so that our unity and charity in Christ may be an example for a polarised world.

Fr Bill Lowry

*Let us ask the Lord to help us live according to the example and teachings of Jesus
- with humility, with generosity, learning to know one another so that we may truly share,
to come to know one another so that we may build genuine human communities
where no one is in need, where all of us feel like brothers and sisters.*

May the Lord strengthen and help each of us to be living witnesses of his love in the world. Amen.

Taken from the Prayer Ritual to Accompany the Jubilee Migrant Cross

KINnected launches to support kinship carers

CatholicCare Victoria is excited to announce the launch of KINnected, a new carers group, created to support and empower incredible kinship carers in Mildura.

KINnected was designed to bring carers together monthly, in a welcoming and supportive space, for connection and the sharing of practical resources.

Kinship carers hold families together during some of the most challenging times, and this group acknowledges the vital role they play by offering a place to be heard, understood, and supported.

The launch event was a beautiful example of what KINnected is all about.

Carers were welcomed with warmth, great conversations, a community BBQ, and plenty of opportunities to share their stories with others walking a similar path.

The energy, the laughter, and the passion for caring for children in the room affirmed exactly why this group matters, and why the team is so committed to growing it.

KINnected will continue to develop into a hub for peer support, information sharing, practical help, and social



connection. With monthly gatherings and ongoing opportunities for learning and relationship-building, we are creating a space where carers don't just cope, they thrive.

This is just the beginning, and the team could not be more excited about where KINnected is headed. Together, we are building a stronger, more supported community of kinship carers; one connection at a time.

KINnected runs every second Tuesday of the month, 11am – 1pm. If you're interested in participating, please contact: Gina Farci, Team Leader - Family Services.

<https://www.catholiccarevic.org.au/resources/kinnected-launches-to-support-kinship-carers/>



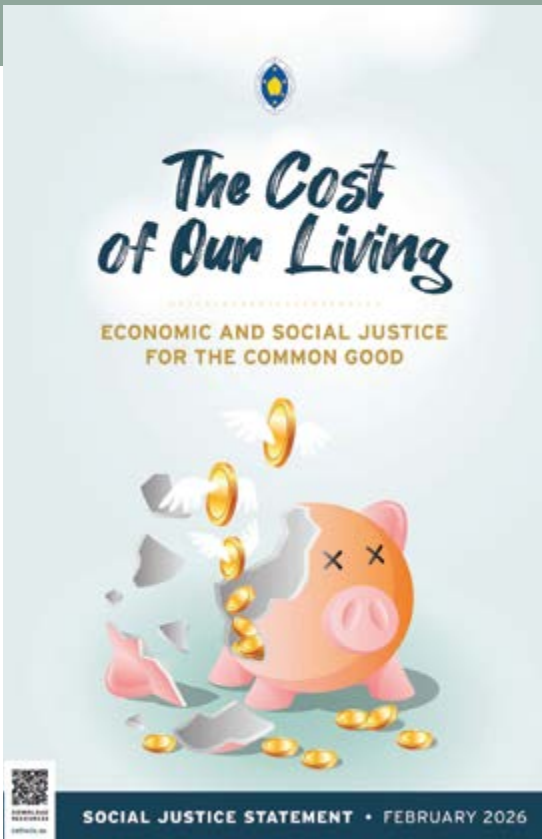
Important role of the CFA recognised

On Friday, March 20, 2026 the Trinity College Colac school community came together to recognise the important role of the CFA and their ongoing commitment to protecting communities during bushfires and emergencies. To support recovery efforts, student leaders organised a Bushfire Recovery Fundraiser, with proceeds donated to BlazeAid. The lunchtime event featured live music and house activities, with strong student involvement, including some brave Year 7 performers.

We were pleased to welcome Mark Billing, Sam Simpson, and Lachlan Sutherland from the Larpent CFA, who provided a hands-on experience for students with the fire truck and hoses. In the afternoon, Year 10 leaders delivered student-made slices to BlazeAid volunteers in Kawarren, where they were warmly received by Coordinator Steve Matthews. We are proud to support those who support our community.

Everdina Pannekeet
Development and Communications Leader

Social Justice Statement



The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference release a Social Justice Statement every year.

In 2026, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is releasing two Social Justice Statements – one in February and the second in August ahead of Social Justice Sunday.

The first, entitled “The Cost of Our Living: Economic and Social Justice for the Common Good”, was released on February 9. It invites us to reflect deeply on the challenges facing our nation and to respond with faith, hope and love. Across Australia, many people are burdened by the rising cost of life’s necessities.

In recent years, many Australians have been struggling to cope with the cost of paying for basic goods and services. This has become known as the cost of living crisis. In this statement, bishops of Australia want to address this crisis and suggest how we, in the Church, can respond to the hardship which so many of us are experiencing.

The Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission celebrated the launch of the February Statement 2026 – “The Cost of Our Living: Economic and Social Justice for the Common Good” with a Webinar on Thursday, February 12.

The webinar included an overview from Bishop Paul Bird CSsR and presentations from James Treloar, Senior Manager in Homelessness and Housing Support at CatholicCare Victoria and Michael Ryan,

OAM, President of the Ballarat region of the St Vincent de Paul Society. The webinar can be watched on the diocesan website at this link - <https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/service-and-agencies/welfare/social-justice/social-justice-statement-current/>

Friends Igniting Reconciliation in Education



St Alipius Parish Primary School Ballarat East recently had the privilege of hosting the very first Fire Carrier Commissioning Ceremony for the Ballarat Diocese. It was a truly special and deeply moving moment for our community.

We were honoured to be joined by our friends at Siena Catholic Primary School Lucas, Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School Wendouree, Damascus College Ballarat, Loreto College Ballarat, St James Primary School Sebastopol and St Augustine’s Primary School Creswick, coming together in a shared commitment to reconciliation and hope. It was a joy to be together!

The students and staff were commissioned as Fire Carriers, entrusted to carry the flame of reconciliation forward in our schools and communities. There was a real sense of reverence and purpose throughout the ceremony, as we paused, reflected, and acknowledged the responsibility and privilege of this role. Friends Igniting Reconciliation in Education (FIRE) - the dream of the FIRE Carrier program is to promote respect, fairness, and inclusion for First Nations People in Education. The FIRE Carrier promotes enculturation and reconciliation by the sharing of culture and spirituality in Victorian Catholic primary and secondary schools.

Thank you to all who joined us for this significant day. It is through moments like these, together, that we continue to grow in understanding, respect and unity. Thank you to Lisa and Aunty Sherry for coordinating the day.

Emily Clarke - Principal



Pilgrimage of the Migrant Jubilee Cross 2025-2026

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office invited the Diocese of Ballarat to host the Migrant Jubilee Cross, which has been travelling around Australia since late last year. This pilgrimage offers an opportunity for the Catholic Church in Australia to continue to mark the celebration of the Jubilee of Migrants in October 2025 and acknowledge and celebrate the faith, gifts, contributions, and resilience that migrant communities bring to our local Church and the world.

The Cross was at St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat from March 31 - April 5, 2026 and all were welcome to attend Evening Prayer on Tuesday, March 31. The Cross then travelled to the Sunraysia Parish for Masses at Robinvale, Ouyen, Red Cliffs and Mildura. A special guest at the Masses at Sacred Heart Church Mildura was our newly appointed Bishop Mark Freeman, who concelebrated Masses over the weekend, with baptisms included. Bishop Mark was grateful for the opportunity to experience the northern part of the diocese and for the kind hospitality of the parish.



Reflection on the Migrant Jubilee Cross Australia

As we celebrated the Jubilee Year in 2025, "Pilgrimage of Hope", the Migrant Jubilee Cross stands before us as a sacred and deeply moving sign of God's love for all people, especially those who journey in search of safety, belonging, and peace. Created from Australian timber and set upon a boat-shaped base, the Cross speaks to the heart of the migrant experience and the call of the Church to be a refuge and a home for all. The Migrant Jubilee Cross is crowned with profound spiritual and cultural meaning. Emblazoned on the Cross is the constellation of the Southern Cross, a symbol that has long guided travellers and dreamers across the southern skies. For those who arrive on these shores, often after long and perilous journeys, the Southern Cross is a sign of new beginnings and a light in the darkness. It also reminds us that Christ is our true guiding star (as well as our intercessor, Mary, Star of the Sea), leading us through the night towards God's house.

Embedded within the Cross are two holy relics that deepen its meaning: one of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and one of Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop, Australia's first canonised saint. The Holy Family, forced to flee to Egypt, shared the experience of displacement and danger that so many migrants and refugees live today. Their presence in this Cross calls us to see the face of Christ in every person forced to leave their homeland. Saint Mary MacKillop, herself a woman of courage and compassion, lived out a radical hospitality, especially for the poor and excluded. Her relic on the Cross anchors the mission of the Australian Church to welcome all with open arms and hearts.

The boat that carries the Cross is a symbol rich in meaning. It represents the many boats in which people have fled violence and poverty, risking everything for a better future. But it also evokes the Church, the Barque of Peter, which sails through the storms of history, carrying us all as pilgrims on the journey of faith. The Church is called to be a safe harbour, a home, and a companion on the journey, especially for the vulnerable and the displaced.

As the Cross travels to every state, diocese and eparchy in Australia, it becomes a living sign of encounter. It invites us to reflect deeply on the stories of migrants and refugees, their griefs and hopes, and their sufferings and gifts. It invites us to see not strangers, but brothers and sisters; not burdens, but blessings. Migrants and refugees bring with them their rich cultures and traditions and their deep faith. They are messengers of the Gospel and fellow builders of the Church in this land.

This Cross is not only a religious object; it is a spiritual companion on the road. It speaks to our minds but also stirs our hearts. It challenges us to listen, to welcome, and to act. It draws us into the mystery of a God who walks with His people, who suffers with them, and who leads them and us home. May the Migrant Jubilee Cross be a source of grace, healing, and unity – a sign of the Church's mission to be a home for all and a light of hope in a world still longing for peace.

*Fr Paul Anthony – Diocese of Armidale
Our Diocesan Community - April 2026*



Manifesto of the Churches of the Global South for Our Common home

With the growing urgency of Climate Change, the landmark “Manifesto of the Churches of the Global South for Our Common home:

Towards Peace with Creation – An Urgent call for a Just transition beyond Fossil Fuels” was signed by the heads of the Bishops’ conferences of Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean on March 16, 2026. This manifesto, inspired by Laudato Si, advocates for the adoption of an international treaty that halts fossil fuel (coal, oil, gas) expansion emphasising the importance of a just energy transition.

This manifesto translates Integral Ecology from philosophy into action, incorporating social justice for the most vulnerable communities, for women, who are often in the front lines of environmental impacts in poorer countries. It asserts that energy transition must protect employment, energy access and the wellbeing of families.

It proposes a roadmap for energy transition, and provides a precursor to the First Conference on Transitioning away from Fossil Fuels in Santa Marta, Columbia held in April 2026. This is the first of a ‘series of conferences’ to develop a fossil fuel treaty. Because fossil fuel production is structurally embedded in global markets, financial systems and geopolitics, coordinated international cooperation, grounded in equity and justice is essential. A second conference will be hosted by Tuvalu in the Pacific within a year.

Vanuatu was the first nation to call for a Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT) to address the climate crisis, joined soon after by Tuvalu to endorse the initiative at COP27 in 2022. Many other pacific nations have joined the call for a treaty. The manifesto warns that the ecological crisis has reached a critical point stating: “We recognise, with sorrow and urgency, that the world that shelters us is collapsing and may be nearing breaking point.”

Instagram : fossilfueeltreaty; Facebook : Laudato Si movement. The Manifesto can be read on the diocesan website - www.ballarat.catholic.org.au

Sandra Dillon

A Legacy of Compassion and Quiet Leadership



CatholicCare Victoria acknowledges and thanks Bishop Paul Bird for his leadership and steadfast support of communities across the Diocese of Ballarat following his recent retirement. Throughout his episcopal ministry, Bishop Paul has been recognised for his quiet and thoughtful leadership.

As CatholicCare Victoria General Manager Client Services Operations, Deanna Davis reflects, “He was about getting in and doing the ministry, not talking about it. How you demonstrate leadership is by doing, and he led by that example.” Bishop Paul has consistently supported social services across the diocese, particularly in rural and regional communities where access to support can be limited.

CatholicCare Victoria Group Director of Client Services, Nick Collins, says Bishop Paul understood the importance of collaboration in strengthening services for those most in need. “He saw the benefit of bringing agencies together to advocate for client needs, share resources and provide more wraparound support for people in our communities,” Nick said.

Over the years Bishop Paul has supported initiatives including counselling services in communities such as Ouyen and assistance for asylum seekers and refugees in Mildura, helping ensure vulnerable individuals and families receive the care and support they need. On behalf of CatholicCare Victoria, we thank Bishop Paul for his years of faithful service to the Diocese of Ballarat and for his commitment to compassion, justice and the dignity of every person. His leadership will leave a lasting legacy in the communities he has served.

Alycia Johnson - Marketing and Communications Manager

Tribute for Bishop Paul Bird



The community of Emmanuel College Warrnambool joins with Star of the Sea Parish South West Coast in giving thanks for Bishop Paul Bird's 14 years of service as our Bishop.

Throughout his time in the role, we have been deeply grateful for his consistent and generous support of our College community. As a Catholic school within the

diocese, our mission is strengthened by the guidance and encouragement of our Bishop. Bishop Paul's commitment to travelling across the region to be present at significant occasions has meant a great deal to us.

We especially thank him for joining us for the Official Opening and Blessing of the Edmund Rice Centre and the Emmanuel Centre where his blessing affirmed our continued growth and dedication to faith-filled learning. His presence at our 150 Year Anniversary Mass was a powerful reminder of our rich heritage and enduring mission and we were honoured he was present.

These moments have been important milestones in the life of our College, and Bishop Paul's prayerful leadership has helped shape and support our journey. We are sincerely thankful for his long-standing support of Catholic Education and for the encouragement he has shown to our students, staff and families over many years.

We wish him every blessing in his retirement and hold him in our prayers.

Olivia Crowley - Emmanuel College Warrnambool

Our Lady Help of Christians School Murtoa Remembering

Earlier in 2025, the DOBCEL community shared the difficult news that Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School, Murtoa, would close at the end of the 2025 school year. As the school's final days approached, the community came together on Sunday, December 14, for a heartfelt commemoration - Remembering Our Lady's - to honour the school's proud 62-year history and the many staff, students, families and parishioners who have shaped its story.

The day began with Mass at St Mary's Church, Murtoa, where DOBCEL was represented by outgoing Chair of the Board, Terry Harney; Board Director, Anne Pekin; Monsignor Glynn Murphy; and DOBCEL Education Consultant, Janet Claassen. This was followed by lunch at the school and an evening gathering at the Railway Hotel. The event was open to all, with invitations extended to anyone connected to OLHC Murtoa.

Throughout the afternoon, the atmosphere was reflective and respectful, with a series of speeches that acknowledged the school's legacy and the enduring bonds

within the community. Principal Chris McCumstie delivered a moving address, capturing both the sadness of the closure and the commitment to carrying forward the school's values and sense of community in ways that will continue beyond the school itself.

DOBCEL extends heartfelt thanks to everyone connected with OLHC Murtoa for their dedication, resilience and ongoing support. The commemoration was a meaningful opportunity to honour the past while recognising the spirit that will continue within the parish and the wider community.

CEB Communications



Our Diocesan Community - April 2026

Celebrating an anniversary

On Sunday, February 8, 2026 after 10.30am Mass at St James' Church Sebastopol, a morning tea was held for Fr Con Bagoisan OSJ, Parish Priest of the South West Ballarat Parish, who was celebrating his 30th Ordination Anniversary as a priest. A Thanksgiving Mass was also held at St Aloysius Redan on this day at 2.00pm with celebrations following at the Redan Presbytery before Fr Con returned to the Philippines to celebrate with his fellow classmates from the seminary.

We wish Fr Con every blessing for the future and may God bless him abundantly for his generous and devoted service.

Fr Con was born on August 26, 1968 in a small town in the southern part of the Philippines. He joined the Congregation of the Oblates of Saint Joseph on May 27, 1985 and was ordained a priest on February 10, 1996. Over the next 30 years, Fr Con has been appointed to several assignments in the Philippines and Australia.

At the invitation of Bishop Holohan, Fr Con volunteered to go on a mission to Australia, and arrived in Western Australia on January 12, 2009. His first assignment was to the Holy Family and Saint Joseph Parish in Albany. Life in Albany, as a whole, was a bit of a shock to Fr Con because he was not properly oriented into the Australian culture and language. Fr Con remembers being told to, "Bring a plate", and thinking, "Why should I bring a plate?" Another time he was asked, "How are you travelling?" Little by little, with the help of many people, Fr Con has learnt the expressions of Australia and the culture.

On Saturday, 26 January 2013, Fr Con was assigned to the Dawesville Catholic Parish (Saint Damien Parish Church). He enjoyed his six years stay in Dawesville because it is very close to the city of Perth. The Church in Dawesville is very simple, yet it invites people to holiness, reflection and deeper prayer. From 2019 to 2024, Fr Con was appointed as the parish priest of Saint Patrick's Parish in Waroona and the chaplain of Our Lady of Mercy College in Australind. Fr Con commented that the people were accommodating and very welcoming. Fr Con was very happy to serve both St Patrick Parish and Our Lady of Mercy College. In 2024, Fr Con was appointed to the Parishes of Redan, Sebastopol and Linton in the Diocese of Ballarat, which has since merged to form the South West Ballarat Parish in 2025.

First printed (partly edited) – <https://www.olmca.wa.edu.au/post/knowning-fr-con-chaplain-of-our-lady-of-mercy-college>



RIP SR PAT: *Damascus College Ballarat join with the wider Mercy community and diocesan community in mourning the death of Sr Patricia (Pat) O'Brien RSM. Pat's connection to Ballarat runs deep. She began her journey as a student at Sacred Heart College, Ballarat East, where she boarded from the age of ten through to her matriculation. She later returned as a teacher (1972–1976), continuing the tradition of Mercy education that remains at the heart of Damascus College today.*

Throughout her vocation, Pat served in schools and communities across Victoria - including Ballarat North, Apollo Bay, Mortlake, Robinvale, Wycheproof and Warracknabeal - as both a teacher and principal. Her ministry also extended beyond the state, working alongside Aboriginal communities in Kempsey, Woorabinda and Karama, reflecting a lifelong commitment to walking with and serving others.

Her final ministry as Pastoral Associate at Star of the Sea Parish in Apollo Bay, and her later years within the Ballarat East Mercy community and Mercy Place Ballarat, speak to a life grounded in compassion, humility and service. Principal Steven Mifsud and the Damascus College community extend sincere condolences to the Sisters of Mercy and to all who were touched by Pat's life and ministry. We give thanks for her contribution to Mercy education and the enduring legacy she leaves within our shared story.



A TOUCH OF ORANGE

On Friday, March 20, 2026 St Joseph's Primary School Warrnambool had their first community group for 2026 celebrating Harmony Day. Students were asked to wear a touch of orange because it is a bright colour that represents harmony. In community groups we did harmony day themed activities like word searches, making bracelets and chalk art.

In our chalk art activity we wrote on the concrete around the school writing harmony themed words like respect, unity, harmony and kindness. We saw lots of people wearing orange, talking to each other, including everyone and playing together. It was a great day and everyone had fun.

Community Groups comprise of students from Foundation to Year 6. The group a student is allocated to when they begin school is their Community Group for their journey throughout their time at St Joseph's. This initiative is aimed at developing lasting connections and stronger relationships for students from across the whole school.

Congratulations to the Year 6 Wellbeing Leadership Team who collaborated to organise a fantastic Harmony Day focused session for our Community Groups. The planning was very well thought out and inclusive and was greatly enjoyed by all. A big thank you to all staff and students involved in making this event a success. The Year 6 Wellbeing Leadership's guiding question is how can we help others feel God's peace in our school? Harmony Day was a time for students to work together to be kind, respect each other's differences and unite as one group, creating a peaceful environment for everyone.

Nash Anderson and Zac Beaton - Year 6 Wellbeing Leaders

SET TO COMBINE

Three Catholic parishes within the Corangamite Shire are set to merge in coming months, with plans to form one parish from seven communities. The Hampden (Terang and Mortlake), Camperdown (Camperdown, Lismore and Cobden) and Timboon (Timboon and Simpson) Parishes will all fall under one administrative umbrella, while retaining their pastoral communities.

Parish Priest Fr George Kuruvila said the three parishes are different now, very different from the time when Terang had three priests, Camperdown had two and Mortlake, Timboon and Simpson each had one priest. "We can see there is a decline in numbers at the same time there is a decline in numbers in the



clergy," he said. "That's why, for many reasons, we've decided to form one parish. Directly, there will be not too many changes that parishioners see. Each parish currently has its own finance committee and a pastoral committee - from here, we will have a common finance committee, and each community will most likely continue with their own local pastoral committee."

The finance and pastoral committees of each parish have come together recently for a meeting to learn more about the plans, with Fr George still working through the early stages of the merger. "At the moment, I don't know where the centre of the parish will be, or what the name of the new parish will be," Fr George said. "We're aiming at two different names - a geographical name and a name connected to the church. For the religious name, we are aiming for a common name for the whole area - we can't use St Patrick, St Thomas or St Colman because they are already connected to one community."

Camperdown Parish Finance Committee Chair Gerard Gleeson said the merger will reduce administrative costs for the area, improving services for the Catholic community. "With the ageing population and diminishing numbers of clergy

and parishioners, it will bring a better service to the community by streamlined administration. Things such as property maintenance and insurance will be easier to manage, and every parish will be represented in the new committee. I've been the Chair of the finance committee for about seven years, and I've seen the costs of running a parish would eventually become impossible due to our diminishing numbers and ageing population. With the merger, Fr George only has to attend one finance meeting - it will allow him to look after the pastoral needs of the community, with home visits, aged care facility visits and more."

Mr Gleeson said all communities within the three parishes will continue to be equally represented under the merger. "Fr George has a big job ahead of him, and I think it'll work," he said. "It's a natural progression that has been happening all across the diocese. It's a big task to get all the administration put into one - initially, it'll be a lot of work, but at the end of the day it will reduce the workload."

The merger is due to occur in July 2026.

Article courtesy of the Camperdown Chronicle

International Year of the Woman Farmer

influenced by gender imbalances in bargaining power in the household, the community and broader society.

Agrifood systems are a major employer of women. Women make up 41% of the global agrifood workforce but often they have less access to land, finance, technology and training. Closing gaps between men and women in agrifood systems could reduce food insecurity for 45 million people:

- Globally, 36% of working women and 38% of working men work in agrifood systems as of 2019.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, 66% of women's employment is in agrifood systems, compared with 60% of men's employment. In southern Asia, 71% of women in the labour force work in the agrifood system versus 47% of men.

Despite the importance of agrifood systems for women's livelihoods and the welfare of their families, women's roles tend to be marginalised, and their working conditions are likely to be worse than men's – irregular, informal, part-time, low-skilled, labour-intensive and thus vulnerable:

- The roles of women in off-farm work in agrifood systems are more likely to be in less-profitable value chains and activities or on worse terms than those of men due to restrictive traditional social norms or poor access to assets and resources.
- The gender gap in land productivity between female- and male-managed farms of the same size is 24%.
- On average, women earn 82 cents for every dollar earned by men in wage employment in agriculture.

Noeline Hogan - East Wimmera Parish

(Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO))

Image: www.pexels.com



Women are central to agrifood systems, from production and processing to trade and innovation. They include smallholder farmers, seasonal workers, fishers, pastoralists, beekeepers, foresters, processors, traders, scientists, traditional knowledge holders and rural entrepreneurs.

They are young and older women, indigenous women, women in local communities, women with disabilities, and refugee and displaced women. Their contributions sustain food security, nutrition and economic resilience, yet they often remain unrecognised.

The 'International Year of the Woman Farmer' is to promote action to close gender gaps, improve access to resources and services, and support women's leadership in agrifood systems.

What is an agrifood system? An agrifood system encompasses the entire range of processes involved in farming, producing, processing, distributing, and consuming food and agricultural products, playing a crucial role in global health, sustainability, and economic stability.

Women across the world play important roles in many agrifood systems, ranging from farmers and unpaid family workers to retailers, wage labourers and entrepreneurs. Their conditions of work continue to be directly

Celebration of Baptism



New Bishop of Ballarat, Mark Freeman, was recently in the Sunraysia Parish with the Pilgrimage of the Migrant Jubilee Cross (Australia 2025 - 2026). The pilgrimage aims to offer an opportunity for the Catholic Church in Australia to acknowledge and celebrate the faith, gifts, contributions, and resilience that migrant communities bring to our local Church and the world.

This visit was Bishop Mark's first venture around the diocese and while he was in the Sunraysia Parish, he celebrated several Masses, as well as the baptisms scheduled for those Masses.

The parents of the children being baptised were delighted to have Bishop Mark, along with Parish Priest, Fr Matt Thomas, celebrate the sacrament.

Taylor, son of Ben and Rachel Dalton, who was one of the children baptised, was quite curious about Bishop Mark's zucchetto (the pink cap) with Bishop Mark trying it on him.

Bishop Mark is looking forward to seeing more of the diocese.

Special Milestone

March 17 was once again a joyful and significant day in many parishes across the diocese this year, especially in those named after St Patrick.

Not only did many gather to celebrate the feast day of St Patrick, but it also marked a very special milestone for Fr Matthew Thomas, Parish Priest of the Sunraysia Parish, who celebrated 20 years of priestly ordination.

Fr Matt, born and raised in Geelong, was ordained in Ballarat in 2006. Over the past two decades, he has served faithfully in a variety of roles across the Diocese. His ministry has included appointments as Assistant Priest at the Ballarat Cathedral and in Mildura, as well as Parish Priest of Camperdown, Swan Hill and Sunraysia parishes.

His early ministry began at St Joseph's, Warrnambool, where he served as a Deacon before moving to the Cathedral in Ballarat following his ordination. After eighteen months in the Cathedral Parish, he continued his pastoral work in Mildura for a further eighteen months.

Following this, Fr Matt spent several years dedicated to serving the Parish of Camperdown, which also included the communities of Cobden, Lismore and Derrinallum, where he led with compassion, commitment and authentic pastoral care.



In 2021, he was delighted to return to Mildura, Red Cliffs and Merbein as Parish Priest and to oversee the establishment of the new Sunraysia parish, which now incorporates Ouyen and Robinvale.

Throughout these years, Fr Matt's presence in our community has enriched the lives of parishioners and strengthened the bonds within our parish. His dedication to ministering, his encouragement, and the genuine friendships he has forged have left a lasting mark on all who know him.

We are indeed much the richer for his leadership and are deeply grateful for his ministry.

A fantastic Success



On March 31, St Patrick's School Port Fairy Mini Vinnies proudly hosted the very first St Patrick's Festival and what a fantastic success it was!

Congratulations to Nellie, Tilly, Matilda, Lilly, Amala, Harvey, Joey, Lachie, Alex and Max for their incredible effort in planning, preparing and running the event. Their teamwork, creativity and leadership were on full display as they brought together a range of engaging, water-themed activities to support our Project Compassion focus, The Long Walk for Water.

Students enjoyed a variety of stalls including jelly, face painting, tippy-tappys, arts and crafts and fun relay activities. A highlight of the day was the House Group water relay, where students worked together to carefully carry buckets of water. Congratulations to Green House, who managed to transport their water with the least amount of spillage!

We are also thrilled to share that, as a whole school, we raised over \$600, an outstanding achievement! These funds will go towards supporting Caritas Australia's Project Compassion initiative, helping communities around the world gain access to clean water and improved living conditions.

We are incredibly proud of our Mini Vinnies - Caritas Group and grateful to our school community for their generosity and support in making this event such a meaningful success.

Tarryn Delaney - Principal
Michelle Malone - Religious Education Leader



THANK YOU

On Thursday, February 12, 2026 Damascus College Ballarat was honoured to welcome Bishop Paul Bird for morning tea, providing our community with the opportunity to personally thank him for his dedicated service and leadership ahead of his retirement.

Welcomed by Principal Steven Mifsud, Bishop Paul spent time with our Year 12 Youth Ministry classes, engaging in thoughtful conversation about their current Caritas initiatives and the ways they are putting their faith into action. Students shared how they are supporting justice and outreach projects, reflecting the College's commitment to living out our Catholic identity through service and compassion.

During his visit, Bishop Paul shared a memorable story about a conversation he once had with an advertising executive. The ad man explained that all advertising can be reduced to four simple words: "Hey, you — buy this."

"Hey" captures attention. "You" makes the message personal. "Buy this" provides a clear call to action.

Bishop Paul encouraged our students to reflect on this idea more deeply — suggesting that while advertising seeks to sell a product, the Gospel also speaks directly and personally to each of us. It calls us by name, invites us to respond, and challenges us to live lives of purpose, dignity and service to others.

Following his time with students, Bishop Paul joined staff for morning tea in the Senior Learning Centre, where he was warmly thanked for his years of pastoral care, leadership and faithful service to the Diocese and to our Damascus College community.

We are deeply grateful for Bishop Paul's presence and guidance over many years and were privileged to acknowledge his contribution in person as he prepares for this next chapter.

Korina Hegert - Marketing and Communications Manager

The 1948 Catholic Rural Movement

The Women Farmers: Call to Prayer (International Eucharistic Congress 2028) is a milestone in history; Ballarat's history! A newspaper snippet from 1948 titled "Catholic Rural Movement Convention at Ballarat" gives tangible evidence of the strong momentum Catholic women have had in rural, regional, and farming life.¹ The Ninth National Convention of the National Catholic Rural Movement was held at Ballarat from August 23 to 28, 1948. Delegates from all parts of the Commonwealth attended the conference, which dealt with rural problems, regional development, soil erosion, producers' co-operatives, and the principle of just prices, and how they affect the farming communities. The convention delegates, the majority of whom were farmers, and men and women living in rural areas, represented the 300 groups that made up the movement throughout Australia. Church dignitaries attended, too.

Bishop Henschke, of Wagga Wagga, Episcopal Chairman of the National Catholic Rural Movement, officially opened the 9th annual convention, attended by 230 delegates. The objective of the convention was "to stress the importance of rural extension and the application of Catholic teaching to rural problems".² NCRM meetings were vital, especially in remote areas. By 1950, women were asking other women to join, "not just farmers' wives", but "teachers' wives, nurses, bankers' wives". The place of women in the NCRM is just as important as men". As early as 1950, they were also charged with spreading the ideal of "Independent Farming".³

Dr Malcolm Borg - Diocesan Archivist

1 Catholic Rural Movement Convention at Ballarat (1948, August 19). Advocate (Melbourne, Vic.: 1868 - 1954), p. 22. Retrieved April 1, 2026, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article172498459>

2 CATHOLIC MOVEMENT MEETS AT BALLARAT (1948, August 25). Daily Mirror (Sydney, NSW: 1941 - 1955), p. 2 (Late Final Extra). Retrieved April 1, 2026, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article274437572>

3 Madden, Kathy (1994). Dreams and realities: some insights into the National Catholic Rural Movement. University of Tasmania. Thesis. <https://doi.org/10.25959/23231999.v1>

CONNECTING AGAIN

Recently, St John of God Ballarat Hospital has had the privilege of welcoming colleagues from Tonga.

Among the visitors were members of the hospital executive from across the Kingdom of Tonga, including the Chief Nursing Officer and the Chief Medical Superintendent. This visit provided a valuable opportunity to share knowledge, strengthen professional connections and reflect on our shared commitment to delivering safe, high-quality care.



We were also delighted to welcome a Ministry of Health team member from Niuaus, the most northern island group of Tonga, a first for our partnership. In addition, we have appreciated the contributions of a nurse from the outer island group of Ha'apai, and radiology representatives from Vava'u working in collaboration with Lake Imaging, supporting mammography and ultrasound services.

We look forward to continuing this important work, with SJOG Ballarat caregivers preparing to travel to Tonga, including the outer islands, in May. This initiative is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in partnership with the Ministry of Health Tonga and our dedicated SJOG Ballarat caregivers. We are grateful for the opportunity to learn from one another and to contribute to healthier communities together.

Jamie Lovett - Marketing & Communications Coordinator

DOBCEL Strategy 2035 Podcast Launch: Towards 2035



The Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited were pleased to launch a new DOBCEL podcast series, 'Towards 2035', which explores the thinking, voices and partnerships shaping their 10-year DOBCEL Strategy 2035.

Across the series, listeners are invited inside the story of 'Strategy 2035' - why it's needed, how it was co-designed, and what it means for schools, leaders and communities today. Through conversations with system leaders, global thinkers and principals from across the Diocese, the podcast explores what it means to be bold and brave in a time of significant change, while remaining grounded in Catholic identity, mission and community.

Across nine episodes, the series brings together system leaders, principals and global voices to explore why a new strategy was needed, how it was shaped, and what it means for our schools and communities.

From the opening conversation with Executive Director Tom Sexton, through to insights from internationally recognised educator Pasi Sahlberg and 'Future Schools' Director Dave Runge, the series connects global ideas with local reality.

Interspersed throughout are "School Voices" conversations, where principals share honest reflections on leading change in their own contexts – grounding the strategy in the everyday life of schools across the Diocese.

It's a series that not only looks back on the co-design of 'Strategy 2035', but also begins to point forward - particularly in the final episode, which opens up the "engine room" of the strategy, including the pillars, principles and emerging Collaborative Innovation Research Prototypes (CIRPs).

All episodes are now available at <https://dobcel.captivate.fm/>. We encourage you to listen and subscribe so you don't miss what's coming next.

Season 2 - Inside the Engine Room - will take this work further, shifting from strategy to action and offering a closer look at how change is being implemented across our system.

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications

A CELEBRATION OF IRISH HISTORY



A celebration of Irish heritage took place in Ballarat recently, with a large crowd gathering to honour St Brigid and the many women whose lives have been shaped by her legacy. Brigid Fest was hosted at St John of God Hospital on February 1, 2026 aligning with Ireland's national holiday dedicated to St Brigid. More than 60 people attended, enjoying traditional Irish dancing, crafting Brigid's crosses, and hearing stories of local women named after the goddess of Irish mythology and the Catholic saint who both made their mark throughout Ballarat's history.

Ballarat Irish Association Vice-President Mary Darcy said Brigid Fest was an important opportunity to highlight the enduring contribution of Irish culture to the city. "We shared

the story of Brigid Burke," Ms Darcy said. "It was an incredible account of a woman who lived across five goldfields, raising her family along the way. We also noted the stained-glass window honouring St Brigid in St Patrick's Cathedral. It was donated by the Loreto Sisters in the 1800s in memory of Ballarat's first bishop. This event was about bringing these stories into the light - bringing the women out of the shadows and telling their stories."

Ms Darcy said the influence of both Brigid the goddess and Brigid the saint continues to resonate today. "There was an address by Margaret Lavery about Brigid's importance in Celtic and modern Irish culture," she said. "She has recently been named one of Ireland's patron saints, and her feast day is now a public holiday, so her status has grown. Brigid Fest is about sharing her story, exploring its relevance today, and honouring those who carry her name."

Association president Helen Bath expressed gratitude to St John of God Hospital for hosting and catering for the event.

Stations of the Cross



The St Patrick's Primary School Stawell school community gathered for a deeply reflective and meaningful Stations of the Cross liturgy, enriched by the powerful artwork from the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry.

The Stations of the Cross used were created in 2017 and painted by Aboriginal artist John Dunn, an Olkola/Djabaguyman man from Far North Queensland. His work weaves together the story of Christ's Passion with the story, spirituality and lived experiences of Aboriginal people.

Throughout the liturgy, students were invited to see the journey of Jesus through a different lens - one that honours the deep connection to Country, culture and community. The artwork's symbols, such as journey tracks, meeting circles and ancestral handprints, helped tell a story of faith, resilience and belonging.

We are incredibly proud of our Year 6 students who reverently led us through each station, helping to bring this important story to life for our whole school community.

It was a moving and prayerful experience that reminded us of the enduring message of hope, love and reconciliation at the heart of the Gospel.

Bettina Bird - Principal



MASS OF THE OILS 2026

On Monday, March 30, 2026, the beginning of Holy Week, the Mass of the Oils was celebrated with priests and people from around the diocese.

The Chrism Mass celebrates the unity of the diocese where priests, deacons, religious and laity renew their commitment to the call to serve in Christ's name as baptised members of his Church. We acknowledge all those who share their gifts and ministries in the service of his Kingdom. The Holy Oils were blessed and consecrated and distributed to all the communities of our diocese for the celebration of the Sacraments.



The Oils – Oil of the Sick, Oil of Catechumens and the Holy Chrism – will reach those in our diocese who become sick and are anointed; every baby in our diocese who is baptised; and every young person and adult in our diocese who are fully initiated into the community of the Church and at ordinations.

The Main Celebrant was Bishop Mark Freeman, along with Fr Marcello Colasante, Vicar General and Fr Ed Moloney, Administrator of the Cathedral Parish. Clergy celebrating a jubilee were also invited to con-celebrate Mass. Bishop Mark acknowledged the clergy jubilarians for 2026 during the Mass.

Members of the diocese fulfilling ministries at the Mass this year were: Altar Servers and Seminarians for the Diocese of Ballarat: Channa Tilakarathna and Simon Zakari; First Reading: Tom Perfect – St Peter's Parish, Daylesford; Cantor: Christiana Vadysinghe – Ballarat Cathedral Parish; Second Reading: Dr Rosemary Canavan – St Patrick's Parish, Gordon; Gospel Procession: Lesley Price – St Alipius Parish, Ballarat East; Gospel: Fr Marcello Colasante – Vicar General: Diocese of Ballarat and Jubilarian; Presentation of the Gifts: Pat & Marita O'Shea – St Brendan's Parish, Cororooke; Preparation and distribution of the Oils: Pastoral Ministry Office and members of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission; Commentary: Dr Peter Morris – St Patrick's Cathedral Parish, Ballarat

The choir was once again beautifully led by Conductor Roger Hillman and Organist Ann-Maree Caligari, both from the Ballarat Cathedral Parish and Flautist Adrian Newman from St Alipius Parish, Ballarat East. Many thanks to all the musicians for their commitment to the hours involved in rehearsals and during the Mass. The music was very fitting for such an important diocesan celebration.

Before the final blessing, Dr Peter Morris called representatives of the parishes of the diocese forward to collect the Oils from Bishop Mark. Following Mass all were invited to the Hall to share in lunch, which was provided by Brett Hayward from ACU Ballarat Campus Canteen.



SUSTAINABILITY AND KITCHEN GARDEN

As St Mary's Primary School Hamilton wrapped up Term 1, you can feel just how much has been happening behind the scenes in Sustainability and the Kitchen Garden. Thanks to the incredible support of our growing team of volunteers, the garden is now bursting with produce, the kitchen has enjoyed a little refresh, and everything is ready for cooking to begin in Term 2. Support from volunteers has helped lay the groundwork for an exciting and productive year ahead. We are proud to see our Sustainability Leaders in action. They have stepped up as outstanding role models, earning wonderful compliments from our volunteers for their knowledge, effort, and genuine care in the garden. This term also saw our Grade 2 students enjoy a fun and educational 'super foods' session led by Monique Sobey, where students enthusiastically explored new flavours and textures, many for the very first time.

There has been progress on the infrastructure too, with our new garden shed now up and ready. Next, you will see plans take shape for how the chook shed will fit into the evolving garden design. Our Sustainability Leaders are

also hard at work designing new garden signage, and we can't wait to share the final result with you. Thank you to the families who have supported the school by temporarily taking food scraps home each day - your help is greatly appreciated while our food-waste systems are finalised.

Terrielynn Groves - Principal
Our Diocesan Community - April 2026



WITH DEEP SADNESS

It is with deep sadness that I write to share the news of the death of Dr Berenice Kerr RSM, who died peacefully following a short illness. On behalf of our community, I extend my heartfelt condolences to her family and friends, and to the Sisters of Mercy, with whom she shared her religious life and vocation.

Berenice was a Sister of Mercy in the true spirit of Catherine McAuley – a woman of deep faith, intelligence, courage and compassion, grounded in a profound love of Christ. She was widely known as a passionate supporter of Catholic education, a gifted scholar, and a woman who brought warmth, insight and genuine humanity to all she encountered. An accomplished academic, she held a Doctor of Philosophy in Church History from Oxford, along with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours and a Diploma of Education. In recognition of her significant contribution to Catholic education, she was named an Honorary Fellow of Australian Catholic University.

An educator by calling and profession, Berenice devoted her life to learning, teaching and leadership. She taught in secondary schools from 1969 and went on to make an extensive and deeply influential contribution to Catholic education through senior governance and leadership roles across New South Wales. Her service included work as Consultant in Secondary Education with the Catholic Education Office in the Diocese of Lismore; Commissioner of the Catholic Education Commission NSW; Chair of the Commission's Standing Committee on Educational Policy; Director and later Chair of Trinity Catholic College, Lismore; and member of the Education Committee of the Council of Leaders of Religious Institutes NSW. She also served as a Director of St Vincent's Private Hospital, Lismore.

Within the Ballarat Diocese, Berenice's contribution was both foundational and enduring. Berenice came to Ballarat as leader of the Mercy community of South B following the national amalgamation of the congregations of the Sisters of Mercy. She was a former Company Member of St Francis Xavier Primary School and Damascus College, and a regular visitor to diocesan schools across the region. Through her presence in schools and her participation in Diocesan Leadership Gatherings, she offered thoughtful guidance, intellectual challenge and deep encouragement to leaders and educators, bringing her scholarship, experience and strong commitment to Catholic identity directly into the life of school communities.

Berenice was a foundational member of the DOBCEL Board, serving with distinction as Deputy Chair and as a member of the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Catholic Identity and Mission Committee until her retirement in December 2025. Her wisdom, clarity of thought and deep commitment to Catholic identity shaped our Board and our system in profound and lasting ways.

Those of us who knew Berenice will remember her intellectual rigour, her love of language and her affection for perfect grammar, but also her quick wit, sharp humour and generosity of spirit. She delighted in good conversation, shared laughter readily, and was always appreciative of a good pinot noir enjoyed in the company of others.

I give thanks for Berenice's faithful service, her leadership, and her unwavering commitment to Catholic education. I ask you to join me in holding her family, friends and the Sisters of Mercy in your prayers. We commend her to God using the adapted words of Catherine McAuley's Suscipe, which so beautifully expresses the 'trust in God's providence' that shaped Berenice's life and faith.

Tom Sexton - Executive Director DOBCEL



On Sunday, February 1, Mass was celebrated at St Mary's Church in Sea Lake. With our parish priest, Fr James Kerr, away in Rome on his sabbatical leave, we have had visiting priests celebrating with us. This weekend we had the pleasure of Bishop Paul celebrating Mass with us at 8.30am for which we were very grateful. At Mass we had parishioners from Culgoa, Berriwollock, Sea Lake and Nandaly. Bishop Paul gave a very comforting homily but I don't know how many t-shirts will be printed, Bishop Paul?

After Mass a cuppa and catch up was enjoyed but Bishop Paul had to leave to get back to Swan Hill for his next Mass. A big thank you to Bishop Paul from our parish and for overseeing our needs from a parish point. We send our best wishes for you in retirement, your good health and God's blessings.

Sam Brady - Nandaly Parish



Our world is marked by war and violence, cost of living pressures and discord. Easter gives us an opportunity to ponder what really matters in our lives. In whatever way we celebrate Easter, we are invited to celebrate the gift of life and do so with hope and deep peace. The week leading up to Easter begins by juxtaposing the seemingly triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem with the experience of his passion and death. Our response is expressed with the words: "My God, my God why have you abandoned?" The Holy Week of prayer and reflection allows us to journey with Jesus through his last supper, his agony of spirit in Gethsemane, his way of the cross, his death on Calvary culminating in the wonder of his resurrection. By Easter Sunday we have made a tumultuous journey and find ourselves responding with words altogether different: "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad!"

The life of each and every person is made up of a series of experiences that fit somewhere between the realities expressed by these two responses. How often we can feel overwhelmed by the demands and of life - so much so we feel abandoned, even by God. At the same time, we know those wonderful moments when our hearts are bursting with joy and enthusiasm for life. In reality, we live each day at some point between these two poles. For us to be able to come to deep peace in our lives we must be prepared to face the pains, frustrations and suffering that are part and parcel of our human existence. Just as we come to know the wonder and beauty of life in moments of joy and celebration, so too we experience the truth and dignity of our humanity when we have to face the challenges of life, especially when we are fearful that we don't have the courage or capacity to do so. Any one of us can come to new life. The way to get there is the way of genuine service in love, one for the other. Easter confronts our self-centred lives and invites us to something real, true and wonderful. Whenever we are prepared to give of ourselves, we will come to life. Easter is about life that arises out of our self-giving. Easter is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad!

An excerpt from Bishop Mark's Easter Message - 2026

We are a community of communities from the Murray to the sea. Inspired by the Gospel and nourished by the Eucharist, we follow the example of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, reaching out in joyful and humble service, caring for all of God's creation, growing in love day by day and looking forward to life with God forever.

Vision Statement for the Diocese

Photos: Front cover: Anna Schlooz and Mary Kennedy holding the Book of Gospels over Bishop Mark at his Ordination and Installation as Bishop of Ballarat. Back cover: Photos from Bishop Mark's Ordination and Installation.